

Monster ENCyclopedia: Kamadan

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. This entry covers one of the creatures associated with the Trickster Gods of Omu in *Tomb of Annihilation*: the kamadan. It originally appeared along with a number of other creatures in a combined *Tomb of Annihilation* article.

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Origins

There isn't any mythological precedent for a leopard with snakes spouting from its shoulders. There are plenty of legendary creatures related to leopards, from the [zheng](#)—a horned red leopard with five tails—to the [serpopard](#)—a leopard which has a snake's body instead of a neck—but neither of these looks much like a kamadan. Perhaps the closest visual inspiration is Cerberus, the dog that guards the gates of the Underworld, at least as envisaged by some artists.



Cerberus, image from [basic Greek mythology](#)

To be fair, historical accounts of Cerberus don't even agree on the number of heads the dog has, let alone on which parts of him are snake-like. Sometimes Cerberus has a snake instead of a tail, sometimes he has multiple snakes instead of a tail, sometimes he has no snake-parts and sometimes he is entirely a snake. However, there are also accounts of Cerberus having snakes writhing around his neck, hair interwoven with snakes, or a mane consisting of snakes. It is only conjecture, but an image like the one above could easily have helped inspire the D&D kamadan.

1st Edition

The *Fiend Folio*, where the kamadan first appears in print, provides another possible inspiration, stating that the kamadan is “clearly a relative of the displacer beast”. This seems like a dubious assertion, since the displacer beast’s spiked tentacles are very different to the kamadan’s serpents, but as we’ll see later, kamadans and displacer beasts can interbreed, so it is possible that the creatures are somehow related. The kamadan is a large leopard with between four and seven snakes sprouting from its shoulders. Nick Louth is credited with the kamadan’s creation.



Fiend Folio (1981)

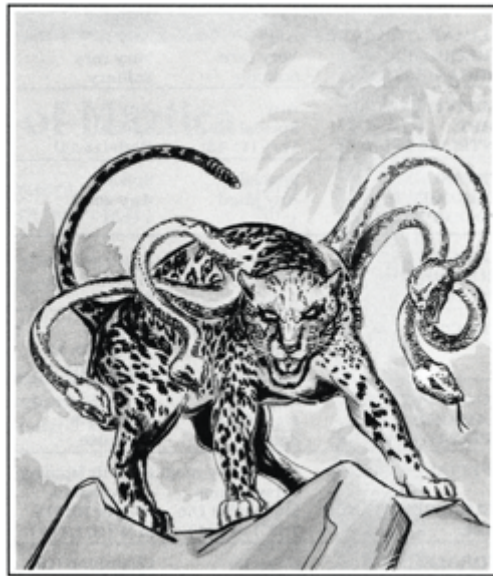
The creature is a solitary beast of neutral alignment, with chaotic evil tendencies. It is rare, and encountered in its lair only 20% of the time. It has low intelligence, but may have accumulated some treasure, most likely from previous opponents.

The *Fiend Folio* provides no backstory for the creature, and focuses on the kamadan’s attacks, which are a claw attack (1-3 damage), a bite attack (1-6 damage) and one bite per snake head (each for 1-4 damage). The snakes’ bites are not venomous, but the leopard head’s breath is dangerous. It can create a cone of *sleep* 30’ long. The kamadan has 4+2 HD, and its breath can automatically put creatures with 4 HD or fewer to sleep.

Dragon #93 gives the pronunciation of kamadan as KŌM-a-dan. In *Polyhedron* #49 there is an adventure titled *Cataclysm*. It includes a lot of felines (1720 to be exact!), one of which is a kamadan. The villain Sefnu in *The Pyramid of Jenkel* in *Dungeon* #23 also keeps a pair of kamadans, whose lair is described as consisting of “bones and rubbish”.

2nd Edition

The 2nd Edition version of the kamadan is a passenger to the entry for the kamatlan in the *Maztica Campaign Set*. The kamatlan is the larger version of the creature found in Maztica, and it is very similar to the kamadan, although rarer. Instead of a leopard, the kamatlan resembles a jaguar with a medium yellow coat covered in dark spots. It has only four snakes growing from each shoulder; these are described as sandy colored with a diamond pattern. The kamatlan has a rattlesnake-like rattle at the end of its tail, which it shakes when agitated. The kamatlan is less intelligent than the kamadan, but has slightly higher morale and is always chaotic evil in alignment.



Kamatlan, *Maztica Campaign Set* (1991)

The accompanying description of the kamadan describes it as having a leopard's tawny coat with rosette-shaped spots, and a fixed number of three snakes protruding from each shoulder. The kamadan snakes are green and about three feet long. Both the kamadan and kamatlan are solitary beasts, meeting irregularly to mate. Despite their predominantly mammalian forms, they are egg-laying creatures. Two months after mating, kamatlan dig shallow holes to bury their leathery eggs, while kamadans hide them under foliage. Eggs take two months to hatch, and young about six months to mature.

Both felines are carnivorous and skilled at stalking prey before they pounce, sometimes for hours. The kamatlan hisses, growls and rattles during battles, and attacks with its front claws (1-3/1-3 damage), its bite (1-8 damage) and four snake bits (1-4). The kamatlan lacks the breath weapon of the kamadan, but its snakes are venomous, and someone failing a save will fall ill with an incapacitating illness in 1-4 turns. This illness lasts for 2-8 days. The kamadan's *sleep* breath is now a 20' x 10' cloud instead of a cone, and—using the *sleep* spell mechanics—fells creatures with a total of up to 2d4 hit dice. It can be used only three times per day. The kamadan has the same 4+2 hit dice it did in 1st Edition, while the kamatlan has 5+2 hit dice. They share the same armor class (4), but the kamatlan has a slightly better attack score (THAC0 15 versus 17 for the kamadan).

Kamatlan are found in tropical parts of Maztica, while kamadans are found in tropical jungles and forests in other parts of the world. Kamatlan seem to have been unknown prior to the events of the *Maztica* trilogy of

novels, in which Mt. Zatal exploded, destroying much of the Maztican capital of Nexal during the Night of Wailing. Kamatlan spontaneously appeared in various places at this time, presumably spawned by the Maztican god Zaltec. They now roam uncivilized jungles, deserts and mountains throughout the continent.



MC14: Monstrous Compendium Fiend Folio Appendix (1992)

The kamadan graces the cover (back and front!) of *MC14: Monstrous Compendium Fiend Folio Appendix*, but doesn't actually appear as part of that collection. This artwork was recycled for card #445 of the 1993 *Trading Card* series.

3rd Edition

There is a 3rd Edition kamadan in *Dungeon #136*. The description is similar to the 2nd Edition version, although it seems to somehow have gained the rattlesnake tail of the kamatlan. The illustration appears to show small snakes protruding from the kamadan's neck, rather than the previous shoulder serpents. Although kamadans are still described as distant relatives of the displacer beast, they have an antagonistic relationship, with kamadans attacking the displacers on sight, and even laying complex traps for them.



Dungeon #136 (2006)

This version of the kamadan is printed as a 7 hit dice creature, but the letters page in the next issue corrects this to 8 hit dice, double that of 1st and 2nd Edition. The kamadan's abilities are similar to those of its earlier

incarnations, but there are a number of changes. Each of the six snakes has a separate brain, allowing the kamadan to make bite attacks with the snakes as free actions. The snakes are now venomous, with the poison potentially doing a significant amount of strength damage. The kamadan also gains all-around vision from the many sets of snake eyes, although this seems strange if the snakes all have separate brains. How do the snakes share what they are seeing with the kamadan's main brain? It also gains darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision and scent, all of which make more sense.

The kamadan's environment is listed as temperate hills and mountains, but it is no longer exclusively solitary, now occasionally found in pairs or a pride (4-10). The sleep breath weapon has switched back from the 2nd Edition cloud to a 30-foot cone, and can be used every 1d4 rounds, but a maximum of five times per day. The kamadan relies heavily on its breath weapon and its mobility (a speed of 40 ft.) against challenging opponents. It is listed as understanding the Muranni language, since the stats accompany an adventure set in Greyhawk's land of Mur.

5th Edition

The *Tomb of Annihilation* updates the kamadan to 5th Edition, as well as dismissing any relationship between kamadans and displacer beasts. Kamadans have a keen sense of smell, and either hunt alone or in mated pairs. They begin combat by releasing their cone of *sleep* breath. Although they have only animal intelligence, they are clever enough to focus on opponents who are still conscious before dealing with sleeping enemies.



Tomb of Annihilation (2017)

The kamadan is now a 9 hit dice creature (67 hit points). As before, it can attack with either a bite (1d6+3 piercing damage), claw (1d6+3 slashing damage) or snakes (1d6+3 piercing damage plus 6d6 poison damage on a failed save). The collection of six snakes is treated as a single attack, so this kamadan does not have as many attacks as previously. The kamadan can *pounce* to try to knock a creature prone. The *sleep breath* is a 30-foot cone that causes those who fail a constitution save to fall unconscious for ten minutes, or until roused.

The 2017 [Extra Life](#) charity adventure *The Lost Kenku* has three trained kamadans guarding the Manor of Weirding from intruders.

Kamadan and other monsters

The cat lord from the *Monster Manual II* is able to converse with kamadans. In *The Plight of Cirria* in *Dungeon #9*, there is an outpost of yuan-ti who keep a number of kamadan in kennels, and use them as temple watchdogs.

Supporting some sort of relationship between the two species, *Dungeon #22* features a kamadan and a displacer beast which have mated and produced seven hybrid cubs. Three of the cubs favor their father, and look like a kamadan with only four snake heads, but with the displacement ability of their mother. Three of them look more like their mother, but have their father's breath. The seventh cub has both snake heads and displacer beast tentacles and the full abilities of both parents. The suggested setting for this adventure is the Amendio Jungle or Hepmonaland in Greyhawk, or Chult in the Forgotten Realms, so these hybrids might be found in either setting.

Kamadan parts

Dragon #98 mentions that glands from the leopard head of a kamadan are used to enchant the teeth of brass dragons. The pelt of a kamadan is worth 6 gp, and a live young 4,200 gp, according to *Dragon #137*. According to the *Maztica* boxed set, kamadan tongues can be used to make *sleep* potions and many kamatlan body parts are useful for hishna magic.

The market for kamadan young has crashed by 5th Edition. *Tomb of Annihilation* notes the going price for a live kamadan cub as between 150 and 300 gp in Port Nyanzaru. This may be because efforts to domesticate the cubs are doomed to failure; kamadans will always turn on their masters when they reach adulthood.

Forgotten Realms

There are two mated kamadans with three cubs living in a shrine in *Tomb of Annihilation*. From the text, we learn that baby kamadans are indistinguishable from baby leopards, as the serpents only sprout once the cubs are older than six months. Kamadans live in the jungles and ruins of Chult.



Shagambi's symbol, *Tomb of Annihilation* (2017)

Shagambi is the wise and virtuous of the nine trickster gods of Omu. She takes the form of a kamadan and is perpetually furious with the grung god Nangnang for stealing her holy spear.

Greyhawk

According to the *Endless Quest* book *Circus of Fear*, the kamadan is "one of the most feared animals in the forests of Greyhawk". The one encountered in the book has been released from a circus cage and is busy finishing off a crabman.



Circus of Fear (1983)

The adventure *The Coming Storm*, in which the 3rd Edition kamadan appears, is set in a remote part of Oerth, and kamadans are noted as dwelling in the mountainous jungles of Mur, far to the west of the Flanaess. The adventure features a number of kamadans, notably one who has been named Rattle by the human children it has been trained to guard.

Ravenloft

The adventure *RMH-10: Scion of Darkness* in the *Mist Hunters* series of *Adventurers League* scenarios doesn't have a live kamadan, but it does mention a shrine in Valachan which has a 20-foot-tall statue of a kamadan.

Miniatures

Figure #27 in *WizKids Tomb of Annihilation* set is the only kamadan miniature released to date.



Icons of the Realms: Tomb of Annihilation (2017), image from [MinisGallery](https://www.minisgallery.com)

Computer games

The kamadan can be encountered as a monstrous opponent in the *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* game.



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

Comparative statistics

				
Edition	AD&D (1st Edition)	AD&D 2nd Edition	D&D 3.X Edition	D&D 5th Edition
Source	<i>Fiend Folio</i>	<i>Maztica</i>	<i>Dungeon</i> #136	<i>Tomb of Annihilation</i>
Size	L	L (5'-6' long)	Large	Large
Type			Magical beast	Monstrousity
Alignment	Neutral (chaotic evil)	Neutral	Always neutral	Unaligned
No. Appearing	1	1	Solitary, pair, or pride (4-10)	
Armor Class	4	4	19	13
Hit Dice/Points	4+2	4+2	76 (7 HD)	67 (9d10+18)
Speed	18"	15	40 ft.	30 ft.
Abilities	Int Low	Int Low (5-7) Morale Average (8-10)	Str 20, Dex 17, Con 18, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 8	Str 16, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 10
Senses			Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent	Passive Perception 14, Keen Smell
Saves			Fort +10, Ref +9, Will +3	
Attacks	3 plus snake heads	9	Bite +12 and 6 bites +10 and 2 claws +10	Bite +5 melee Claw +5 melee Snakes +5 melee
Damage	1-3/1-3/1-6 plus 1-4/snake head	1-3/1-3/1-6/1-4(x6)	Bite 1d8+5, 6 bites 1d4+2 plus poison, claws 1d6+2	Bite 6 (1d6+3) piercing Claw 6 (1d6+3) slashing Snakes 6 (1d6+3) piercing and 21 (6d6 poison)
Special Attacks	Breath weapon	Breath weapon	Breath Weapn Poison Snakebite	Pounce Multiattack Sleep Breath
Special Defense	Nil	Nil	All-Around Vision	
XP	240 + 5/hp	975	CR 8	Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Treasure	20% 1-12 x 1000 copper 30% 1-6 x 1000 silver 10% 1-4 x 1000 electrum 25% 1-6 gems 20% 1-3 jewelry 10% any 2 magic items	20% 1-10 x 1000 copper 30% 1-6 x 1000 silver 10% 100-600 platinum or electrum 25% 1-6 gems 20% 1-3 art objects 10% any 2 magic items	1/10 coins; 50% goods; 50% items	

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