

## Monster ENCyclopedia: Hook Horror

This is a series of articles about specific monsters from D&D's history. Each entry takes a look at the origin of one D&D creature, and tracks its appearances and evolution across different editions. The ENCyclopedia series is busy with an alphabetical browse through the creatures of Dungeons & Dragons, with an article on one monster for each letter A-Z. The eighth letter of the alphabet is "H" and we're taking a look at the history and development of the hook horror.

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### Origins

For many D&D players, the hook horror first showed up in the *Fiend Folio*. In fact, that was only the creature's third appearance in print. Like the [flumph](#), the hook horror began life in the pages of *White Dwarf*, where it appeared in *The Fiend Factory* column of issue #12. The hook horror was created by Ian Livingstone, co-founder of Games Workshop and British gaming legend, who was the editor of *White Dwarf* at the time.



*White Dwarf* #12 (1979)

Hook horrors are described as large, powerful humanoids with a hard, mottled gray exoskeleton and vulture-like heads. They have sharp, hooked talons on the end of each arm. They have poor vision but acute

hearing, which makes them difficult to surprise. They cannot speak, and communicate by making clacking noises with their exoskeleton. The sounds of hook horrors clacking can be an eerie and alarming noise to those exploring the deep underground caverns where they dwell. Found in groups of up to a dozen, they are 5 hit dice monsters, with relatively good armor (AC 3). They have two simple talon attacks (1-8 damage each), low intelligence and neutral alignment. They may have silver or electrum coins as treasure.

The initial description of the hook horror is terse, clocking in at just 83 words, but one of the features of *The Fiend Factory* column was that the series editor (Don Turnbull), would add comments. In this case, the 36 word comment is nearly a third of the total description. Turnbull notes that the hook horror is “straightforward stuff” and that the description creates “an excellent and vivid image” even without the artist’s contribution. He suggests that hook horrors should have a vulnerability or fear of light, so that a *light* spell could be used to repel them.

In *White Dwarf* #15 readers were asked to vote for their top ten *Fiend Factory* monsters. The top ten were reprinted in *Best of White Dwarf Articles*, and included the hook horror. The text is the same as in *White Dwarf* #12, but this time printed without Turnbull’s comment. Below is the list of “Top Ten Monsters” as voted by *White Dwarf* readers. Yes, the hook horror was more popular than the githyanki in this survey. Consider yourself proficient in monster lore if you can immediately spot the two monsters on the list that didn’t make it into a D&D book.

For those of you who are interested in the order of the “Top Ten Monsters”, it was as follows:	
1 Necrophidius	6 Githyanki
2 Russian Doll Monster	7 Imps
3 Svart	8 Volt
4 Needleman	9 Urchin
5 Hook Horror	10 Dahdi

*Best of White Dwarf Articles* (1980)

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## 1st Edition

The hook horror’s first appearance in an official D&D tome is in the *Fiend Folio*. The same artwork is used as in *White Dwarf* #12, but the picture gets almost twice as much space on the page, so it is larger and clearer. The description has only a few slight changes. Instead of “humanoids”, hook horrors are now just “bipeds”. They live in “deep underground corridors and chambers” instead of “deep underground caverns”, perhaps hinting at a less natural origin. The statistics block format in the *Fiend Folio* has more information than the one in *White Dwarf*, so we learn that hook horrors are rare, spend 20% of their time in their lair, and are nine feet tall.

Not everyone was a fan of the *Fiend Folio* when it was released. Writing in an article titled *Fiend Folio Findings: Flat Taste Didn’t Go Away* in *Dragon* #55, Ed Greenwood described it as a disappointment. The hook horror seems to be a particular offender, causing Greenwood to write: “Monsters such as the al-mi’raj and the hook horror have strange appearances and little else; there is no depth to their listings.” Later, he continues, “these creatures have promise, but the hook horror and the grimlock again seem incomplete.”



*Dragon #131 (1988)*

Michael Persinger contributed *The Ecology of the Hook Horror* to *Dragon #131*. The article is a series of observations made by the scholar Ferba to the Guild of Naturalists of Quardolf City. Ferba bases his analysis on a single dead specimen, said to be in an “excellently preserved state”. This particular hook horror is fully grown at 9’2” tall. Around the neck of the hook horror is a crest of red feathers, and where each metallic-grey talon meets its upper limb are two more tufts of distinctive red feathers. We learn that the chitinous protective exoskeleton is strongest over the chest and back, and less so over the limbs. It derives its strength—compared here to dwarven steel—from the buildup of calcium deposits.

We discover more about the hook horror’s senses. They have weak eyes and limited vision, and lack the infravision common to many underground beasts. Hook horrors make up for this with olfactory senses rivaling those of bloodhounds, excellent hearing, and a limited form of echolocation which allows them to sense the environment within 120’ even in total darkness. (For some reason the illustration accompanying the article omits the bat-like ears shown in most other depictions.) Hook horrors are capable of detecting invisible wizards and silently moving rogues. In the footnotes, the article expands on the *Fiend Folio*’s simplistic “10% chance of surprising a hook horror”, by noting that efforts to use magical *silence* to sneak past also incur a penalty.

Hook horrors are said to be herbivores, primarily fungivores, consuming subterranean mushrooms, lichen and mosses. They have abrasive tongues to assist in stripping foods from rocky surfaces. Despite their large size, hook horrors consume only three quarters of the food mass of an adult human. This is because they spend half of each day in a sloth-like sluggish torpor, moving very little, and conserving energy. Hook horrors tend to migrate to caverns with a fresh supply of food once supplies in one area dwindle. In rare cases, more intelligent specimens cultivate fungi in their lairs, with garden chambers devoted to farming. Presumably, at least some of the fungi ingested by the horrors are high in calcium, which they need to form their exoskeleton.

Amusingly, the *Ecology* article provides a gastronomic explanation for the hook horror's treasure type "P" entry (silver and electrum coin). These coins serve the same functions as pebbles in the crop of a chicken, grinding up the creature's food to aid digestion. Silver and electrum coins are specifically sought out because unlike other metals, they do not irritate the hook horror's stomach lining. Adventurers collecting treasure from these creatures' lairs might notice the peculiar, sour odor of the coins recovered, but being adventurers, probably won't care where the coins have been previously.

Hook horrors reproduce by laying eggs, with females laying up to four eggs once each year. The eggs are about three inches in diameter, and shaped and coloured to blend in with stones. Hook horrors scatter these eggs around their lairs, and this camouflage is effective. Few eggs are lost to predators, and almost all of them hatch after six months. Newly hatched hook horrors are vulnerable and must be protected. Mortality rates for young are high.

Only a foot in size (and ½ HD) when hatched, a hook horror grows to two feet in three months, and five feet within a year. After this, growth steadies and the juvenile hook horror eventually reaches nine feet tall by its 17th birthday. Because its exoskeleton does not grow with it, a hook horror must molt several times before it reaches adulthood. Old plates begin to flake off like old scabs over the course of two days, to reveal a much softer replacement exoskeleton beneath. The hook horror is vulnerable to physical attack during the few days it takes the new shell to harden.

Hook horrors rarely live past the age of 40, with death usually caused by disease or parasitic infections, to which the creature seems to be particularly vulnerable. It is not clear in the *Ecology* article exactly how they contract these parasites, just that they usually become infected while young from sources other than fungi. So commonly are hook horrors diseased, that the footnotes suggest a 10% chance of at least one disease, and a further 10% chance of 2-5 additional diseases.

Hook horrors are happy to dwell in any subterranean surroundings, whether those are natural cavern complexes or worked areas such as abandoned mines. The article speculates that hook horrors must occasionally venture above ground, but notes also that there are no reports of encounters with them outside.

They prefer the company of small groups, no greater than a dozen in size. Young hook horrors become independent at an early age, remaining with their parents for only a year before beginning to set off on excursions during their second year. By their third year, they become entirely independent. When they reach the age of about six, hook horrors search out a mate to complete the cycle.

Only rarely are hook horrors found outside this small tribe structure, with tales of huge herds forming on occasions. Travelers have been known to briefly befriend hook horrors by offering them food. Efforts to domesticate them for guard or sentry duty have proved risky, as their behavior is animalistic when threatened.

Hook horrors are able to communicate with one another by means of clacking noises made by flexing parts of their exoskeletons. To an outsider, these sounds are mere noise, but there is a pattern in the tone and pitch of the clacks which conveys meaning. A steady high-pitch indicates excitement, while a low-pitched, unsteady sound means anger or alarm. Soft, steady tones signal friendship. The sound of a hook horror conversation is similar in volume to that between humans.



A hook horror tends to behave instinctively under stress, shying away from fire and loud noises. It is not naturally aggressive, but is capable of fighting furiously if confronted. In battle, a hook horror relies on the foot-long swordlike talons, which it wields with exceptional strength. It is usually too sluggish to coordinate two simultaneous hook attacks, and suffers a penalty, so only does so in desperation. A hook horror can use its sharp beak to make a weak attack, but since an injured beak frequently renders the creature unable to eat, and is thus eventually fatal, this is something it tries to avoid.

The *Ecology* article records several alternative names for the hook horror: vulture beak, hacker, cave dweller, and clacker.

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## 2nd Edition

The organization of monsters into the various *Monstrous Compendium* appendices was fairly erratic, with some previously generic creatures making their appearance in the Forgotten Realms or Greyhawk appendices, despite no previous affiliation with those settings. So it was for the hook horror's appearance in the *Monstrous Compendium Greyhawk Adventures Appendix*. It is interesting to compare the release date of this product (April 1990) with those of R.A. Salvatore's *Homeland* and *Exile* novels (August and November 1990), in which Drizzt Do'Urden encounters hook horrors. We'll return to these novels a little later, but had they been released slightly sooner, the hook horror would very likely have been saved for a Forgotten Realms supplement, instead of being shoehorned into Greyhawk.



*Monstrous Compendium Greyhawk Adventures Appendix* (1990)

The description in the *Monstrous Compendium* entry is largely consistent with 1st Edition. More emphasis is placed on the existence of hooks, with all three toes having small, sharp hooks, and additional hooks protruding from each elbow. There are also short spines depicted on the hook horrors shoulders, but they are not mentioned in the text. For the first time, the eyes of a hook horror are specified as multifaceted, strengthening the link to insects. They have no odor discernible to typical humanoids, but animals detect a dry musty smell. An adult weighs almost 350 pounds.

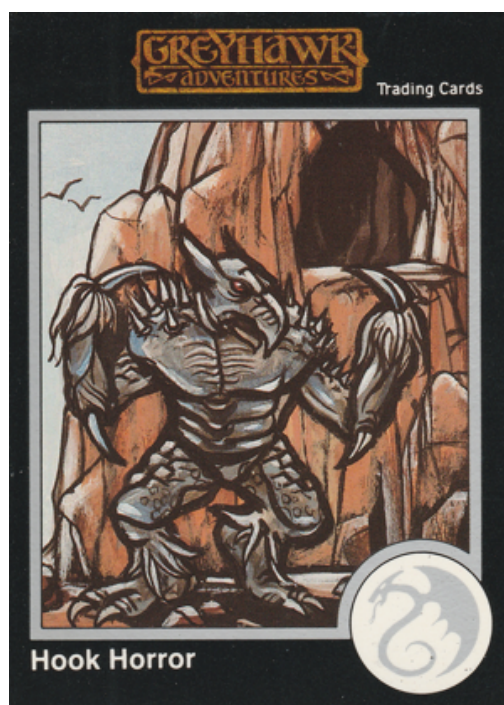
Some of the remaining information here contradicts the lore from *Dragon* magazine. Significantly, hook horrors now eat meat in addition to fungi, plants and lichen, and even have a preference for it. This makes them more aggressive in nature, and willing to ambush unsuspecting travelers or underground denizens as

potential food. They will not foolishly attack, however, and will retreat from stronger parties. In combat, they are more powerful, hitting with both hooks each round (for 1-8 points of damage each hook), and gaining a bonus automatic beak attack if both hooks hit (for 2-12 points of damage). They can also use their hooks to climb, and move at normal speed when climbing most vertical surfaces.

The senses of a hook horror remain basically the same: poor eyesight, acute hearing, and a form of echolocation. However, the rules mechanics for modeling the penalties and bonuses differ from 1st Edition, and as we'll see below, would continue to change in every successive edition. There is a tip-of-the-hat to Don Turnbull's editor's note in the original *White Dwarf* version of the hook horror here, as the creature is treated as blinded in normal light.

More detail is given on hook horror clans, which are ruled by the eldest female. She does not participate in combat, instead the eldest male—often her mate—is considered the war chieftain and is in charge of hunting and battle situations. Conflict between members of a tribe is rare, and usually limited to petty quarrels. Inter-clan conflict is just as rare, and generally only triggered by a dispute over territory. Hook horror clans are not expansionist in nature, and do not seek to rule larger areas than they need, or to rule over other creatures. They usually dwell in underground caves or warrens with an entrance on a vertical rock wall, accessible only by climbing. All of the clan's eggs are kept in the most defensible place, but each family unit in the clan inhabits its own small cavern located close to the central area.

Adventurers are cautioned against assuming that hook horrors will understand concepts such as gratitude or indebtedness, as their clacking language has no terms for these. Saving the life of a hook horror in no way means that it will feel obliged to return the favor.



1991 Trading Cards Factory Set, card 574/750

There are two color illustrations of hook horrors in the 1991 and 1992 Trading Card sets, but both are clearly redrawn versions of the *Monstrous Compendium* art, showing very similar posture and facing.



*1992 Trading Cards Factory Set, card 618/750*

When the hardcover *Monstrous Manual* collection was released in 1993, the hook horror was included, with the text unchanged from the *Greyhawk Adventures Appendix* version. There is a new color picture by Tony DiTerlizzi which gives the hook horror its most insectoid appearance to date.



*Monstrous Manual (1993)*

In the adventure *The Witch's Fiddle* in *Dungeon* #54, the adventurers have an opportunity to intervene in a battle between two hook horrors and an apparent witch. This is an unremarkable encounter, but comes with a decent black and white picture of a hook horror looming threateningly from a passage.





*Dungeon #54 (1995)*

In the *Night Below* boxed set, there are warring groups of quaggoths and hook horrors. Unfortunately, there is little strategic opportunity for the players to get involved in this conflict, and their role is billed as a not much more than a hack-and-slash mop up operation. The accompanying artwork makes some interesting choices on how to show the relative sizes of the quaggoths (7½') compared to the hook horrors (9').



Quaggoths versus hook horrors, *Night Below* (1995)

### 3rd Edition

By the time the hook horror made its first 3rd Edition appearance in 2002's *Monster Manual II*, it had evolved into a creature with substantially more "hook". Up to 2nd Edition, only the creature's hands were the hooks; in 3rd Edition the entire front section of each arm is the hook. The additional spikes on the exoskeleton which appeared in the 2nd Edition artwork are now confirmed in the text, as the hook horror's beetle-like torso is said to be covered with sharp, bony protuberances. The hook horror is still about 9 feet tall, but it has picked up some weight, now clocking in at 400 pounds.



*Monster Manual II (2002)*

The beefier physique is matched by improved statistics, with the hook horror now having 10 HD, and three attacks (two claws and a bite). If it hits the same opponent with both hook attacks, the bite attack automatically succeeds and the hook horror also grapples its target. A hook horror can more easily sunder a foe's weapon or shield. In battle they use their hooks to trip foes. Hook horrors can also advance right up to 30 HD individuals, with creatures of 16 HD or above being huge in size. To accompany the update to 3.5 Edition rules, Wizards of the Coast published a *D&D v.3.5 Accessory Update*. This upgraded the hook horror further, by giving it the *cleave*, *improved trip* and *power attack* feats.

The progression from the unaggressive, fungus-eating 1st Edition hook horror to the meat-eating opportunistic ambusher of 2nd Edition continues here. The 3rd Edition version is described as a sly hunter that distrusts intruders and fiercely protects its hunting grounds. The hook horror's ability to climb is now taken into account in their combat tactics, with groups of hook horrors typically ambushing foes from above. They cooperate and work together to target the largest and best armed opponents first, and are willing to retreat (usually by climbing) if battle goes poorly.

The hook horror's diet is the same as in 2nd Edition, omnivores with a preference for meat. Their family structure is also the same with the eldest female in charge overall, and the eldest male leading hunts and battles. Larger groups of hook horrors occur now, with solitary, pack (5-20), or clan (21-40) encounters possible. The 3rd Edition version of the hook horror has blindsight (updated to blindsense in 3.5) and light sensitivity. As well as making clacking sounds, hook horrors are also noted for the constant scraping sounds they make while climbing. Hook horrors can suddenly speak Undercommon, which seems somewhat incongruous with what we knew previously about their communications with each other.

*Lords of Madness: The Book of Aberrations* dangles an intriguing origin story for the hook horror that does not seem to have been explored further. It suggests that they were created as a servitor race by some long-dead cabal of archmages. This may explain their sly cunning and tendency to gather in large numbers.



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#### 4th Edition

After three previous editions, the hook horror earned a place in the core *Monster Manual* for 4th Edition. Despite fairly different underlying rules systems, the 4th Edition hook horror is quite close to its 3rd Edition counterpart. The artwork in the *Monster Manual* shows a hook horror with a similar build to the *Monster Manual II* version, but with whiskers and a touch of the more insectoid look from the *Monstrous Manual* artwork blended in.



*Monster Manual* (2008)

Hook horrors are now found in small hunting packs, or in large clans. Clans are ruled over by the strongest egg-laying female (a slight change from the previous eldest female). Hook horrors range over a wide area and defend their territory fiercely, both from other hook horrors and from other creatures. They are omnivores that hunt live prey when necessary. As well as climbing, they are now good at jumping, and in combat they can drag opponents with their hooks and even fling them. Sometimes a hook horror will fling a foe towards its hungry pack mates, but it more typically uses its hooks to toss aside opponents that are too tough to kill outright.

Although hook horrors have echolocation (modeled as blindsight) and generally live in total darkness, they don't suffer any penalties in normal light, and can see just fine. The eerie clicking noises they use to communicate continue to alert and alarm adventurers who hear them. This hook horror has forgotten that it could ever speak a language in 3rd Edition.

In terms of game mechanics, the hook horror has 137 hit points, and an armor class of 28. They attack with both hooks during combat, each doing 1d12+7 damage and pulling the target closer. Success with both hooks triggers extra damage (1d12) and grabs the target. A hook horror can bite a grabbed opponent as a minor action (for 1d8+7 damage) or use its special *fling* which does 2d12+7 damage and leaves the target prone a short distance away. They often use their climbing skills to attack from an unexpected direction, but once the battle begins, horrors like to be close enough to rip into their enemies with their hooks.

In 4th Edition, many creatures, including the hook horror, spawned unusual varieties. *Demon Queen's Enclave* has rotting hook horrors, whose bite does necrotic damage and slows its target. *Dungeon #163* includes an encounter with shadow hook horrors capable of cloaking in darkness themselves to become briefly invisible.

*Underdark* provides the most unusual variation; the hook horror darkfiend replaces its hook attacks with a charging pounce, a horrific shriek which immobilizes and deafens, and the ability to create a zone of magical darkness. The elder hook horror in *Dungeon #204* is designed to be a challenge for epic tier play. As well as being beefed up significantly in level (23), hit points (219) and hook damage (3d8+18), the elder hook horror also has a *reflexive claw* attack which it can automatically use against any enemies moving nearby.

*Dungeon #177* revisits the idea that hook horrors may have been artificially created. The article *Deities & Demigods: Torog, the King that Crawls* claims that the Order of Amalgamation, a cult that serves Torog through self mutilation and grafting of monstrous parts onto their own bodies, created the hook horror as part of a failed breeding program or through surgical experimentation. *Into the Unknown: The Dungeon Survival Handbook* advises that there is more to hook horrors than it might seem, noting that they are capable of teamwork, demonstrating compassion and engaging in complex ritualized behavior.



*Into the Unknown* (2012)

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## 5th Edition

The current edition of D&D had a long, public playtest, and a lot of insights into the development process were provided in blog posts and website articles. We're fortunate that Mike Mearls happened to pick the hook horror as the example for his June 2012 *Legends & Lore: Monster Design* column, since we have first-hand commentary on what Mearls thinks the essence of a hook horror is.

In his analysis, Mearls starts with the hook horror's story elements. He highlights four main points: their clicking echolocation ability, their rending hook attacks which lead to a follow-up bite, their climbing skills, and their rudimentary tribal social structure and language. That's largely consistent with what we've discovered so far in this ENCyclopedia entry. But perhaps the more interesting part of the column is how Mearls translates these points into potential 5th Edition mechanics.

He decides that the echolocation means invisibility doesn't work against hook horrors, and that hiding from one requires a solid object to duck behind. The hook horror's superior hearing means it can't be surprised

easily. Mearls gives it two hook attacks, and suggests that a hit target becomes skewered. A skewered victim takes hook damage and bite damage, and must make a strength check to escape. The hook horror also needs to have a climb speed and a bonus to climb checks.



*Monster Manual* (2014)

Based on 5 hit dice in 1st Edition and 2nd Edition, a challenge rating of 6 in 3rd Edition, and a level of 14 in 4th Edition, Mearls decides that a hook horror should be “a tough match-up for 5th-level characters”. He pegs its strength as comparable to that of an ogre, gives it above average wisdom and dexterity, an intelligence of 6 and below average charisma.

For the story elements, Mearls sticks with the *Monstrous Compendium* lore, where hook horrors dwell underground in small groups, prefer meat and hunt it, but without attacking obviously more powerful targets. He suggests that in addition to living in caves, their climbing ability suggests that they might seek out higher perches in caverns to roost.



*Monster Manual* (2014)

There was a 22-month gap between Mearls’s column and the release of the D&D Next adventure *Dead in Thay* in April 2014, but only five months more until the release of *Monster Manual* in September 2014. Given that, it’s no surprise that the version of the hook horror in *Dead in Thay* is closer to the final 5th Edition version. It has changed from being an aberration to a monstrosity, and the complicated impaling attack has been dropped. For some reason, the hook horror’s hit points dipped dramatically in this iteration of the rules where it is again a 5 hit dice monster.



*Monster Manual* (2014)

By the time we reach the 5th Edition *Monster Manual*, the hook horror has completed its gradual transformation. No longer a mushroom-munching monster that fights only to defend itself, it has instead become a fierce and aggressive predator. It is described as having a vulture-like head and the torso of a giant beetle. Its exoskeleton is studded with sharp body spikes. The hook horror has powerful legs and arms which end in sharp, curved hooks. It is a large monstrosity of neutral alignment.

The creatures are omnivorous and eat lichens, fungi, plants and any creatures they can catch. Hook horrors lay eggs in a central portion of the clan's home caverns, and defend this area and their wider hunting grounds aggressively. They communicate by striking their hooks against stone surfaces or their own exoskeletons, and this is acknowledged formally as the Hook Horror language for the first time here. The complex clicking sounds of the language echo for miles through the Underdark. Hook horrors have excellent hearing, but because they rely on echolocation for their blindsight, they cannot use this when deafened.

As in earlier editions, hook horrors live in extended clans ruled by the eldest female. Her mate typically leads the clan's hunters. Hunting packs focus on taking the largest or most dangerous opponent first. Excellent climbers thanks to their hooks, hook horrors often ambush prey from above, and will climb cavern walls to flee if a combat turns against them.

Mechanically, this hook horror is a simpler creature than the one first suggested in the *Legends & Lore* column; it has just two simple hook attacks (+6 to hit, a reach of 10 ft., and 2d6+4 piercing damage). The hook horror inherits the increased hit points of 3rd Edition (10d10+20 hit dice, 75 hit points) and has an armor class of 15. It has walking and climbing speeds of 30 ft, blindsight (60 ft.) and darkvision. The range of the hook horror's darkvision was initially printed at 10 ft., but this was corrected to 120 ft. in the *Monster Manual's* errata.





*Out of the Abyss* (2015)

Hook horrors also feature in the *Out of the Abyss* adventure, where a mated hook horror pair is being pursued by a band of gnoll hunters. Depending on how the encounter turns out, there is a chance that the adventurers will find a batch of hook horror eggs, and a new hatchling might even imprint on one of them. Delightfully, to address this possibility, the adventure includes a “Hook Horror Maturation” chart with stats for infants (tiny, up to 1 month), young hook horrors (small, 1-3 months), and juveniles (medium, 3-6 months). Hook horrors become large and adult at six months which is substantially faster than the 17 years it took for them to mature in 1st Edition! The appendix of *Out of the Abyss* also contains statistics for hook horrors which have been infected by the myconid’s infestation spores to become spore servants.



**Ambush in the Caves of Kooblah**, *Adventures Outlined Coloring Book* (2018)

In the *Dungeons & Dragons: Adventures Outlined Coloring Book*, a hook horror assists Tasha the Timid Tiefling in realizing her sorcerer powers in *Ambush in the Caves of Kooblah*.



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## Hook horrors and other monsters

D&D lore consistently paints a picture of hook horrors as creatures that don't have a lot to do with other species, and that seems to be true in a genetic sense too. Their *Ecology* article states that they are not mammals, but invertebrate arthropods with vaguely humanoid form, and observes that (along with kobolds), hook horrors are one of few egg-laying bipeds. The *Monstrous Compendium* suggests that they are distantly related to cockroaches and cave crickets.

The little we do know about hook horror relationships with other creatures mostly revolves around food. The 1st Edition hook horrors prefer non-mobile fungi, but if food supplies are short, they will prey on zygoms, violet fungi, phycomids and shriekers. The *Ecology of the Hook Horror* suggests that large fungi are found in half of hook horror lairs, and that some groups will even keep captive fungi as a food supply. Hook horrors apparently have a special gland in their endocrine system which gives them immunity to any rotting or infestation powers that these fungi have. By the time we get to 3rd Edition, hook horrors are predominantly carnivorous, and the *Monster Manual II* notes that drow are one of their favorite meals. The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* echoes this preference and goes on to observe that drow hunt and slay wild hook horrors and take the young and eggs to raise as slaves.

In the *Night Below* there are hook horrors working for a rakshasa, but the rakshasa is using illusions to make itself seem to be a hook horror chieftain. These hook horrors are at war with a band of neighboring quaggoths. The encounter tables in 4th Edition suggest that hook horrors can sometimes be found with balhannoths, grimlocks and beholders, and the *Monster Manual 2* has them teamed up with a maw of Acamar and mindflayers, but none of those matches are really consistent with everything else we know about them. The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* does note that humanoids sometimes capture and train hook horrors for use as guardians or shock troops, and there is a lamia in *P1: King of the Trollhaunt Warrens* who keeps two hook horrors as pets. The 5th Edition *Volo's Guides to Monsters* suggests that some beholders keep hook horrors as pets.

Hook horrors don't have many natural enemies. Not only are they capable of defending themselves aggressively, but at least in 1st Edition their tendencies to accumulate internal parasites means that most carnivores shun them as food. This is no longer the case by 2nd Edition, where natural predators capable of catching a hook horror would eat it. Ogres have been known to use crude suits of armor made from hook horror exoskeleton plates, so perhaps they occasionally hunt them.

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## Hook horrors parts

According to *Dragon #131*, the plates of a hook horror's exoskeleton can be made into armor, but it is only suitable for large creatures. The exoskeletons of juvenile hook horrors are too soft to be used to make smaller suits. The process of making a suit of armor takes a month (including one whole day to shell the deceased creature), and gives armor with AC 3, that saves as bone. A smith can typically sell this for 450 gp, so may be willing to pay adventurers 100 gp for the body of a hook horror (or 250 gp if the plates have already been removed). The *Monstrous Compendium* notes that after a month, the exoskeleton dries out and becomes too brittle to be crafted. Although attempts have been made to harvest the special gland which protects hook horrors from fungi, these have been unsuccessful, as the gland stops functioning once the hook horror dies.

For those considering a career in breeding these unusual creatures, *Treasure of the Wilds* in *Dragon* #137 sets the price of an egg at 300 gp, and that of a young hook horror as 500 gp.

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### Hook horrors and magic

At least in its 1st Edition incarnation, the hook horror's senses give it a few special bonuses and penalties against some spells. Balancing a +2 saving throw bonus against spells causing blindness and visual illusions and phantasms is a -2 saving throw penalty against spells targeting the senses of smell and hearing. A hook horror that is blinded by a spell only suffers a one third penalty to speed, and half the normal penalty to attacks (-2 instead of -4). Its vulnerability to disease gives it a -1 saving throw against magical disease attacks (e.g., *cause disease*). In 3rd Edition, a *silence* spell negates a hook horror's blindsense.

An *ESP* spell will give only a basic understanding of a hook horror's thoughts, typically involving food or personal discomfort. At least in 1st Edition, the different fundamental mechanisms for language foil the efforts of translation spells such as *tongues* and *comprehend languages* to decipher their clacking language.

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### Al-Qadim

The article *Campaign Journal: Scimitars Against the Dark* by Wolfgang Baur in *Dragon* #198 presents advice on running a darker, horror-genre version of Al-Qadim. The hook horror is one of many creatures listed as a suitable creature for this style of campaign.

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### Birthright

*Warlock of the Stonecrowns* includes an encounter with a pack of hook horrors that have recently battled a myconid colony. As a result, one member of the pack is infected with yellow mold, and attacks on it have a chance of spreading the infection. So much for the *Ecology of the Hook Horror's* claims about their immunity to fungal infection.

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### Blackmoor

The third adventure in the DA series, *City of the Gods*, includes a full stat block and description of a hook horror. Because the Blackmoor series used the BECMI rules, this is the Mystaran version of the hook horror from the *Creature Catalogue*, which we'll cover in more detail below. Interestingly, the only place in the adventure that hook horrors appear is as one of many possible species sealed inside the "Envio Pods" in the crashed spaceship that give the adventure its title.

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### Forgotten Realms

For many D&D fans the hook horror is familiar as a creature found in the Forgotten Realms setting. This is because they feature prominently in two of the early Drizzt novels. *Homeland* details Drizzt's first encounter with hook horrors. During a training exercise, Master Hatch'net advises his drow students that crossbows are not effective against hook horrors, and directs them to get close enough to slide melee weapons between their armor plates. Drizzt proceeds to kill two hook horrors by himself, and assists in dispatching a third.

In *Exile*, Drizzt gains a hook horror as a companion for much of the story. The hook horror is actually a polymorphed pech named Clacker. He manages to communicate this to Drizzt in time to avoid being killed, and joins the dark elf and the svirfneblin Belwar Dissengulp in their travels. Clacker's story is a rather tragic one. Over time, his hook horror form gradually squeezes out the remnants of his pech personality, and he

has to be reminded that he is really a pech. Towards the end of the book Clacker meets an untimely demise, and in death he finally reverts back to his pech form.



*The Legend of Drizzt: Exile comic #2/3 (2005)*

There is a mention of Clacker in *Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark*. The section on the environs of Blingdenstone notes that a pech was turned into a hook horror by the Wizard Fendlestick in a small cavern now known as Fendlestick's Folly. The same book mentions a now-abandoned illithid city called Phanlinksal which included hook horror slaves. Phanlinksal is detailed further in *Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue*.



*A Reader's Guide to R. A. Salvatore's Legend of Drizzt (2008)*

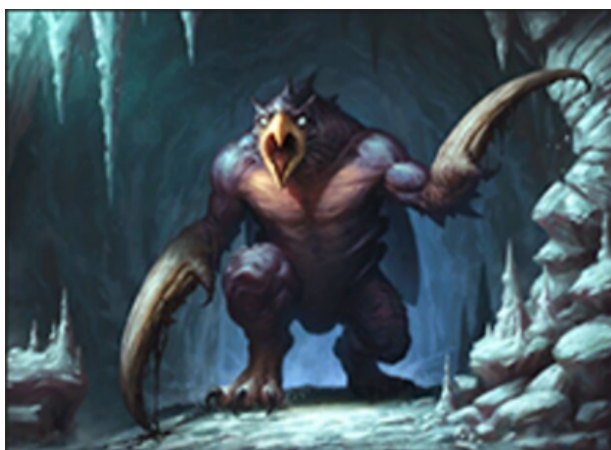
*Doom of Daggerdale* includes an encounter with a small hook horror, which has not been fed recently and which can be bribed with mushrooms, moss, grains, or preferably meat. A bribed hook horror will follow its benefactor, clicking and clacking and demanding more. If not fed every few hours, it will eventually attack.

This adventure also contains encounters with nightshades, which are elemental spirits of poisonous plants. If the young hook horror gets a taste for them, it will attack any nightshades encountered thereafter.

*Elminster's Ecologies Appendix II* lists hook horrors among the many insectoid species found in the Undermoor. *The North: Guide to the Savage Frontier* notes that hook horrors have been reported in the mines surrounding Felbarr Fields. Smallfry's Pantry, located in *Skullport*, has been known to cook whole hook horrors and then crack them open with mauls to access the meat. (Presumably these weren't the parasite-ridden 1st Edition versions.) A more recent *Adventurers League* title, *CCC-BMG-MOON6-2: Troubled Visions*, includes an encounter with a partly roasted hook horror. It is fairly livid about the recent attempt to cook it. *Underdark* states the hook horrors are particularly prevalent in the Middledark region of the Underdark (3-10 miles below the surface). According to the *Tyrants of the Underdark* board game, the now ruined drow settlement of Buiyrandyn became the lair of a hook horror clan after its destruction by illithids.

Hook horrors feature reasonably prominently in the adventure *Dead in Thay*. Hook horror eggs and young are being kept by the Red Wizards in an egg chamber and hatchling pens. Later in the adventure, there is a nest of four hook horrors in the Forest of Illusion. These hook horrors hang from the walls, but have grown lazy as a result of their imprisonment. Interestingly, the encounter description indicates that speaking Undercommon might mean that a character can make a deal with the hook horrors. Hook horrors seem to have a short attention span though, since any truce lasts only for about ten minutes before requiring renegotiation.

In the Twisted Caverns region of Undermountain, as detailed in *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, live a small group of hook horrors who have not yet fallen under the influence of a neighboring aboleth. The adventure details their homestead and their larder, although "larder" is a generous description of a ledge containing troglodyte bones, kuo-toa remains and patches of various fungi.



*Alchemy Horizons: Baldur's Gate* (2022)

In 2022, Wizards of the Coast released a digital-only deck for *Magic: The Gathering* titled *Alchemy Horizons: Baldur's Gate*. A hook horror appeared on card #44 of the set.

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## Greyhawk

After unexpectedly becoming denizens of Oerth in the 2nd Edition *Monstrous Compendium Greyhawk Adventures Appendix*, hook horrors did at least appear in a few subsequent Greyhawk supplements, including in the wandering monster tables for *WGR1: Greyhawk Ruins*, published three months later.

There is an encounter with a clan of hook horrors in the adventure *WGA3: Flames of the Falcon*. This group is aggressive and consists of a mixture of adults and young. The description in the text references the *Monstrous Compendium* illustration, noting the spines across their upper backs, and the hooks protruding from their elbows. The footprints of the hook horrors are described as over sixteen inches long. Even though they appear in just one encounter, the entire page entry for the hook horror is reprinted at the back of the adventure.

In *WGR2: Treasures of Greyhawk*, a large beholder named Zomitil inhabits the ruins of a temple of St. Cuthbert. He has collected five hook horrors who serve as guards. Hook horrors appear on the encounter tables for Shattados's Palace in *WGR3: Rary the Traitor*, and *WGR4: The Marklands* notes that hook horrors recently attack Pelluer Keep in Nyrond. They can also be found in the subterranean ruin of Darkpool in the Fellreev Forest, according to *WGR5: Iuz the Evil*.

The 3rd Edition adventure *Expedition to the Ruins of Greyhawk* introduces voidmind hook horrors. These creature are the minions of the mind flayer Akulath (a six-tentacled ulitharid), and have the voidmind creature template from the *Monster Manual III* applied to them, giving them a sentient tentacle which can be used to create psionic cones of slime. Hook horrors appear in a number of *Living Greyhawk* organized play adventures, including hook horror druids and rangers in *ESA6-01: Knife's Edge* and elite hook horrors in *KEO7-08: Forest of Caverns*.

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## Mystara

Although it was originally an Advanced D&D creature, the hook horror transitioned to Basic D&D in the pages of *XL1: Quest for the Heartstone* in March 1984. At the back of that adventure, it shares a page with the dragonfly, and gets two pictures, one of the whole creature and another partial side view. The description in the appendix is similar to that in the *Fiend Folio*, but the encounter in the adventure refers to them as “birds” and their beak attack does substantially more damage (3-18 points) than their hooks (1-8 each). Even though these hook horrors are said to communicate using clicking noises, just like AD&D hook horrors, they are encountered in the adventure standing around in a cave “growling and squawking”.



*Quest for the Heartstone* (1984)



*Quest for the Heartstone* is a notable adventure not because it has a particularly memorable story, but because it was produced as a tie-in with a series of toy figures produced by LJN. Consequently, the hook horror has its very own action figure. The adventure repeatedly punts these, saying “You may use the HOOK HORRORTM Monster produced by LJN Toys, Ltd. for this encounter”.



Hook Horror toy from LJN (1984), image from [Toydreams](#)

The hook horror is reprinted in both the *Creature Catalogue* (1986) and the *Creature Catalog* (1993), but here it is joined by a “closely related species” known as a hulker. The hook horror is reduced to only seven feet in height, but hulkers are described as being two feet taller than hook horrors, with several hooks on each paw. They have mandibles instead of a beak, and in contrast to the hook horror, excellent vision, including infravision. Hulkers look remarkably like umber hulks and the 2nd Edition *Mystara Monstrous Compendium Appendix* confirms that hulkers and umber hulks are indeed the same thing and that Mystarans consider them to be closely related. Collectively, they are referred to as hook beasts. Notably, the Mystaran hook horror and hulker are able to communicate with each other through their shared language of clicks, and sometimes hunt together.



Hook horror and hulker, *Creature Catalogue* (1986)

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## Ravenloft

*The Shadow Rift* includes a hook horror encounter while the PCs are climbing. It suggests that the best way for the DM to begin the encounter is to have the lowest climber suddenly vanish with a shriek. There is also a hook horror inside a *spirit trap* in *A Light in the Belfry* which has been driven insane by its prolonged captivity.

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## The Realm

The hook horror is clearly an adaptable beast. Not only did it get its own action figure, it also made the leap to television. A pack of hook horrors features in the *City at the Edge of Midnight* episode of the D&D Cartoon Show. (The Realm is the name given to the Cartoon Show's setting, as the protagonists are transported to "the realm of Dungeons & Dragons".)



*City at the Edge of Midnight*, D&D Cartoon show (1984)

The *D&D Sticker Book* released in 1985 was a licenced UK product based on the cartoon series and contained a number of reusable stickers and several background pictures to place them on. The Hook Horror sticker looks very similar to both the LJN action figure and the cartoon depiction.



*Dungeons & Dragons Sticker Book* (1985)

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## Spelljammer

Although it was not part of the Spelljammer line, the adventure *Dawn of the Overmind* takes place on Penumbra, a constructed discworld and the center of the illithids' once mighty empire, accessible only through spelljamming. Pervasive in this alien place are a race of creatures called grammites. They are nine foot tall creatures similar to hook horrors, with a mottled gray exoskeleton, mandibles and hooked limbs. They have essentially the same statistics and abilities, and lack only the vulture-like characteristics of the hook horror. There is also a mothergrammite, which is a larger, more bloated version. The adventure suggests, but does not confirm, a relationship between grammites and hook horrors.

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## Miniatures

The first hook horror miniature was produced by Citadel Miniatures in 1979, as part of their *Fiend Factory* line. This line was based on creatures from the *White Dwarf* column of the same name. Unfortunately, following the publication of the *Fiend Folio* by TSR, rights issues caused Citadel to have to replace several creatures from the line, including the hook horror.



*Citadel FF3-1*, image from [Miniatures Workshop](#)

The next miniature, also metal, was the first official Dungeons & Dragons hook horror, released as part of Ral Partha's 2nd Edition line.



*Ral Partha #11-506*, image from [Lost Minis wiki](#)

Wizards of the Coast has included hook horrors in two of its pre-painted sets. In 2004, the *Aberrations* set included a hook horror figure as #35/60, as did 2008's *Dungeons of Dread* set (figure #57/60).



*D&D Miniatures: Aberrations #35/60*, image from [MinisGallery](#)



*D&D Miniatures: Dungeons of Dread #57/60*, image from [MinisGallery](#)

Most recently, WizKids Games released a hook horror in the *Rage of Demons* set, accompanying the 2015 D&D storyline of the same name.



*Icons of the Realms: Rage of Demons #45/50*, image from [MinisGallery](#)

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### Computer games

Although not quite as pervasive in digital form as some other D&D creatures, hook horrors have featured in several computer games, including 1994's *Menzoberranzan*.





*Menzoberranzan* (1994), image from [GHostsLPs](#)

There also are many hook horrors in the caves of *Icewind Dale II*.



*Icewind Dale II* (2002), right image from [RPGDeLarge](#)

The hook horror from *Sword Coast Legends* is a direct translation of the 5th Edition *Monster Manual* artwork.



*Sword Coast Legends* (2015), image from [Kevin Elliott](#)

*Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* features a hook horror as a monstrous opponent encounter.



*Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* (September 2017), image from [Idle Champions wiki](#)

*Baldur's Gate 3*, the most recent digital release at the time of writing, has a colorful version of the hook horror.



*Baldur's Gate III* (2020), image from [Corbax Studio](#)

## Comparative statistics

						
Edition	<b>BECMI</b>	<b>AD&amp;D (1st Edition)</b>	<b>AD&amp;D 2nd Edition</b>	<b>D&amp;D 3.X Edition</b>	<b>D&amp;D 4th Edition</b>	<b>D&amp;D 5th Edition</b>
Source	<i>Creature Catalogue</i> (AC9)	<i>Fiend Folio</i>	<i>Monstrous Manual</i>	<i>Monster Manual II</i>	<i>Monster Manual</i>	<i>Monster Manual</i>
Size		L (9' tall)	L (9' tall)	Large	Large	Large
Type				Aberration	Natural Beast	Monstrosity
Alignment	Chaotic	Neutral	Neutral	Usually neutral	Unaligned	Neutral
No. Appearing	2-12 (0)	2-12	2-12	1, 5-20 or 21-40		
Armor Class	2	3	3	22	28	15
Hit Points	5 HD	5 HD	5 HD	10d8+20 (65 hp)	137 hp	75 (10d10+20)
Speed	90' (30')	9"	9"	20 ft., climb 20 ft.	4, climb 4	30 ft., climb 30 ft.
Abilities	Int 4 Morale 8	Int Low	Int Low (5-7) Morale Steady (11-12)	Str 24, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 9	Str 24, Dex 19, Con 25, Int 3, Wis 16, Cha 12	Str 18, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 7
Senses				Blindsense 60ft., Light sensitivity	Perception +9, Blindsight 10	Perception +3, Blindsight 60 ft., Darkvision 10 ft., Echolocation, Keen Hearing
Saves	as Fighter: 5			Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +8	Fort 27, Ref 24, Will 24	
Reach				10 ft.	2	10 ft.
Attacks	2 claws/1 bite	2	3 (THAC0 15)	2 x Claw +13 melee Bite +8 melee	Hook +20 vs. AC Bite +20 vs. AC (grabbed target only)	Hook +6 melee weapon
Damage	1-8/1-8/3-18	1-8/1-8	1-8/1-8/2-12	Claw 1d6+7 Bite 2d6+3	Hook 1d12+7 and pull Bite 1d8+7	Hook 11 (2d6+4) piercing
Special Attacks		Nil	Nil	Improvised Grab Power Sunder Rending Bite	Rending Hooks Fling	Multiattack
XP	175	90 + 5 per hit point	175	CR 6	800	Challenge 3 (700 XP)
Treasure	30% 1-6 x 1000 silver 10% 1-2 x 1000 electrum	30% 1-6 x 1000 silver 25% 1-2 x 1000 electrum	10-60 silver 1-20 electrum or platinum	Standard		

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