Sneak, Rend, and Gore

WILD ANIMALS FOR EXPERT NOVA

by Anders Blixt

“Life finds a way.”
Ian Malcom, Jurassic Park
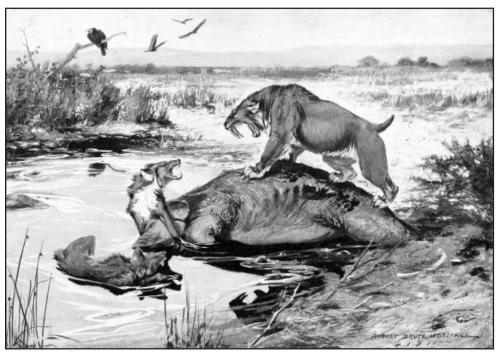
Smilodon and dire wolves disputing a carcass
Robert Bruce Horsfall (picture in public domain)

Preface

In the murky prehistoric past, that is, some time before 1985, my friend Lennart explained that you can divide role-playing games into two categories: those in which the adventurers fight monsters (e.g. *Dungeons & Dragons*) and those in which they get humans and other sapients as their adversaries (e.g. *Traveller*). For the first category, the adventurers need combat prowess, fire spells, and good armour, whereas games in the second category usually emphasize clever schemes, social interaction, and indirect approaches.

When I wrote *Expert Nova* in the summer of 2019, I put the game in category two, because I prefer dealing with such campaigns. That's why the basic game got no rules for animals. But in December 2019, I outlined two new campaign settings in which the adventurers are supposed to venture into the wild; as a result I wrote this set of animal rules during a creative week.

In the spring of 2020, some gamers notified me of minor errors in the text. I also spotted a few matters that I wanted to improve, for example the layout and the selection of animals. So here is version 1.1 of the *Expert Nova* animal rules – same content in a better package.

Introduction

Predators don't waste energy; they want to kill their prey as quickly and efficiently as can be done. I have read claims that lions loaf 22 hours a day.

Predators are also sneaky opportunists that rarely pick a fight with combative animals of a higher Power Rank. For example, a tiger can use roaring and aggressive posturing to compel a wolf pack to abandon their deer carcass; the wolves realize that it is less hazardous to kill another deer than to confront the tiger.

Humans are rarely natural prey for terrestrial predators and therefore they tend to leave us alone. However, provocations, injuries or a shortage of regular prey can make a predator change its mind.

On the other hand, omnivores and herbivores can act in very aggressive manners, in particular when cornered or when protecting their young. Three examples:

- If need be, a group of male baboons will take a stand against a leopard to cover the flight of the rest of their troop.
- A male boar is often willing to charge any creature regardless of circumstances.
- Every year, hippopotamuses kill or injure a lot of people because they regard us as Power Rank II predators that they must drive away or incapacitate.

New Term: Power Rank

The term *Power Rank* (PR) denotes the "might" of an animal species, that is, its size and its capacity for intimidating lesser species (see the Power Rank Table on p. 5).

Big Guns for Big Game

During the second half of the 19th century, European arms manufacturers developed two specialized firearms for big game hunters: the *double rifle* and the *howdah pistol*.

Double Rifle

People use the double rifle for hunting elephants, African buffalo and other big game. Its twin-barrelled design resembles a shotgun. Its calibre is 12 to 15 mm, depending on the model. Double rifles and their *express cartridges* are very expensive.

1. Load the weapon as you load a shotgun.
2. Use the RIFLE range band.
3. An adventurer can fire both barrels at the same time (one Skill Check for both bullets), but the recoil is so gruesome that she loses one hit point.
4. A bullet's Damage Roll is 1D6+5. If you roll ⊞, the target creature is killed instantly regardless of its Hit Points.

Howdah Pistol

The twin-barrelled howdah pistol is used at close-range encounters with dangerous animals. It is usually chambered for a common rifle round, such as the .303 British, the 7mm Mauser, or the 8mm Lebel.

1. Load the weapon as you load a shotgun.
2. Use the PISTOL range band.
3. You can fire both barrels at the same time with one Skill Check for both bullets.
4. A bullet's Damage Roll is 1D6+3.

Animal Stats

The numerical values listed below for Traits, Attributes and Abilities are the species median. When you create an individual animal, modify its values as you see fit.

Example: The limping tiger Shere Khan in Kipling's Jungle Book *stories has been maimed by gunshot. Therefore, his Knack, Speed, and Close combat values are significantly reduced and that's why he preys on people instead of deer.*

a. **Power Rank (PR)**: The scale is non-linear; therefore, Power Ranks are denoted by Roman numerals, see the Power Rank Table on page 5.
b. **Traits**: Animals only have Push and Knack. Sense is replaced by the abilities Listen, Sniff, and Spot, whereas only fully sapient beings possess Grit.
   - *Push*: $10 \times PR$.
   - *Knack*: The value is set in relation to the median human value of 10. I use multiples of 5 for the sake of simplicity.
c. **Attributes** are calculated as follows (the Load Attribute is irrelevant):
   - *Hit Points*: $7 \times PR$.
   - *Damage Bonus (DB)* is calculated normally; it is in fact $2 \times PR - 2$.
   - *Speed:* In tactical situations, a species' Speed is set in relation to the median human Speed of 5. I use multiples of 5 for the sake of simplicity.
d. **Abilities**: Animals have *abilities* instead of skills, but both features use the same game mechanics. There are four ability levels (median values in parenthesis):
   - *Poor* (6), that is, less competent than a normal human
   - *Adequate* (11), that is, about as competent as a median human
   - *Competent* (16)
   - *Excellent* (21)
e. **Way of life**: The species is either *solitary*, that is, each animal lives by itself (occasionally with cubs); or *social*, that is, members of the species forms packs, herds, troops, prides, congregations, etc.
f. **Hunting tactics**: Different predatory species use different hunting tactics. Two common tactics are:
   - A *pursuer* pursues its prey until it collapses from exhaustion. Wolves and paleolithic humans are pursuers.
   - A *pouncer* sneaks up on its prey and attacks in an explosive dash. It abandons a failed attack within 30-60 seconds. Cheetahs and crocodiles are pouncers.

Guidelines for Fighting Animals

a. The *Close combat* ability denotes an animal's prowess in a melee.

b. An animal has one melee attack per tactical round. Its action rank is $2 \times$ *Close combat*. It can carry out any reasonable tactical manoeuvre.

c. An animal's natural weapons (fangs, claws, paw strike, gore, etc.) normally have a damage roll of $1D3 + 1 + DB$.
   - *Exception*: Felines and pseudo-felines (e.g. smilodon) that attack simultaneously with fangs and claws get a damage roll of $1D6 + 2 + DB$.

d. Claws, paws and fangs can cause gruesome injuries. Therefore, apply one of the following options:
   - Exploding damage dice.
   - At ⊞, calculate damage without explosions and multiply by 2.

e. When an animal tries to tackle, pull, or topple an adventurer, her player rolls a Luck Check (Knack) to determine whether she remains standing. Select Challenge Level depending on species and attack. Some examples:

   > A wolf snatches and pulls Helen's jacket sleeve ⇒ Demanding
   > A leopard pounces at Helen's torso ⇒ Hard
   > A male boars gores Helen ⇒ Hard
   > A rhino rams Helen ⇒ Daunting
   > A tiger pounces at Helen's back ⇒ Impossible

f. Apply Stun Checks the usual way. However, unusually ferocious animals (e.g. male boars) and animals of Power Rank VI and above are exempt.

Power Rank Table

PR	Representative species (extinct ones in parenthesis)
I	baboon, cheetah, dobermann, wolf
II	boar ♀, cougar, leopard, sun bear, (deinonychus)
III	boar ♂, jaguar, spectacled bear, plains zebra
IV	black caiman, brown bear, hippopotamus, lion, Mississippi alligator, tiger, (dilophosaurus)
V	African buffalo, saltwater crocodile, (megalania[1]), (short-faced bear[2])
VI	elephant, rhinoceros, (allosaurus), (stegosaurus), (daeodon[3])
VII	(Columbian mammoth), (Tyrannosaurus rex)
VIII	(apatosaurus)
IX	sperm whale

[1] A monstrous comodo dragon that lived in Australia during the Pleistocene.

[2] The short-faced bear lived on the North American prairies during the Pleistocene. It was larger than any present-day bear and occupied the same ecological niche as the lion. It hunted big herbivores, such as the bison.

[3] The daeodon was an omnivorous beast, huge as a bison and resembling a boar. It prowled the plains of North America during the Oligocene and the Miocene. Its nickname among palaeontologists is "Hell Pig".

Some Contemporary Animals

Baboon	Brown bear
Power Rank I	Power Rank IV
Push 10	Push 40
Knack 20	Knack 10
Hit Points 7	Hit Points 28
Damage Bonus $\pm$0	Damage Bonus +6
Speed 10 (1)	Speed 10 (1)
Poor abilities: −	Poor abilities: Spot
Adequate abilities: Sniff	Adequate abilities: Climb, Hide, Stealth
Competent abilities: Close combat, Hide, Listen, Spot, Stealth	Competent abilities: Close combat, Listen, Sniff, Swim
Excellent abilities: Acrobatics	Excellent abilities: −
Way of life: Social	Way of life: Solitary
Hunting tactics: Pouncer	Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: Omnivore. If a baboon troop is under threat, 2D6 males attack at once.	Comments: Omnivore. May attack with strike or bite without provocation.

Dobermann	Leopard
Power Rank I	Power Rank II
Push 10	Push 20
Knack 15	Knack 20
Hit Points 7	Hit Points 14
Damage Bonus $\pm$0	Damage Bonus +2
Speed 10 (1)	Speed 15 (1)
Poor abilities: Spot	Poor abilities: −
Adequate abilities: Swim, Stealth	Adequate abilities: Spot, Swim
Competent abilities: Close combat, Jump, Listen	Competent abilities: Listen, Sniff
Excellent abilities: Sniff	Excellent abilities: Acrobatics, Close combat, Hide, Stealth
Way of life: Social	Way of life: Solitary
Hunting tactics: Pursuer	Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: A well-trained Dobermann only attacks on command or in self-defence.	Comments: Feline with Damage Roll 1D6+2+DB.

Rhinoceros	Black caiman
Power Rank VI	Power Rank IV
Push 60	Push 40
Knack 10	Knack 10
Hit Points 42	Hit Points 28
Damage Bonus +10	Damage Bonus +6
Speed 15 (0)	Speed 5 (3)
Poor abilities: Spot	Poor abilities: Listen
Adequate abilities: Listen, Sniff	Adequate abilities: Sniff, Spot
Competent abilities: Close combat	Competent abilities: Close combat
Excellent abilities: −	Excellent abilities: Swim
Way of life: Solitary	Way of life: Social
Hunting tactics: It doesn't hunt, but it does fight.	Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: Ornery, often attacks what it considers to be threats. No stun check.	Comments: May attack without provocation. Prefers to drag-and-drown its prey. Hide = leather armour.

Some Prehistoric Animals

Short-faced bear (*Arctodus simus*)

Power Rank V
Push 50
Knack 15
Hit Points 35
Damage Bonus +8
Fart 15 (1)
Poor abilities: −
Adequate abilities: Climb, Hide, Sneak, Spot
Competent abilities: Close combat, Listen, Sniff, Swim
Excellent abilities: −
Way of life: Solitary
Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: Predator. Paw or bite attack.
Era: Pleistocene, North America.

Deinonychus

Power Rank II
Push 20
Knack 20
Hit Points 14
Damage Bonus +2
Fart 15 (1)
Poor abilities: −
Adequate abilities: Swim
Competent abilities: Listen, Sniff
Excellent abilities: Acrobatics, Close combat, Hide, Spot, Sneak
Way of life: Social
Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: Man-sized. Feathered predatory dinosaur. Claw attack. Era: early Cretaceous.

Dilophosaurus

Power Rank IV
Push 40
Knack 20
Hit Points 28
Damage Bonus +6
Fart 10 (1)
Poor abilities: Swim
Adequate abilities: Hide, Sneak, Sniff
Competent abilities: Acrobatics, Hear, Spot
Excellent abilities: Close combat
Way of life: Social
Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: Predatory dinosaur. Up to 7 metres long, 1.8 metres tall at the hips. Claw or bite attack. Era: early Jurassic.

Sabre-toothed tiger (*Smilodon populator*)

Power Rank IV
Push 40
Knack 15
Hit Points 28
Damage Bonus +6
Fart 15 (1)
Poor abilities: −
Adequate abilities: Sniff, Spot, Swim
Competent abilities: Acrobatics, Hide, Listen, Sneak
Excellent abilities: Close combat
Way of life: Solitary
Hunting tactics: Pouncer
Comments: Pseudo-feline, Damage Roll 1D6+2+SB. Era: Pleistocene, North America.

Tyrannosaurus Rex

Power Rank VII
Push 70
Knack 10
Hit Points 49
Damage Bonus +12
Fart 10 (−)
Poor abilities: −
Adequate abilities: Listen, Sniff
Competent abilities: Close combat, Spot
Excellent abilities: −
Way of life: Solitary
Hunting tactics: Pursuer
Comments: Up to 12 metres long, 3,5 metres tall at the hips. Hide = leather armour. No stun check. Era: late Cretaceous.

Dire Wolf (*Canis dirus*)

Power Rank II
Push 20
Knack 20
Hit Points 14
Damage Bonus +2
Fart 10 (1)
Poor abilities: Spot
Adequate abilities: Hide, Sneak, Swim.
Competent abilities: Close combat, Jump, Listen
Excellent abilities: Sniff
Way of life: Social
Hunting tactics: Pursuer
Comments: Circa 50 % larger than a grey wolf. Era: Pleistocene, North America.