

CHILDREN OF THE DEEP



BATHYNOMIANS

PLAYABLE GIANT ISOPOD FOLK
WITH CREEPY LITTLE HANDS

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BATHYNOMIANS

Bathynomians crawl out of the ocean's depths to stare in awe at the light of the sun — or terrify hapless fisherfolk who snag one in a net. They come from a dismal world so deep beneath the waves that light itself is a commodity, where ancient things buried even deeper in the silt and muck burble in mad, dreaming frequencies. Such harsh conditions produce a hardy people, and those bathynomians who leave their drowned nations to explore the wonders of the shallows above possess an indefatigable optimism. Still, a life spent bathing in the presence of sleeping alien god-things leaves its mark, and many surface peoples find the bathynomians deeply unsettling — a troublesome legacy that these isopod folk must contend with as they seek to make their own way beneath the scorching light of the sun.

CREEPY LITTLE HANDS

Bathynomians are humanoid crustaceans. They resemble lesser isopods, though below a pair of primary powerful arms are innumerable rows of smaller, twitching limbs that end in nimble digits. The exoskeleton of a bathynomian has segments of banded armour that can hold off sharp teeth and the crushing pressure of the depths. Common carapace hues are pink, grey, and silver, with rarer examples of purple, violet, crimson, or turquoise. Most bathynomians also possess distinctive patterns of bioluminescent spots and streaks, which they consider in much the same way as a human might think of someone's eye colour or hairstyle — a vivid personal identifier against the inky darkness of the ocean floor.



Adult isopod folk stand at least five feet tall, but continue growing slowly throughout their life. This requires periodical moulting of the carapace, which not only leaves the bathynomian sensitive and soft for a little while after each shedding, but also demands a great deal of nutrients. Old isopod folk might reach over seven feet tall before ecdysis and age take a heavy toll from them.

Bathynomians generate a sense of unease in most surface-dwellers who interact with them for the first time. This goes beyond their alien anatomy; the stygian isopod folk spend their lives marinating in the psychic effluent of dreaming aberrations. The bathynomians themselves have long since adapted to such existential dread and, as far as the deep folk are concerned, everyone else just seems to be highly-strung and prone to unpredictable fits of panic.

HORRORS IN THE DEEP

Down so deep that even the darkness drowns, the bathynomians dwell in sunken cities and wander silent plains of oceanic muck. Flakes of rotting matter rain down in a sparse offering from the higher waters, and a plethora of strange beings ooze, flit, and scuttle across that benighted seascape to feed. Enormous mountains and gaping maws punctuate the stygian land, and from beneath come the dreaming whispers of horrors that never lived, of half-formed gods whose false worlds collapsed into this one in tumults of bloody immanence, of forgotten transgressions hidden away by the gods of the sunlit realms above. Here, the mind resonates with the fluting songs of impossible frequencies, and gibbering things crawl just a hair's breadth away in dread, liquid places of ghastly potentiality. It is a dismal nightmare.

For the bathynomians, of course, it's just how life is. The isopod folk have dwelt so long with the dread utterances of elder gods echoing in their heads that it's just background chatter — reassuring, even, because they know that their patrons are right there. When a bathynomian travels too far from their cyclopean temples and the black obelisks that mark the graves of dead gods, the silence of the depths becomes too intense — and loneliness, real solitude, is something that they're ill-prepared for.

The dreaming ululations of the great old ones underpins their society, letting them work in time to the pulsing psychic frequencies and share their understanding of these dead songs through their own music and verse. The whispering urges to raise up dark monoliths and pyramids of black stone mean that bathynomians greatly enjoy working on large, communal projects, and feel a great of satisfaction seeing a grand construction completed.

The strong need among bathynomians for community and social contact goes beyond the boundaries of species.

Isopod folk rear all manner of oozing livestock as beasts of burden, guardians, or ornamental creatures, and delight in those which display brilliant patterns of bioluminescence; indeed, the rearing of phosphorescent jellyfish is considered a refined art for gentlepods. Bathynomians will also happily work with anyone else willing to pitch in with the latest monolith-raising or civil engineering project, and will tightly bond in friendship groups even with surfacers. Isopod folk who ascend to the shallows above cling to what friendships they can find there with the tenacity of a man overboard clutching a piece of floating wood.

ELDER THINGS

Grim temples squat within the great bathynomian cities of the ocean floor. The priest-queens of the great old ones and their warlock soldiers rule over their kindred from these bastions, and with each passing century they carve mad sigils of the dead gods as enormous ditches and channels across few more leagues of the muck-plains. Beyond their obsession with building frightening structures and singing eldritch songs, the city-folk are otherwise fairly easy-going neighbours and happily trade with anyone who can actually survive the crushing pressure of the depths; they particularly prize sources of light and colour.

However, strife and even war brews between the priest-queens and the heretics of the lich-cities. Some bathynomians delve into the mysteries of necromancy to overcome the limitations that moulting places on their lifespan. Unfettered from such constraints, a bathynomian lich continues to grow at a rapid pace. The greatest of their kind are mountainous things of shell and limb and sorcerous glyph, so large that entire communities of their acolytes and followers can carve channels into their dead flesh and dwell within. These massive necromancers shuffle and clatter across the seascape, sometimes battling with each other in slow-paced arcane duels or crushing the priest-queens' sigil-trenches underfoot in defiance of the great old ones. They'll even venture higher, to where other sea-dwellers build settlements, to raid or trade for souls and magic.

A rare few bathynomian communities exist in the shallows, where refugees fled the fall of their sunken city or were driven out for heresy. Even without the burble of dead gods in their minds, the isopod folk still feel the urge to build, and raise up grand edifices of multi-hued coral, mother-of-pearl, and leviathan bone. However, lacking the central authority of a warlock priestess, these settlements tend to be chaotic and wild in their arrangement, with an overgrowth of competing architectural projects. Some rise so high as to reach the surface, where platforms of flotsam serve as trading posts with land-dwellers.

Some of the benthic folk forsake the sea altogether and seek their destiny among the dry people of the land. Drawn by the wondrous possibility of plentiful food and unending light, bathynomian adventurers tend to be rather gluttonous and deeply excited by the strange songs and art found above the water. The isopods sometimes struggle in arid climes, and need to bathe from time to time to keep their carapace in good health. While most are warlocks or bards, a few are so overwhelmed by the blazing majesty of the sun that they choose it to fill the absence of the elder things in their mind, and zealously take up the faith of a sun god as its clergy.

BATHYNOMIAN NAMES

Bathynomian names are usually abstract admixtures of clicking syllables and biophosphorescent pulses. When interacting with other species, the isopod folk commonly choose descriptive names that catch their fancy — Deep Glow, Bright Haze, Tide That Comforts. Some even regularly change their chosen moniker, trying out new names and discarding them until they settle upon one that they really feel *fits* them.

BATHYNOMIAN TRAITS

Your bathynomian character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution score increases by 2. Your Charisma score increases by 1.

Age. Bathynomians suffer little from the ravages of time, but after around one hundred years or so, the energy needed to moult the shell and grow larger is too great for them to survive. Young isopod folk mature rapidly and are fully functioning adults, albeit small ones, within three years of hatching.

Alignment. Bathynomians live in a harsh environment, and their minds marinate in the dreaming frequencies of drowned elder things. As a result, those dwelling in the deep tend towards a pragmatic attitude towards questions of morality and ethics, but match it with an optimistic spirit and sense of community.

Size. Adult bathynomians soon achieve a height of around five feet and slowly grow over the following centuries; elders can loom some seven feet tall. Rumours persist of benthic ancients who are truly giant — ghastly colossi of squirming legs and rattling plates, larger than a house.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet, and you have a swimming speed of 30 feet.

Darkvision. Acclimatized to the black depths, you can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You cannot discern colour in darkness, only shades of grey.

Benthic Adaptation. You can breath both air and underwater, and you do not suffer damage or penalties from pressure in the deeps.

Carapace. You have a thick natural carapace. When you aren't wearing armour, your AC is 13 + your Dexterity modifier. You can use your natural armour to determine your AC if the armour you wear would leave you with a lower AC. A shield's benefits apply as normal while you use your natural armour.

Creepy Little Hands. You gain one additional free interaction with an object or feature of the environment on your turn, for a total of two such free interactions. You still need to use your action if you want to interact with a third object.

Psychic Resistance. You have resistance to psychic damage.

Unsettling Mien. You gain proficiency with the Intimidate skill.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and Primordial.

VARIANT: TONGUE EATERS

The Tongue Eaters are a strange and aberrant branch of the bathynomian people. Smaller than their kin, Tongue Eater clansfolk possess greatly developed mental powers which they use to enter parasitic relationships with the great beasts of the deeps. A Tongue Eater often consumes the tongue of their chosen steed to prevent it from eating its kills, letting them take their own fill before feeding it what remains. Some even dwell actually within the mouths of particularly large leviathans.

While bathynomians tend to look down on the nomadic Tongue Eaters, these smaller folk travel far more than their larger fellows. It's not uncommon for outcasts to even leave for the surface world, hoping to find larger and fiercer beasts there to bend to their will and eat the tongues of.

A Tongue Eater lacks the Carapace trait, is of Small size, and has a base walking and swimming speed of 25 feet. It gains the following trait:

Psychic Influence: You can cast the *Animal Friendship* and *Charm Person* once each with this trait, and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

CREDITS

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