

# NYAMBE

## WHEN GIRAFFES ATTACK!

BY CHRIS DOLUNT

(This article first appeared in *Game Trade Magazine* in 2002.)

**Encounter Level:** 6 (mad giraffes); 8 (formian taskmaster and bodyguard); 9 (formian warriors)

**Setting:** The tUbi grassland on the continent of Nyambe-tanda — a tropical savannah or scrub plain.

**Summary:** The party is attacked by mad giraffes. Unfortunately, the giraffes are the property of a formian hive. If the party kills the giraffes, the formians demand compensation; what they *really* want is for the party to cure their animals.

**Requirements:** This encounter uses elements from the *Nyambe: African Adventures* campaign sourcebook, coming in August 2002 from Atlas Games, but can be adapted to other campaign settings. It requires that the party have some method of magically curing diseases; this could be a paladin, a character able to cast *remove disease*, or a magic item capable of casting it multiple times.

### The Setting

Nyambe-tanda — the Land of the Overpower — is a vast continent of exotic creatures and wide expanses, where ancestor orisha cry for brave tribal warriors to carve out the hearts of foul mchawi wizards, and where dragon-blooded sei sorcerers once joined the fierce Amazons of Nibomay in the bloody Rebellious Time to win their freedom.

West of Nyambe's Giko Taaba mountain range lies the tUbi grassland, a nearly featureless expanse of savannah broken only by the occasional watering hole or tree. The grasses in the tUbi reach as tall as six feet in the most wild of regions, and provide sustenance to a tremendous variety of animals, such as wildebeest and gazelle, upon which the fearsome lion-centaurs called the entare prey. The only people who regularly brave the tUbi are those of the nomadic Shombe tribe, and even they take pains to avoid the entare.

As the party travels through this grassland, they occasionally hear a strange whistling sound off in the distance. Eventually, the party catches sight of a gigantic tree in the distance, hundreds of feet in height. Before they can react to the sight, a nearby group of giraffes suddenly flies into a berserk rage and charges the party!

A few days ago, these giraffes were attacked by a mad lion, and although they survived the attack, they all contracted the disease it carried. The creatures act as the watch-animals for a formian hive, and the formians unfortunately have no way to cure the disease. A formian taskmaster and his human bodyguard have been lurking in the nearby thatch grass looking for an adventuring party that might be tricked into assisting them. When the party draws near, the taskmaster uses his telepathic powers to drive the animals into a violent rage.

If the characters have access to skills, spells, or special abilities that can calm animals, they may be able to stop the attack, but apply a +4 circumstance penalty to the DC, or a +4 circumstance bonus to the saving throws of the giraffes, to represent the difficulty of controlling the diseased animals.

## Mad Giraffes (3)

### Huge Animals

CR 3; SZ H (animals); HD 4d8+16; hp 30, 33, 34; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 13 (–2 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk melee +7 (2 females: 1d6+4, kick; 1 male: 1d8+4, gore); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA Rabid Rage; SQ Scent, Low-Light Vision; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 22, Dex 14, Con 19, Int 1, Wis 14, Cha 8

**Skills:** Listen +7, Spot +7

**Rabid Rage (Ex):** Due to its diseased condition, a mad giraffe can fly into a wild rage. A raging giraffe temporarily gains +4 to Strength, +4 to Constitution, and a +2 morale bonus on Will saves, but suffers a –2 penalty to AC.

The increase in Constitution increases the giraffe's hit points by 2 points per hit die, but these hit points go away at the end of the rage when the Constitution score drops back to normal. A fit of rage lasts for a number of rounds equal to 3 + the giraffe's (newly improved) Constitution modifier (8 rounds in this case). The giraffe may not end the rage voluntarily. At the end of the rage, the giraffe is fatigued (–2 to Strength, –2 to Dexterity, can't charge or run) for the duration of the encounter. A mad giraffe can only fly into a rage once per day. Entering a rage takes no time itself, but the giraffe can only do it during its action.

**Scent (Ex):** A giraffe can detect those within 30 feet by sense of smell. It can take a partial action to note the direction of the scent. If it moves within 5 feet of the source, the giraffe can pinpoint that source. The giraffe can also follow fresh tracks with a Wisdom check DC 10. Creatures tracking by scent ignore the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** Giraffes can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, etc.

## The Taskmaster

The formian taskmaster and his human bodyguard have three-quarters concealment from the thatch-grass. This gives them a +7 circumstance bonus on their Hide checks. If they are somehow spotted, attacks directed against them suffer from a 30% miss chance.

No matter how the battle ends, the formian taskmaster will emerge from his hiding place, “shouting” telepathically. The taskmaster grumpily explains that the giraffes are the watch-animals for a major formian hive. If the party killed or injured the animals, it demands compensation. If the party somehow avoided a fight, it accuses them of “bewitching” the animals, and will still demand compensation.

Negotiating with the taskmaster should not be particularly difficult; despite its best efforts, the taskmaster is not very good at deception. Eventually, it will come out and say that it wants the party to return to its nest and attempt to cure the other mad giraffes. If the party doesn't go along with its demands, the taskmaster will repeatedly attempt to dominate them until it either succeeds, the party does acquiesce to its demands, or they attack.

The taskmaster's bodyguard, Kumbuku (koom-BOO-koo), will immediately leap into the fray if the formian is attacked. Kumbuku is a young gamba (village warrior) of the Shombe (SHAWM-bey) people who was unfortunate enough to encounter a formian press gang and is now being dominated into service by the taskmaster. Kumbuku has a shaved head, is dressed in a red and green plaid blanket known as a *shuka* (SHOO-kah), and is wearing beaded jewelry decorated with the claws of a dire lion — a memento from his coming-of-age ceremony in which he and his age-mates slew a black-furred dire lion.

The GM and the players should remember that formians have a hive-mind, and that assaulting the taskmaster can also easily bring down the wrath of the entire hive; a troop of nine formian warriors (see below) soon arrives to enforce the taskmaster's will if he comes under attack. Whether willing or not, the party should eventually be brought to the formian hive and pressed to cure the giraffes.

# Formian Taskmaster

## Medium-Size Outsider (Lawful)

CR 7; SZ M (outsider); HD 6d8+12; hp 39; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 19 (+3 Dex, +6 natural); Atk melee +10 (2d4+4, sting), and melee +5 (1d6+2, 2 claws); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Hive Mind, Poison, Dominate Person, Dominated Creature; SQ Immunities, Resistances, Telepathy, SR 21; AL LN; SV Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 19

**Skills:** Climb +13, Hide +12, Listen +12, Move Silently +12, Search +8, Sense Motive +12, Spot +12

**Feats:** Improved Initiative, Spell-Like Ability Focus (enchantment)

**Languages:** None (telepathic)

**Hive Mind (Ex):** All formians within 50 miles of their queen are in constant communication. If one is aware of a particular danger, they all are. If one in a group encounter is not flat-footed, none of them are. No formian in a group encounter is considered flanked unless all of them are.

**Poison (Ex):** Sting, Fortitude save (DC 15); initial and secondary damage 1d6 temporary Strength.

**Dominate Person (Su):** Taskmasters can use *dominate person* on any creature as the spell cast by a 10th-level sorcerer (save DC 19), although the subject may be of any type and may be up to Large size. A single taskmaster can dominate up to four subjects at a time.

**Dominated Creature (Ex):** A taskmaster is never encountered alone: one dominated nonformian creature always accompanies it; this taskmaster's dominated creature is the human Shombe warrior Kumbuku.

**Immunities (Ex):** Formians have poison, petrification, and cold immunity.

**Resistances (Ex):** All formians have fire, electricity, and sonic resistance 20.

**Telepathy (Su):** Taskmasters can communicate telepathically with any intelligent creature within 100 feet.

**Spell Resistance (Su):** To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a formian taskmaster, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 21, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

# Kumbuku

## 4th-Level Human Gamba (fighter variant)

CR 4; SZ M (humanoid); HD 4d12+8; hp 38; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 12 (+1 Dex, +1 Sanguar Feat); Atk melee +8 (1d12+6/x3, heavy spear); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NG, SV Fort +6 Ref +2, Will +0; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 9, Cha 10

**Skills:** Climb +7, Handle Animal +3, Intimidate +2, Hide +4, Intuit Direction +2, Jump +5, Listen +4, Spot +4, Wilderness Lore +2

**Feats:** Power Attack, Steadfast (+4 to resist bull rushes and trip attempts), Weapon Focus (heavy spear), Weapon Specialization (heavy spear)

**Languages:** Dwarven, Kordo (Common variant), Daka-alif

**Possessions:** +1 *subduing heavy spear* (can inflict subdual damage without the usual -4 attack penalty), traveler's outfit, woven backpack, calabash gourd filled with acacia tree nectar, dire-lion-claw necklace.



# The Formian Acacia

The taskmaster's nest is built within the giant tree, commonly known as a formian acacia. The formian acacia is a thorny acacia tree that stands over 300 feet in height, with a trunk over 100 feet in diameter.

Dozens of giraffes mill about the tree, browsing on low-hanging branches, and formian workers can be seen scuttling along the branches, carrying small yellow protein pellets. Over hundreds of years, the formians have developed a strange symbiotic relationship with the tree; it produces nectar to nourish the hive, and the formians protect the tree from harm.

Of course, the tree isn't sentient, and the formians have the better part of the relationship. They have hollowed out tunnels in the interior of the tree as a living space, and additional passages and chambers wind about its roots. When the wind blows, it rushes through the tunnels within the tree, producing a ghostly whistle that can be heard from miles away.

On a Knowledge (planes) or similar skill check with a DC of 5, the GM should alert the characters to the dangers of formians — an expansionist race of Outsiders — building nests on the Material Plane. If pressed (Diplomacy check DC 15), the taskmaster will admit that the hive's plans for expansion have been held in check by the formian acacia's slow growth rate. However, the queen "has a plan." (The details of this plan are left to the GM.)

The formians also raise giraffes as watch animals, and in return the formians allow the animals to eat the lower-hanging leaves of the tree. Unfortunately, at least half of the watch-giraffes are mad with disease, and as the party approaches, they will see the creatures foaming at the mouth, biting each other, and otherwise acting strangely.

In total, 17 giraffes are infected with the maddening

disease. The formians will insist — with a display of force if necessary — that the characters remain until all of the animals are cured. The accommodations within the formian acacia are quite spare and the characters get nothing to eat except tree nectar, though this is quite capable of sustaining them. The taskmaster remains with the party at all times during their stay, and under no circumstances will the characters be able to meet with the queen.

## Conclusion

At some point during their stay, Kumbuku will break free of his mental domination and beg the party to help him slay the taskmaster and escape; if a language barrier exists, his intentions should still be rather obvious. Killing the taskmaster brings a troop of formian warriors to dispose of Kumbuku and the party (see below).

If the party does not act on Kumbuku's behalf immediately, the taskmaster renews its control over him a few minutes later. Once all of the animals have been healed, the taskmaster will present the characters with a package of valuables taken from human slaves (including Kumbuku's dire-lion-claw necklace), and ask the party to remain permanently as the giraffes' caretakers. If the characters refuse, the taskmaster will attempt to dominate as many of the party members as possible, and then call for a troop of formian warriors to dispose of the others.

The GM can stage this final confrontation in several ways. If the party has been having an easy time of it, set the attack within the tree, where warriors are within easy reach. If the party would be seriously out-classed, have the encounter take place outside, where the party can slay the taskmaster and escape before the hive can react.



## Formian Warriors (9)

### Medium-Size Outsider (Lawful)

CR 3; SZ M (outsider); HD 4d8+8; hp 26 each; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 18 (+3 Dex, +5 natural); Atk melee +7 (2d4+3, sting), and melee +5 (1d6+1, 2 claws), and melee +5 (1d4+1, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Hive Mind, Poison; SQ Immunities, Resistances, SR 18; AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +5; Str 17, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 11

**Skills:** Climb +10, Hide +10, Listen +7, Move Silently +10, Spot +6

**Feats:** Dodge, Multiattack

**Hive Mind (Ex):** All formians within 50 miles of their queen are in constant communication. If one is aware of a particular danger, they all are. If one in a group encounter is not flat-footed, none of them are. No formian in a group encounter is considered flanked unless all of them are.

**Poison (Ex):** Sting, Fortitude save (DC 14); initial and secondary damage 1d6 temporary Strength.

**Immunities (Ex):** Formians have poison, petrification, and cold immunity.

**Resistances (Ex):** All formians have fire, electricity, and sonic resistance 20.

**Spell Resistance (Su):** To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a formian warrior, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 18, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

## Just Rewards

If the party rescues Kumbuku, his family will pay handsomely for his return — they present the party with 100 cattle worth 15 gp a head. However, Shombe families are nomadic, and it may take quite a bit of searching the tUbI grasslands to locate them

Alternately, the package of valuables the taskmaster presents to the party consists of the following:

- 30 tiny gems used as mancala playing pieces (worth 10 gp each)
- A mancala board of made from valuable hardwood (worth 10 gp)
- A dozen cowry shell necklaces (worth 5 gp each)
- A masterwork “talking” drum (worth 100 gp)
- A stylized wooden carving of a forest spirit (worth 50 gp)
- An *udamalore* (oo-dah-mah-LORH-eh) ceremonial ivory scimitar (worth 1,000 gp)
- Kumbuku’s beaded dire-lion-claw necklace (worth 150 gp)

## Nyambe:

## African Adventures

The Nyambe campaign setting for the D20 System brings high fantasy to African myth, legend, and history in a 256-page hardcover sourcebook from Atlas Games, coming in August 2002. Ask your local retailer for more information on *Nyambe: African Adventures*, or visit our web site at [www.atlas-games.com](http://www.atlas-games.com).



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