

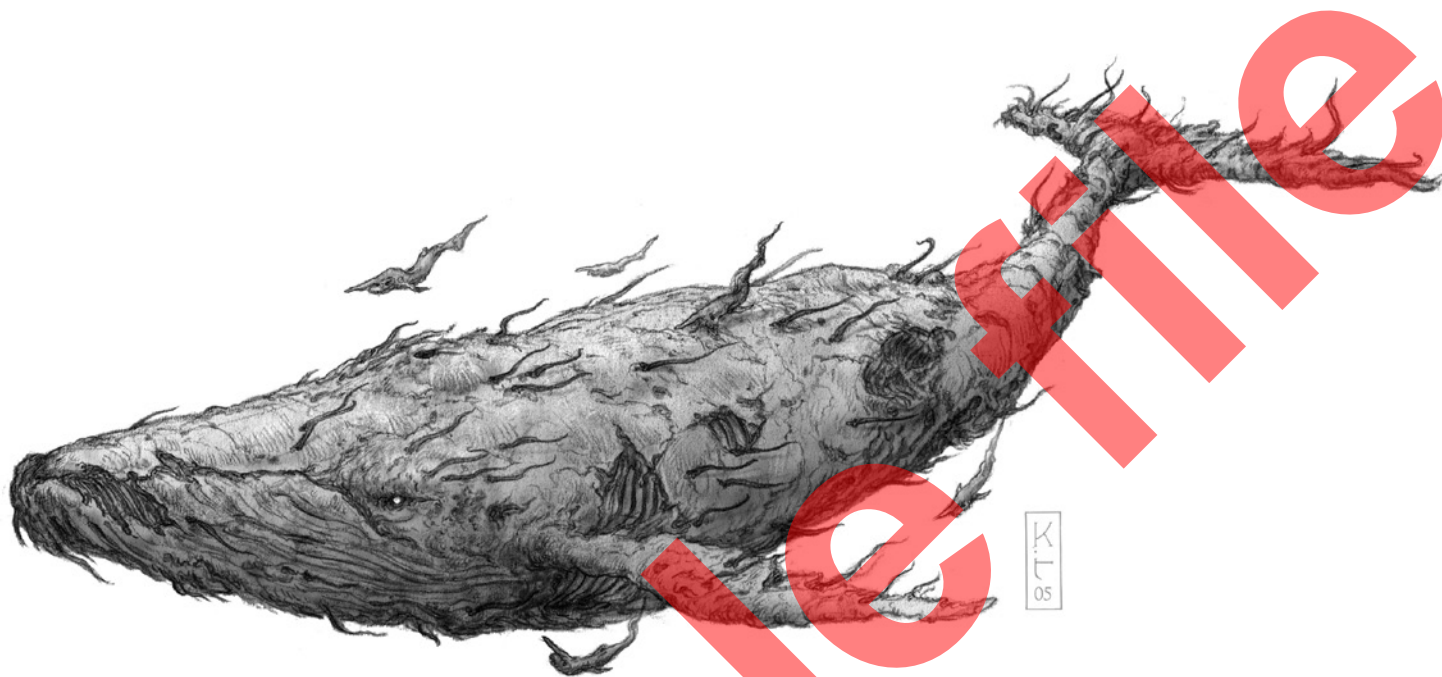
# A Magical Society Aggressive Ecology: The Undead Leviathan



By Joseph Browning

Expeditious Retreat Press

# A Magical Society Aggressive Ecology: The Undead Leviathan (OSRIC)



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## Credits

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## Introduction

Welcome to the rebirth of the Magical Society: Aggressive Ecology line! The idea came from when I was working on A Magical Society: Beast Builder way back in 2003. While working on individual monsters and how to build them I realized that there hadn't been any concentrated focus on the idea of an entire environment being linked together and aggressive to intrusion outside of planar exploration. Taking that idea, and moving into the Prime Material, I crafted the first Aggressive Ecology—the Undead Leviathan. I did so in 2005 and now, fifteen years later, the realization of OSRIC and the OSR has allowed me to publish the idea in my favorite old-school roleplaying system.

The next in the line is the Slaver Fungus. There will be more whenever my devious little mind gloms onto something unique in nature that it can turn into a strange and dangerous adventure in the grand realms of fantasy!

Joseph Browning  
Expeditious Retreat Press  
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# AN ECOLOGICAL DANCE OF DEATH

There are few aggressive ecologies found in the deep oceans, and only one centered upon the rotting carcass of a fallen whale. A whale fall is an unusual event in and of itself, but occasionally these massive bounties of detrital material land in places that simply cannot sustain natural life of any sort: a negative energy sink. These strange negative energies infuse a whale carcass with unholy power, giving it unlife, mobility, and malevolence — creating an undead leviathan.

## The Science: Whale Fall

Before discussing undead leviathans, a brief description of a normal whale fall should prove instructive. Light penetrates up to 1,000 meters into the ocean, but after the first 200 meters, the waters are very dim, commonly referred to as the mesopelagic zone, the twilight or midwater zone. Consequently, almost all food chains deeper than this are based upon the detrital food chain. As living creatures in the top 1,000 meters of ocean die, their carcass drifts down to the sea bed, constantly nibbled and picked at by the inhabitants of the deep. By the time the sea bed is reached, a steady supply of organic particles and detritus (called marine snow) is all that remains of most of the creatures. However, very large creatures like whales often reach the bottom of the ocean in a single large piece. To sea bed dwellers, this massive influx of food can equal several thousand years of typical marine snow. It is truly a cornucopia of energy and devoured at an astounding speed.

The first creatures to converge on the fallen whale are the active scavengers like hagfish, sleeper sharks, rattails, and squat lobsters. Collectively, these creatures can dine on up to 88 to 132 lbs. of flesh each day as long as there still soft tissue on the whale corpse, and the feast can last for several months, even up to several years. After all, whales are large creatures; the massive blue whale's maximum weight is 190 tons.

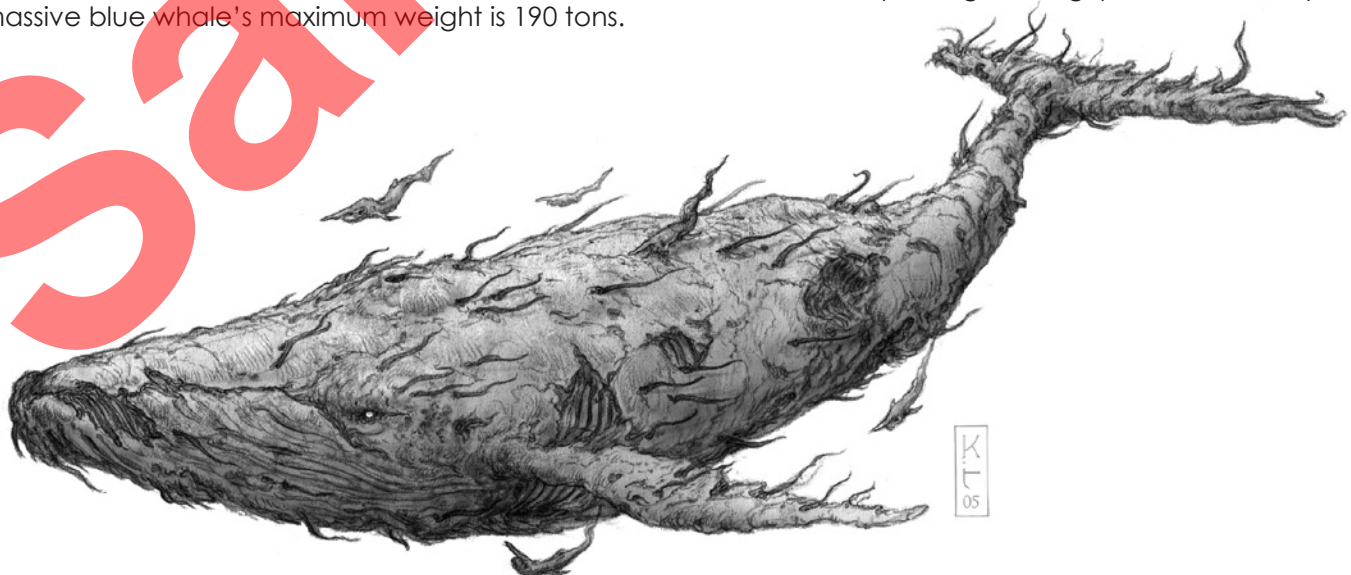
During this feeding, the area around the whale fall becomes saturated with rich organic deposits, which in turn lead to a large community of opportunistic crustaceans and worms around the whale fall. Eventually, anaerobic bacteria create a sulphide-rich environment that will support many different types of clams, mussels, and worms. When all is said and done, the bones of the whale remain, but even when the soft tissue is spent, the whale fall continues to provide a source of energy. Whale bones are rich in fats, and it can take up to an entire century before the skeletal remains of the whale crumble and become one with the sea floor.

## The Fantasy: Dead Whale Rising

Occasionally, something goes terribly wrong in this natural process — a whale falls into a negative energy sink. After several days, the few specialized creatures that can survive in a negative energy sink “colonize” the whale carcass and prepare for the next step in their life cycle. Within a month, an undead leviathan rises with its accompanying ecosystem and swims away, bringing death where it goes.

Radiating a terrible negative energy aura, an undead leviathan creates more than waves in its wake. Within this aura (at least 180 ft. from the creature), any living being is subject to a killing effect. Small creatures die immediately while larger ones swim madly out of the way, hoping to escape the aura before perishing. Inside this aura, there is no non-magically dependent life; it's a floating dead zone with the undead leviathan in the center. Close to the undead leviathan this aura intensifies according to the size and age of the creature.

The undead leviathan also regenerates at a tremendous rate, replacing missing parts within days and





forming bulbous cancerous protrusions if there is not the standard compliment of mutualistic creatures constantly taking chunks off the undead whale on a daily basis. Without its mucus sharks, leviathan hagfish, and leviathan spiders, an undead leviathan would grow into a giant globular mass that sinks to the bottom of the ocean under its own weight. Such a fate is a guaranteed (second) death sentence as an undead leviathan feeds on killing living creatures through its negative aura (the requirement depends on the size and maturity of an undead leviathan). Without the ability to move, an undead leviathan will fail to receive its requisite daily dose of death and perish—effectively turning back into a regular, non-magical whale fall.

### Life Persists Among Death

There is magically dependent life within the negative energy aura, and it is highly specialized for survival. Once you near the undead leviathan, you'll immediately see at least one (and usually a pair or more) of mucus sharks swimming around the giant carcass, liberally biting off chunks of undead flesh when hungry. Even though its main source of food is the undead leviathan itself, mucus sharks will feed on creatures killed by the negative energy aura.

Their rounded fins, weakly developed caudal fin, protrusible jaw, and long fleshy protrusion of the forehead are reminiscent of a goblin shark, but confusing it for the mundane shark would be a lethal mistake. Mucus sharks are very aggressive and protective of their meal ticket, ruthlessly attacking any decent-sized creature that isn't killed by the undead leviathan's negative energy aura.

The only creature safe from the mucus shark's toothy maw is the leviathan hagfish, whose flesh is poisonous to consume and even tastes wretched to a shark accustomed to dining on undead whale. Like the mucus shark, leviathan hagfish do their part to keep the carcass afloat by continually feast upon an undead leviathan, and it is not uncommon to find dozens of leviathan hagfish latched on at any given time. These larger versions of their common cousin look like unhealthy spaghetti trailing off the swimming corpse. Leviathan hagfish are somewhat territorial and occasionally attack a mucus shark coming in for a bite of undead leviathan, but the shark's tremendously slippery hide usually prevents any hagfish from latching on. And if a latch on occurs, the mucus shark simply swims outside of the undead leviathan's negative energy aura. Any hagfish that notices the lack of a negative aura detaches and tries to swim back to its host leviathan.

Left to their own devices, leviathan hagfish would cover the entirety of the corpse and the undead leviathan would be consumed in a feeding orgy of hagfish. Fortunately, their numbers are curbed by



a third creature living within the giant carcass of an undead leviathan: the leviathan spider. An individual leviathan spider looks like a mass of white and gray twisted barbed wire with eight legs and rarely exceed 10 inches in footprint. These diminutive creatures form colonies (much like ants) within an undead leviathan and spend most of their time tunneling through the rancid flesh and preventing the undead leviathan's regeneration from closing any of their hive passages. Not that there is a shortage of space: the heart of a blue whale is as big as a small room (and weighs 1,000 lbs.), and its great veins are big enough that a halfling could travel along them without difficulty.

Leviathan spiders live solely off the flesh of their host and would be parasites if they did not perform several useful functions for the undead leviathan. Their primary contribution to the ecology is restraining leviathan hagfish: whenever a hagfish or group of hagfish dig too deeply into the flesh of an undead leviathan, the leviathan spiders drive off or kill the hagfish. While these spikey spiders are harmless individually, they are quite effective combatants when they swarm. The only other time leviathan spiders swarm is in defensive of their home. Whenever the undead leviathan (the spiders' nest and only food source) sustains more than half its hit points in damage, swarms of leviathan spiders pour out of its wounds to attack any nearby unfortunates. This includes hagfish, mucus sharks, and anything else. Luckily, these swarms usually last for only a few minutes.

Besides the resident trio, there are often groups of opportunistic aquatic creatures trailing just outside of the undead leviathans' negative energy aura and feeding off the detritus left in the wake of the undead