

# STAR TREK MENAGERIE

## A Collection of Animals, Aliens, and Creatures for *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game*

By Pete Rogan

### Tree Barracudas

*Question:* When is a snake not a snake? *Answer:* When it doesn't act like one.

Tree barracudas are arboreal gliding reptiles with the external appearance of snakes. They have the typical reptilian slit, lidless eyes, lipless mouths, forked tongue, and scaled skin. They are limbless, but have two folds of skin on either side of their bodies, about one third of the way down from the head. These unfold into ellipsoid gliding wings braced by thin riblets of bone. Tree barracudas inhabit particular trees in tropical and semi-tropical environments, but have been known to live in other climatic regions when seasonal differences are slight or non-existent.

Tree barracudas live in the leafy canopy of dense forests, eating insects, small lizards, rodents, and an occasional egg or fledgling from a nearby avian nest. They are not particularly fast, but are amazingly adept climbers, using their tails to brace themselves while their mouths and wings secure a grip long enough for the tail to find a new perch farther up. Although they do not climb very quickly, they are able to scale great heights and extend themselves out onto limbs that would not hold most other animals. A fully-grown tree barracuda is usually about 40-50 centimeters in length, with a wingspan of 30-35 centimeters. These wings are used for gliding flights from the tops of trees. Tree barracudas often go from tree to tree where branches overlap, so it is theorized that gliding is used only to escape predators. Zoologists discount the use of flight as a hunting technique, due to the limited sight and hearing of the tree barracuda. Prey on the ground would be virtually invisible to it. They do have an excellent sense of smell, however, particularly at close range.

Tree barracudas normally live in 'pods' of from three to ten individuals. These groups are not strictly family structures or purely social groupings, but seem to be the optimum number of creatures a particular tree can support. A 'pod' will defend its treetop from encroachment by other competing lifeforms, even other tree barracudas, using their jaws and small teeth to attack and their folded wings as shields. Tree barracudas are egg-layers, producing one or two clutches of eggs per treetop. The exact mating ritual, season, and incubation time is not fully known at present, and further study is needed. Newly-hatched tree barracudas are wingless for the first six to nine months of their lives. They may inhabit the parent pod's treetop for up to a year after hatching, depending upon mortality and population changes. When a tree's food supply is not sufficient, juvenile tree barracudas are driven away by the adults, often to fall on the forest floor to find a new tree or a more accepting pod.

Tree barracudas derive their name, and their dangerous reputation, from their response to any severe fright or threatened danger. If their treetop is disturbed, by natural or artificial means, they tend to drop en masse from the branches, stopping their glides by coiling their tails around the handiest object they encounter. This occurs very quickly, and they do not care what kind of object they seize: tree limb, arm, head, even another tree barracuda in flight. Their wings, with their bony supporting riblets, can produce painful and ragged cuts on exposed flesh, as well as through most

forms of clothing. These cuts tend to infect quickly. Because the tree barracudas drop with no noise or warning, and on unpredictable provocation, they most often strike with complete surprise. An unsuspecting individual or group who disturb a tree or discharge a weapon nearby may suddenly find themselves showered with startled tree barracudas.

These creatures usually are not poisonous. They get their vicious reputation from their unheralded arrival right after a disturbance in their vicinity. A number of fallacies follow them wherever they are found. Tree barracudas do not actively hunt lifeforms bigger than themselves. They do not voluntarily wind themselves around people's arms, legs, heads, or throats, though this may occur if they fall there; they usually try to disengage themselves, but many people, by struggling to unwrap the frightened little creatures, simply cause their wings to become more firmly embedded in the flesh. They *do* bite if they become frightened, and, because they are almost always in a panic when they fall, some biting is bound to occur at those times.

If caught in a fall of tree barracudas, affected individuals should hold themselves still and allow the animals to work themselves free and drop to the ground, where generally they will slink into the underbrush. They do have a tendency to climb the nearest treelike object, however, including arms, legs, and the limbs of horses or other animals. Most often, though, they discover their own error and fall off, seeking cover.

People who encounter these peculiar creatures are often surprised to find that they are common to more than one world. Even some of the tropical regions on Terra have a species. It is difficult to tell which of the worlds they now inhabit was their original home, as generations of curiosity-collecting spacers have spread them throughout the known galaxy. Some species of tree barracudas are trainable, to a degree, and they make interesting pets, if treated and handled cautiously.

The stats given below are for the typical tree barracuda found on many worlds. Some species are faster, some smaller, and a few are venomous, doing an additional 1D10 damage per hour if the victim is bitten. There is an unsubstantiated report of a so-called 'greater' tree barracuda with a length of over one meter and a mass of five kilograms. When falling, such a creature could knock a humanoid to the ground, stunning the victim and producing more serious and lasting damage.

Tree Barracuda: Small reptilian omnivore

STR 15 END 20 DEX 55

Mentation Class: Medium

Action Points: 10 (Always attacks first in first combat round.)

Damage per Attack: 1D10+4 Armor: None

