



The Curse of the Snallygaster

**A 5e-Compatible Tabletop Role-Playing
Adventure for 1st-Level Characters**

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Disclaimer: Great Blue Herons are large birds with sharp, bayonet-shaped beaks. They are shy but can be dangerous, possibly more dangerous than the Snallygaster itself. They are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Snallygasters need no such protection.

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Jabberwocks and Snallygasters: Exploring the Role of Dungeons & Dragons in Environmental Education
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MEET THE SNALLYGASTER

GAME SYSTEM

This adventure is compatible with most 5e-based tabletop role-playing games, including the *Everyday Heroes*™ role-playing game system. The adventure can be easily adapted for many other tabletop role-playing game systems.

ADVENTURE SETTING

St. Michaels, a small town on the Maryland Eastern Shore with a long, rich history

ADVENTURE LENGTH

One 3- to 4-hour session

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Snallygaster is an elusive Maryland cryptid described as a winged birdlike reptile with a metallic beak, sharp talons, and, sometimes, tentacles. Although rooted in the folklore of 18th-century German immigrants, some skeptics believe that the original Snallygaster was a heron attempting to swallow an octopus.

In the 1920s, the backwoods of Maryland were home to bootleggers (people who produce or sell illegal alcohol) who used the legend of the Snallygaster to scare off revenuers (federal agents who sought to

enforce liquor laws during Prohibition). A century later, St. Michaels residents report glowing eyes in the mist, claw marks on barns, and livestock found drained of blood.

Locals whisper that the Snallygaster has returned. The U.S. Cryptid Field Research Team (a special division of U.S. Fish and Wildlife) is sent to investigate.

Unknown to them, a small-time smuggling ring has revived the legend to hide their modern rum-running operation—funneling illicit liquor from the coast to the mountains. The Snallygaster that locals fear is a man in a glider suit, using pyrotechnics and sound devices to frighten off witnesses.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not, to the best of our knowledge, actually have a cryptid division, although it is rumored that they maintain a database of Bigfoot sightings.

MISSION BRIEFING

Objective: Investigate and document the reported Snallygaster sightings near St. Michaels, MD.

Secondary Objectives:

- Determine if the threat is biological, paranormal, or human in origin.
- Avoid public panic or media leaks.
- Coordinate with local law enforcement discreetly.

SCENE I: ARRIVAL IN ST. MICHAELS

SETTING: TOWN OF ST. MICHAELS

It is an early Wednesday evening when you arrive in St. Michaels. The town is quiet. The tourists, who usually throng the streets, will not return until the weekend. Members of the U.S. Cryptid Field Research Team come from all over the country and don't necessarily know each other.

Introduce your characters.

After your party gets acquainted, your first stop is the police station, where the friendly but skeptical Chief Beattie Ramsey expects you. The police station is next door to the St. Michaels Library, which has been offered to the team as a base of operations.

Sheriff Beattie "Bea" Ramsey

AC: 11, HP: 16

Skills: Persuasion +3, Insight +2, Investigation +3

Equipment: Radio, flashlight, revolver (1d8+2)

Practical, dry sense of humor. She is skeptical of "monster" talk but happy to let federal agents handle the weirdness. If befriended, she'll cover for them when the press comes snooping.

If asked about anything unusual, Beattie mentions that the jail regular Chunky hasn't been up to his usual low-level shenanigans recently.

ENCOUNTER: MEET THE CHIEF

Interview Chief Beattie Ramsey. She shows blurry phone footage of "the creature" flying over the Crab Claw Restaurant.

This is the most exciting thing to happen to Beattie Ramsay in a long while. Usually, she has to deal with upper-class drunks driving erratically, picking fights on Carpenter St., or skinny dipping in Muskrat Park. She doesn't believe that the Snallygaster exists but enjoys the change to her usual routine.

The party can visit restaurants, coffee shops, bars, or one of the various tourist shops to chat with some of the locals. They get a variety of opinions including:

- "Chunky said he saw it eat a snakehead!"
- "It's probably some kid playing a prank."
- "It'll be good for local tourism."

SKILL CHECKS

- **Persuasion (DC 12):** Gain Sheriff's trust and get access to the evidence locker (scraps of scales that are actually roofing tar).
- **Investigation (DC 10):** Spot inconsistencies in the video — the "tentacles" look like an octopus.

SCENE II: THE FALSE SIGHTING

SETTING: FOXY'S HARBOR GRILLE

This scene sets the tone: part cryptid mystery, part natural history, part bureaucratic misadventure.

Bea sent you to Foxy's Harbor Grille for dinner. Your server, Whit Tilghman, overhears you and reveals that she heard strange noises and saw the shadow of a giant bird near Church Neck Road. She was sitting with her ex-boyfriend, Ed, in his car when it happened. She makes sure the party knows that he is her ex-boyfriend.

As you walk back from the restaurant through Muskrat Park, you see a huge, winged shape flying off with squirming, writhing tentacles emerging from its mouth. A camera flashes and someone shouts:

"Snallygaster!"

ENCOUNTER: THE FALSE SNALLYGASTER

This Snallygaster is a Great Blue Heron that stole an octopus from the dumpster behind Foxy's, the result of an unsuccessful attempt to add calamari to the menu, which spoiled when the shipment was delayed.

Can the team uncover the truth before yet another blurry Snallygaster photo spreads online? This scene should be funny and confusing, not dangerous. The agents may

chase or capture it for cryptid analysis, only to discover that it's just a bird.

False Snallygaster (Great Blue Heron)

AC 12, HP 9

Skills: Perception +3

Peck: +4 to hit, 1d4+2 piercing.

Frightened Flutter (Reaction): If startled, the heron flaps noisily, knocking over unsecured items in a 10-foot radius (DEX Save DC 11 or fall prone).

SKILL CHECKS

- **Perception (DC 12):** Spot the bird's true form.
- **Nature (DC 10):** Identify both the Great Blue Heron and octopus.
- **Athletics (DC 12):** Chase it for fun, possibly leading to someone falling in the water by Muskrat Park.
- **Persuasion (DC 12):** Convince the curious bystander not to post the photo online.

After the false alarm, the agents can return to their B&B for a debrief about the day's activities. The team should spend the next day or two setting camera traps, taking eDNA samples from around town, running transects, and questioning townspeople. The longer this takes, the more tourists arrive looking for the Snallygaster, especially if the photo leaked online.

Clues should slowly lead them to Ballintober Farm.

SCENE III: BALLINTOBER FARM

SETTING: BALLINTOBER FARM

The road to Ballintober Farm is heavily forested and occasionally floods at high tide. Built during the Prohibition Era, the farm most recently was the disreputable residence of a high-ranking government official. It has, in recent years, fallen into disrepair.

The few locals who pass through the area have reported hearing screeches and seeing glowing eyes in the woods.

Investigating the area will reveal an old, abandoned distillery and a rum stash hidden inside.

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING?

The old docks and boat ramps at Mount Misery Farm are used by recreational ne'er-do-wells to smuggle cheap rum, undermining the excellent distillery in town. They have set up a remote-controlled sound rig and LED drones to deter tourists and nosey neighbors. Their rum stash is hidden in an abandoned distillery at the back of the farm.

SKILL CHECKS

- **Technology (DC 13):** Trace the sound source.
- **Stealth (DC 12):** Approach unseen.

- **Perception (DC 10):** Spot recent tire tracks from a pickup truck.

ENCOUNTER: RIGGED DISTILLERY DEFENSES

A hidden loudspeaker attached to a motion sensor will trigger a Snallygaster scream, forcing a DC 11 WIS Save or become Frightened for 1 round (harmless but startling).

- **Perception (DC 12):** Notice wiring.
- **Technology (DC 13):** Disable loudspeaker.

COMPLICATION: TRIPWIRE FLARE

A hidden tripwire releases a flare and a mechanical screech, causing a temporary panic. You must be actively searching for traps to avoid setting it off.

- **Stealth (DC 13):** To avoid setting off the flare.
- **On failure:** +2 to hit, 1d4 fire damage, and alerts nearby **Smugglers**.

SCENE IV: FACE THE SNALLYGASTER

SETTING: ABANDONED DISTILLERY

"Hidden in the abandoned distillery at the back of Ballintober Farm, you finally meet the Snallygaster. As you approach the building, a tall, winged figure takes to the sky, swooping through the fog, glowing eyes blazing."

BUT IT'S ACTUALLY...

Ed "Chunky" Buchanan, ex-pilot and current rum runner, is wearing a motorized glider rig coated in phosphorescent paint and rigged with sound emitters. Ed uses the glider to appear and vanish dramatically and attempts to frighten the party with loudspeakers and flares.

If reduced below 5 HP, he surrenders, ranting:

"I just wanted to be left alone! It's not my fault the come-heres will believe anything!"

COMBAT/CHASE ENCOUNTER

Ed tries to scare the team off or escape with a truckload of rum while his accomplices (2–3 smugglers) attempt to cover his retreat.

FOES

Smuggler

AC 12, HP 11

Skills: Intimidation +2, Athletics +3

Club or Wrench: +3 to hit, 1d6+1 bludgeoning.

Pistol (if armed): +3 to hit, range 30/90 ft., 1d8+1 piercing.

Flees if bloodied, serve as lookouts or rum-runners at the abandoned distillery.

Ed "Chunky" Buchanan

AC 13, HP 22

Skills: Deception +4, Piloting +4, Perception +2, Technology +2

Revolver: +4 to hit, range 40/120 ft., 1d8+2 piercing.

Glider Dive (Recharge 5–6): Chunky dives up to 40 ft. in a straight line; any target in the path must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save or take 2d6 bludgeoning and be knocked prone.

Flash Bomb (once per encounter): Creates a burst of light and sparks; all within 15 ft. make DC 12 CON saves or be blinded until end of next turn.

CONCLUSION: THE SNALLYGASTER UNMASKED

After capturing or exposing Ed, the team learns that the smugglers revived the Snallygaster legend to keep curious locals, tourists, and law enforcement away from their bootlegging operation. What they didn't expect was that the Snallygaster would attract far more attention than some low-level rum running.

St. Michaels has quite the reputation for high-quality rum, and Chief Ramsey would rather keep it that way. The Snallygaster has been drawing crowds, and news of bootleggers would be bad for the tourist business. She thanks the team for their efforts and offers them a handshake deal:

"Let's just say we bagged ourselves a big bird and keep the mystery alive."

REWARDS

The team receives an **Excellence in Public Discretion** commendation from their agency. As they pack up to leave, their phones start buzzing. There are rumors of another Snallygaster sighting across the state line.

OPTIONAL TWIST: IT WAS A REAL CRYPTID AFTER ALL!

As you check your equipment, you notice that one of your camera traps captured something winged and reptilian flying past the moon.



LESSON PLAN: INVESTIGATING *THE CURSE OF THE SNALLYGASTER*

Life Science lesson using creative role-play.

OVERVIEW

In the adventure *The Curse of the Snallygaster*, students become wildlife investigators working for the fictional U.S. Cryptid Field Research Team. Through collaborative storytelling, scientific investigation, and environmental observation, students learn real biological field methods while exploring how scientists distinguish evidence from misinformation.

TIME REQUIRED

2–3 class periods (45–60 minutes each)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Explain how scientists investigate wildlife sightings.
- Identify basic ecological field methods including camera traps, transects, and eDNA sampling.
- Distinguish between evidence and assumption.
- Analyze animal adaptations and behavior.
- Collaborate to solve a scientific mystery.
- Practice scientific observation and communication skills.

MATERIALS

- *The Curse of the Snallygaster* adventure
- Teacher-prepared “evidence cards” (photos, tracks, witness statements)
- Local maps of parks, towns, or wilderness areas
- Student notebooks or science journals

VOCABULARY

Cryptid: A creature from legend or folklore whose existence has not been confirmed

eDNA: Environmental DNA collected from water, soil, or air

Transect: A line scientists follow to count or observe organisms

Camera Trap: Motion-activated wildlife camera

Adaptation: A trait that helps an organism survive
Observation: Information gathered using senses or tools
Evidence: Data used to support a conclusion

LESSON 1 – THE MYSTERY BEGINS

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Ask students “If people reported seeing a monster in your town, how would scientists investigate it?”

Write responses on the board.

Discuss:

- Eyewitness reliability
- Animal misidentification
- Scientific skepticism
- Importance of evidence

Introduction to the Snallygaster (10 minutes)

Introduce the Maryland cryptid that a Great Blue Heron may have inspired.

Explain that in the adventure:

- Witnesses believe they saw a monster.
- Investigators collect scientific evidence.
- Many sightings may have natural explanations.

In Game: Wildlife Investigation Teams (25–30 minutes)

Divide students into investigation teams.

Each team receives:

- Witness statements
- Blurry “monster” photos
- Environmental clues
- Wildlife information cards

Students must determine:

1. What evidence is reliable?
2. Which clues are biological?
3. Could the “monster” be a real animal?

Encourage students to think like wildlife biologists.

LESSON 2 – FIELD METHODS

Mini-Lesson: How Wildlife Scientists Study Animals (15 minutes)

Introduce real field techniques used in the adventure.

1. Camera Traps: Researchers use them to photograph elusive animals.
2. Transects: Scientists walk measured paths and record observations.
3. eDNA Sampling: Animals leave DNA traces in water or soil.

Discuss:

- Why these methods are useful
- Strengths and weaknesses of each
- How evidence can be misinterpreted

In Game: Design a Cryptid Investigation (25 minutes)

Student teams design their own investigation plan using assorted local maps.

They must decide:

- Where to place camera traps
- Where to collect eDNA
- What animals might be misidentified
- How to avoid false conclusions

Students create:

- A simple field map
- A hypothesis
- An evidence collection strategy

LESSON 3 – PUTTING EVIDENCE TO THE TEST

Discussion (10 minutes)

Ask:

- Why do monster stories exist and what can they tell us about communities?
- Why do people sometimes misidentify animals?
- How can social media spread misinformation?

In Game: The Final Reveal (25–30 minutes)

Reveal that the in-game Snallygaster was actually:

- A staged hoax
- Based partly on real wildlife behavior
- Amplified by rumors, tourism, and local legends

Students evaluate:

- Which evidence supported the truth?
- Which clues were misleading?
- How did scientific thinking solve the mystery?

Students complete a short reflection:

“What is the difference between believing something and proving it scientifically?”

Assessment

Formative Assessment

- Participation in discussions
- Investigation notebook entries
- Team collaboration

Summative Assessment Options

- Scientific investigation report
- Wildlife evidence presentation
- Reflection essay
- Creature adaptation project

Notes for Instructors

The role-playing elements can be light or extensive depending on classroom comfort. Combat from the original adventure can be removed entirely.

Focus should remain on investigation, ecology, evidence, and scientific reasoning.

This lesson works especially well for:

- reluctant learners
- collaborative classrooms
- STEM enrichment
- library programs
- environmental education clubs

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. Why are eyewitness accounts sometimes unreliable?
2. How can folklore be inspired by real animals?
3. Why is scientific skepticism important and how does it differ from denialism?
4. Are there instances when too much skepticism can cause you to miss something important?
5. What happens when misinformation spreads online?

6. What kinds of cultural value do stories about cryptids have even when they are not scientifically supported?

Next Generation Science Standards

MS-LS2 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics

MS-LS2-1. Analyze and interpret data to provide evidence for the effects of resource availability on organisms and populations of organisms in an ecosystem.

MS-LS2-2. Construct an explanation that predicts patterns of interactions among organisms across multiple ecosystems.

MS-LS2-4. Construct an argument supported by empirical evidence that changes to physical or biological components of an ecosystem affect populations.