

Lizardfolk - A Surprisingly Complex Race

Biology

Lizardfolk males are around 5'4 - 6'0 and weigh about 400lbs

Lizardfolk females are around 5'0 - 5'8 and weigh about 300lbs

Much of this weight is in their skin, which, like alligators, contains osteoderms to protect their vital organs. Lizardfolk are ectothermic creatures; they rely on outside warmth to keep their bodies functioning. Lizardfolk are rarely found in colder climates, and may find travel in such climates to be very difficult (See comments below. An argument can be made for lizardfolk survivability in the cold. A DM should use discretion here, to make sure the players are still having fun).

Despite their bulk, lizardfolk are excellent swimmers. They usually make their tribal homes in warm swamplands, or along river basins. They are exclusive meat eaters. They fish with spears, and they hunt deer by ambush. Occasionally, the whole tribe may work together to bring down very large prey such as a water buffalo. Lizardfolk are very fond of spinosaurs, and will often keep a tamed spinosaur in their territory as kind of tribe pet, and as a symbol of the tribe's strength.

Lizardfolk come in shades of green, grey and blue. Males, especially once they reach adulthood, will have bright orange, red or yellow frills. Females tend to have yellow, green or blue frills. Other than these color differences, and the size difference, males and females are indistinguishable from one another.

Although a lizardfolk will claim their adult name at around 12 years old, they usually won't take their first mate until around age 20. Because of the principles of ma'ko, lizardfolk rarely live long enough to die of old age. Most lizardfolk are ritualistically slain before the age of 50.

A female lizardfolk is capable of laying a clutch of 3 - 14 eggs every spring. However, she will rarely lay for a second year in a row if any of her offspring from the previous year are still alive.

Eggs are laid in a large compost nest that must be hidden away from rivals, her own or her mate's. It is the sacred duty of a female to guard her own eggs, and ensure their survival. The eggs will hatch after a 2-month incubation. Female lizardfolk are very defensive and protective of their young offspring, and will often act rather viciously if they perceive a threat to their hatchlings.

After hatching, a lizardfolk is already somewhat self-sufficient. They are able to walk, swim and feed themselves. (However, they are mostly dependent upon their parents to hunt for them, and bring them dead food). Young lizardfolk have a very high mortality rate, and are rarely named before their first birthday. A single clutch might only have one or two survivors who receive child names.

Society and Ideology

Lizardfolk live in tribes that consist of up to 40 related adult males, and up to 3x as many females. Within a tribe, there is a recognized chief; whomever among the tribe has the most powerful ma'ko. Chief is not specifically a male title, but it is unusual for a female to be the chief.

A tribe will also host a shaman. Shamans usually have some degree of magical power, and live more or less outside of the ma'ko system. A tribe's shaman is believed to be a conduit for the ma'ko of the world, and thus, their ma'ko is so vast that it cannot be overcome by more "normal" individuals. The flesh of a shaman is very holy, and it is not to be consumed by their tribe members. A shaman's bones are to be carved into sacred relics such as fortune-telling dice, or arcane focii for younger shamans. Jawbones are especially sacred for carving into elaborate wands. Because shamans are sacred, they are permitted to live to very advanced ages; shamans may live well into their 60's before they pass.

Individuals with very powerful ma'ko are highly desirable as mates. Females will often vie with another, to prove their own worth to a highly ranked male. Males will do the same for highly ranked females. Usually, a highly ranked male will be able to attract 1-3 females every breeding season. However, even males with extremely powerful ma'ko may find it difficult to convince more than three females that his attention will not be unduly divided. Shamans are universally able to have their choice of mate. Females who share a male for a season consider this to be a bond of close kinship, because their children are siblings.

Tribes trace their kinship to each other through descent from "Venerated Ancestors"; lizardfolk from the distant past who had legendary ma'ko. If an individual, or an entire tribe, believes that their ma'ko has exceeded that of their "venerated ancestor", they will break their ties of kinship and begin a new clan.

When necessity calls for it, such as in times of war or famine, the clan's shamans will choose a chief-of-chiefs from among the tribal chiefs. The chief-of-chiefs is regarded as the wisest and most powerful member of the entire clan.

A challenge to the ma'ko of the Challenges to the ma'ko of a chief-of-chiefs must go unanswered until such time that the clan's shamans allow the chief-of-chiefs to step down from the position. During an event that makes a chief-of-chiefs necessary, the clan cannot risk the instability that would ensue from the chief-of-chiefs defending their position.

Lizardfolk are an extremely utilitarian race. They feel that anything worth keeping should have an immediate or obvious use. Lizardfolk enjoy finding new ways to use old tools, or ways to redesign their old tools. Lizardfolk are great problem solvers, and enjoy finding more efficient ways to get things done.

They believe that it is very wasteful to leave useful parts of a kill behind. To waste a kill is to dishonor the life you have taken; it diminishes the killer's ma'ko, and it dishonors the family of the creature you have

killed. Although lizardfolk are a violent, predatory race, they do not kill lightly. Even a rival who has been slain in anger should not be wasted.

Lizardfolk are very adamant about their sense of fairness. Someone who is very strong should not seek out fights with someone who is much weaker than them. Hatchlings, though weak and easy to pick off, are not worthy opponents (Even if they are your enemy's children). It is unfair, and thus diminishing to one's ma'ko, to harass or issue a challenge to someone who is obviously weaker than you. If a lizardfolk sees someone else being "unfair" to a weaker individual, they might feel compelled to intervene and deescalate the situation. The exception to this is if a weak or crippled individual is being culled from the tribe.

To many outsiders, lizardfolk are cold-hearted, and vicious murderers. However, this is simply because lizardfolk have a different sense of what "murder" is. "Murder" occurs when a very strong individual kills a weak individual for no reason. Or, it occurs when the slain had no chance to fight back. Ambush tactics, such as used when hunting, are only to be used against beasts. Ambushing a thinking, speaking individual is an admission that you were not strong enough to face them head-on. However, someone who blindly walks into a trap could be construed as someone whose ma'ko was too weak to allow them to see such an obvious threat... Murder is a complicated and nuanced idea for the lizardfolk. It is certainly not as cut-and-dry as it is for the smooth-skinned races. Generally, if someone had a fair chance to avoid being killed, then they were not murdered.

Lizardfolk are very polite and cooperative to each other; rudeness is viewed as a challenge. A challenge should not go unmet, or else it is an admission of weakness. Lizardfolk live and die by the principle "Do not start a fight that you cannot finish". To lizardfolk, killing an individual who has challenged your ma'ko is an absolute right. Anger or sorrow over the loss of a loved one is simply not felt, so long as proper tradition regarding the body is followed.

When among the "smooth-skins", lizardfolk have to remind themselves that smooth-skins are squishy and weak. A "mild, corrective nibble" that might chastise a hatchling can maim or even kill a smooth-skin (recall that lizardfolk have osteoderms; literal armor inside their skin).

Ma'ko

Lizardfolk religion and society revolves around the concept of "Ma'ko". Ma'ko cannot be easily summed up by someone who is not a lizardfolk. Ma'ko is similar to the concept of qi in that it is the life force of an individual. However, ma'ko is also a measure of an individual's honor, it is their soul and the sum of who they are as a person. In more meta terms, ma'ko is somewhat analogous to "power levels" in Dragonball

Z.

All living creatures have some level of ma'ko. Lizardfolk devote their lives to increasing their ma'ko, and thus their social standing within their tribe. Lizardfolk have a very cut-and-dry approach to determining how ma'ko is increased or diminished.

Ma'ko is increased through honorable combat, victory over your foes, courage in the face of pain, being useful to your tribe and by honoring the dead. Ma'ko is diminished by cowardly acts, wastefulness, indolence and dishonoring the dead.

An individual's ma'ko is directly tied to their social standing, and it is imperative that a tribe carefully curate the ma'ko of its members. Weak, dishonorable and crippled lizardfolk are often culled from their tribe. Execution at the hands of a higher-ranked family member, or banishment by a tribal shaman, will cleanse a tribe of a weak individual's ma'ko. Children who are brave, strong and useful are seen evidence of their parents' powerful ma'ko.

As a lizardfolk ages, it is prudent to become wary of execution at the hands of one of their offspring. Older lizardfolk are tolerated only so long as they maintain the strength of their ma'ko, and usefulness to their tribe. Allowing a respected elder's ma'ko to diminish with advanced age is very shameful to the offspring of that individual. It is thought that they either lack the physical strength to successfully challenge their parent, or that they do not have the strength of will to commit the act. A lizardfolk who is "allowed" to age by their children may feel a deep sense of shame that none of their offspring are willing to commit the act, and release their ma'ko back into the tribe.

Combat against an honorable foe is one of the more sure-fire ways that ma'ko can be increased. While there are many contextual and social rules surrounding what is and is not an "honorable" foe, it can be broadly summed up as

- An enemy who has issued a challenge to your ma'ko, or against your tribe's ma'ko.
- An enemy who presents a grave threat to hatchlings, or weak-but-useful individuals.
- Fierce prey that has already killed a hunter.
- A warrior from a rival tribe.
- A sibling whose ma'ko is greater than yours.
- An elder who has begun to diminish.

Females who kill to defend their hatchlings, or the hatchlings of their female relatives, are exempt from normal conventions of fair combat. It is considered to be very foolish to threaten a new mother or her children.

Dishonorable foes are easily determined. The rules and social mores of what is dishonorable to kill are very cut-and-dry.

- Hatchlings.

- Prey that you do not need.
- Weak-but-useful individuals.
- A stronger enemy who was given no chance to fight back.
- A stronger enemy who has not had a chance to recover from a recent challenge.

Lizardfolk and the Dead

Lizardfolk are infamous among the other races for their traditional funerary rites. Their treatment of the dead are one of the stronger reasons that they are regarded as savages and cannibals. To lizardfolk, it is an extreme dishonor to allow a corpse to be wasted. This belief is extended to friends and enemies alike. After a difficult battle, a lizardfolk will almost certainly preoccupy themselves with the task of cutting out their enemy's heart, and preparing it to be eaten later. Depending upon the enemy, they will also likely try to butcher the body, and take a large bone or some teeth to be fashioned into trophies.

A lizardfolk who regards a smooth-skin as a friend might try to reassure their friend that they will not allow their friend's ma'ko to be dishonored by allowing their corpse to rot. They might even explicitly ask their friend to make a nice, studded leather cloak out of their own hide, as it would be a comfort to the lizardfolk to know that they would still protect their friend after death.

Lizardfolk who journey among smooth-skins may need to be reminded that the smooth-skins prefer that their ma'ko be returned to the earth, and that smooth-skins do not wish for their soft skin to be made into a pretty cloak, or nice leather bag. Lizardfolk may find this very strange.

Among their own people, lizardfolk funerals are very solemn affairs conducted with all the gravity and reverence one would find with the "higher religions". When a lizardfolk dies, their ma'ko is thought to rapidly leave their body. Funerary rites should be conducted by the deceased's heirs within 24 hours (and certainly before the body begins to putrefy).

The primary heir of the deceased is usually the child or grandchild with the most powerful ma'ko. Alternatively, they might be a rival who defeated them in a challenge. Occasionally, the primary heir may be a mate, or a sibling. Whoever the primary heir is, they are fairly likely to be the person who killed the deceased.

The primary heir must undertake the sacred duty of butchering the body, and distributing the meat, bones, and organs among the various other claimants. Muscles, skin, organs and large bones are of particularly high value. The heart and brain are thought to contain the highest concentration of an individual's ma'ko. Skin and large bones are very useful for crafting into mementos, or trophies. The primary heir often reserves the heart or brain and large swaths of skin for themselves. Claiming too much for themselves might lead to a fight, and being forced to defend their claim against a sibling or cousin.

It is believed that all who share in the meat of the deceased inherit a share of that person's ma'ko. For especially venerated individuals, such as a chief-of-chiefs, the primary heir of the deceased may decide

that the deceased's ma'ko is too great for a select few individuals to inherit. They will distribute a share of the deceased's meat among the entire gathering.

The cuts of meat that are to be devoured are cooked and shared among the heirs of the deceased. Heart, brain and muscle are considered to be the choicest cuts, as they contain the highest concentration of ma'ko. Vicious, sometimes deadly, fights may break out at a funeral feast if there are disagreements over who deserves certain prized cuts of meat. (Those who are slain at such feasts are quickly added to the feast, so as to save relatives the trouble of having to travel and gather again for a second funeral).

Because sharing in the meat of an ancestor is something that is typically only done between the offspring of the deceased, sharing a chief-of-chief's funeral meat with the entire clan is an establishment of kinship, and an affirmation of unity within the clan. It is regarded as a very selfless and holy act.

Now, just because funerals are sacred and solemn does not mean that they cannot be political. There is certainly a strategy to distributing the remains of the deceased. One might offend their siblings by claiming too much of the deceased for themselves. At the same time, everyone knows that if you eat the heart of one who is dead, you inherit their power. One should carefully keep the balance of who gets what, so that more threatening siblings are placated, but their power is not increased beyond your own.

A young lizardfolk who dies before they claim an adult name is usually devoured whole by their same-age siblings or cousins.

Lizardfolk Adventurers

Lizardfolk claim their adult name when they are about 12 years old. A young lizardfolk will usually have to demonstrate some act of skill, cunning or bravery in order to claim their adult name. Once it is done, they must present an offering to their tribe's shaman, who will announce the young lizard's name to the tribe. Lizardfolk who fail to claim an adult name before they are 15 or 16 years old are usually culled from the tribe by one of their parents, or by an ashamed sibling.

Although they will have an adult name, and a place within the tribe, a young lizardfolk will usually lack the ma'ko to claim a mate until they are several years older. This is when young lizardfolk leave their homes in the swamps and rivers, to go out into the world and seek challenges that will increase their ma'ko. A young lizardfolk on such an adventure will likely take trophies from their more impressive challenges, so that they can provide proof of their adventures to the tribal elders. Young shamans may also strike out on their own, to seek further wisdom from the smooth-skin shamans, before they settle in as the resident tribal shaman.

Lizardfolk adventurers are usually barbarians (especially ancestral guardian), monks, druids, fighters, rangers, or rogues. Occasionally, you will find a bard, cleric, paladin (of the ancients) or sorcerer. Warlocks

are pariahs among lizardfolk, as they are considered to be “cheaters”. Lizardfolk are largely illiterate, so wizards are exceedingly rare.