

A HEROIC TIER ADVENTURE

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

ENCOUNTERS™

KEEP ON THE BORDERLANDS

Chapter 4 of 5: A Season of Serpents



AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 2ND LEVEL

Chris Sims

INTRODUCTION

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters™ adventure for four to six 2nd-level characters

Welcome to DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters, an exciting official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® program. This adventure is a mini-campaign season designed to be played in one-encounter sessions once per week at your local Wizards Play Network location. Each week, players can earn in-game rewards for their characters and Renown Points toward special program-exclusive D&D Encounters™ Cards that can be used in this and future seasons of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters.

Preparing for Play

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters play kit provides all you need to DM this adventure, including poster maps of encounter areas and a sheet of tokens for monsters, adventurers, and battlefield effects. Follow the steps below to prepare for play.

Before you DM your first session:

- ◆ Read the Introduction, Adventure Background, and Adventure Synopsis sections.
- ◆ Read **Session 13: Chasing the Serpent and encounter 4-13: A Sticky Situation**. If you are starting at another point, read the appropriate sections and what has come before.

At the table of your first session:

- ◆ Ensure each player has a character to play. Players may use one of the characters provided in the kit, or may create their own using the guidelines provided.
- ◆ Give each player a D&D Encounters Play Tracker. This sheet is found in the play kit, and it allows the players to track treasure, experience, and Renown Points earned for each play session.
- ◆ Get a session tracking sheet from the organizer. Record all the players' DCI/RPGA numbers on it, along with your DCI/RPGA number. If you or any of the players don't have a DCI/RPGA number, ask the organizer for a membership card.

During the session:

- ◆ Each session is one encounter. Just DM the encounter assigned for that week's session. Typical playtime for one encounter is about 90 minutes to 2 hours.
- ◆ Make decisions and adjudications that enhance the fun of the game. As the DM, you can make some adjustments to the adventure (see the sidebar on page 2) to facilitate player fun.

At the end of your first session:

- ◆ Have the adventurers take a short rest if they want, but remind them to track their daily abilities. Healing surges used, daily powers expended, and other daily resources do not refresh in-between each session; only at the end of each chapter. Make sure your players track this information on their D&D Encounters Play Tracker.
- ◆ Turn in your session tracking sheet to the organizer. Make sure you've recorded all the DCI/RPGA numbers on it, along with names and the play date.
- ◆ Report Renown Point totals earned for each player to the organizer. The organizer fills out the Renown Point Tracker for the location and tells you if any players have earned D&D Encounters Cards.
- ◆ Give out treasure. Make sure the players write down rewards on the D&D Encounters Play Tracker.
- ◆ Collect your special reward for providing your time as a DM to make the event happen. Your organizer has more details on this reward.

At the end of the final session of a chapter:

- ◆ The adventurers take an extended rest, regaining all of their healing surges, hit points, and daily powers. In addition, their action point total resets to 1.
- ◆ Once you've been the DM for a session, it's easy to prepare for your next session. Simply read over the session's material, and you're ready to go.

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CREATING A CHARACTER

Players are responsible for bringing their own characters to each play session. A player should bring a new 2nd-level D&D character created using the rules found in the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Fantasy Roleplaying Game* boxed set, the *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™ supplement, or the *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™ supplement.

If a player doesn't have a character or doesn't want to create one from scratch, several pre-generated characters are provided in the play kit. Get these from the organizer and offer a choice of one to each player that wants one.

At the end of each session, you award experience points, treasure, and Renown Points to each player. They'll track that information on their D&D Encounters Play Tracker and you'll report the Renown Points each player earned with the organizer.

Character Death: If a character dies during a session, the player has two choices. He or she can bring the same character back at the beginning of the next session with four fewer healing surges, or he or she can start a new 2nd-level character. If a character dies and has fewer than four healing surges remaining, that character loses all his or her remaining healing surges and can return next session but has hit points equaling only his or her bloodied value.

There is no other penalty for death except for the potential loss of renown for not surviving 12+ sessions without dying.

Advancement

At the end of each session, you award experience points when the characters complete encounters. Use this table below to award experience points for each session. Don't modify the amount of experience based on the number of characters.

EXPERIENCE POINT AWARDS

XP Description	XP/Character
Session 13	180 XP
Skill Challenge: Finding the Path	75 XP
Minor Quest (Optional): Free Ferdinand Ronnik	25 XP
Session 14	130 XP
Session 15	170 XP
Session 16	160 XP
Major Quest: Gather intelligence on the enemy	125 XP

If the characters succeed at all the encounters and complete all quests, each should earn 865 XP by the end of Chapter 4.

Leveling Up: Near the end of Chapter 4, the characters will have earned enough experience to make it to 3rd level. However, the players must wait until the end of the chapter, when their characters take an extended rest, to level up. All characters will be level 3 at the beginning of Chapter 5 (covered in the next adventure packet).

Milestones: For every two encounters a character completes without taking an extended rest, the character reaches a milestone, gaining an action point.

A CHANGING GROUP

Since you can never tell who's going to show up to a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters session from week to week, you might wind up with a different group of players. Some players might be starting in "mid-stream," some could have missed a session or two, and others might have played all the sessions with a different DM. That's fine. Catch up new players with a brief summary of what has come before, and make sure that returning players have marked off resources they spent (healing surges, daily powers, etc.) since their last extended rest.

Majority Rules: If some element of the adventure plot hinges on the adventurers making a decision in a previous session, and the group is different during the current session, simply find out how the decision went down from the players. Go with the majority, and if it's an even split, side with the most positive result. For example, if three of five players' characters at your table captured Ferdinand Ronnik in a previous encounter and two didn't, Ronnik is considered to be captured for your session this week.

Treasure

As the characters progress through the mini-campaign, they have the opportunity to gain treasure in the form of gold pieces, valuables, and magic items. At the end of each session, determine if the players earned any treasure. Use the following rules to divide up treasure among the characters.

Gold and Valuables: If the adventurers earn it, each character gets a share as noted on the table below. All valuables such as gems and jewelry are converted to gold pieces (gp). The amounts have already been divided on a per-character basis. Don't modify the amounts based on the number of characters.

Magic Items: During the adventure, a number of magic items might be discovered. They are listed on the table below. Give out magic items according to the Awarding Magic Items sidebar.

When to Gear Up: Characters can buy equipment at the start of each chapter. If a character gains a magic item that has only level, rarity, and type described (for example, a common level 5 magic weapon), the player can select a magic item up to that level of the same type and rarity after the session is complete, before starting the next one.

Awarding Magic Items: When the characters find a nonconsumable magic item, the players decide who receives what. If this is impossible or difficult, you assign the new item to a character who has no nonconsumable magic items. If all the characters have a nonconsumable magic item, the character with the lowest-level nonconsumable magic item receives the new item.

If more than one character has no nonconsumable magic item, or two characters tie for the lowest-level magic item, those the players decide who receives the new item. If they can't decide, have each roll a d20 until one rolls higher than the other. That player receives the new item.

You can distribute consumable items in the same way if the players can't decide who takes such items. Just remember not to count these items as nonconsumable magic items.

TREASURE FOUND

Treasure	Location
Common arms-slot magic item (level 4 or lower)	Encounter 4-13
6 gp each	Encounter 4-15
103 gp each	Encounter 4-16
One potion of healing per character	Encounter 4-16
Common magic armor (level 6 or lower)	Encounter 4-16
Uncommon magic weapon or implement (level 5 or lower)	Encounter 4-16

Renown Points

One of the great rewards for playing in a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters season is the accumulation of Renown Points (RPs), which are given out for accomplishments made by players during, and sometimes in-between, sessions. These Renown Points are tracked at the Wizards Play Network location, and reaching certain thresholds garners the player a tangible reward—a D&D Encounters Card.

Players can use these cards during the current DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Encounters season, subsequent seasons, or possibly both. Each card has all the information on how it works printed right on the card itself.

As the DM, it's your task to award Renown Points at the end of a session of play, just like you would award experience and treasure. Unlike experience and treasure though, Renown Point totals earned for each player must be reported to the organizer at the conclusion of the session when you turn in your session tracking sheet. The organizer can then tell you if any players have qualified for a card.

The Renown accomplishments, their frequency, and the point values of each are listed below.

RENOWN POINT AWARDS

Accomplishment	Frequency	RPs
Complete an encounter	Session	3
Hit a milestone	2/chapter	2
Moment of greatness	1/chapter	2
Create a D&D Essentials character	Season	5
Create a D&D Character Builder character	Season	5
Revive a dying adventurer ally	Season	1
Hit for 15+ damage against 1 enemy	Season	1
Kill 3 minions in 1 attack	Season	1
Take 50 enemy damage in 1 session	Season	1
Survive 12+ sessions without dying	Season	2
Complete all quests	Season	5

Moment of Greatness: This is a discretionary award given out by the DM or through party vote to a player for doing something inventive, daring, or just plain cool during a session of play.

Renown Rewards

When a player earns 20 RPs, he or she earns the first D&D Encounters Card, called the Delver Reward. This is awarded to the player immediately following the session in which it is earned. The second award is called the Adventurer Reward, and a player qualifies for the reward by obtaining 100 Renown Points in the season.

The final award is given out at the conclusion of the season. At the end of the season, a number of D&D Encounters Cards are distributed among those who qualify for the reward. If more players qualify for the reward than the number of cards available, the organizer will determine how they will be distributed.

This adventure is the third of five chapters for *Keep on the Borderlands: A Season of Serpents*. The later adventures will be available separately as the season progresses. Check with your organizer upon completion of this adventure to receive the next adventure. These introductory pages provide background information to aid you in running the storyline.

Keep on the Borderlands

Legends claim that dwarf-built Restwell Keep has been the fortress of a hobgoblin king, the home of an infamous bandit lord, a linchpin garrison of fallen Nerath, and the lair of a dragon. Indeed, the keep has been all these and more. At present, it is a faint but steady light struggling against a growing darkness. Its intrepid inhabitants are in constant danger from within and without.

Government: Not long ago, the keep was a free-wheeling place with lax law enforcement. Lord Peridin Drysdale, paladin of Erathis, recently took command. More than a few residents, accustomed to the old regime, resent the paladin's adamant push toward order and morality. As a result, Drysdale's authority is weak in the outer bailey.

Defense: Mercenary guards watch the barracks, as well as the towers and gate of the outer bailey. Kendon Longstrider, a 60-year-old human veteran, is in charge. Drysdale's soldiers patrol the keep proper and the inner bailey. The lord has mandated that capable individuals serve as militia if the need arises.

Room and Board: The gruff, greedy Nerrin Silverhand runs the seamy Travelers Inn on Fountain Square. A private room (four occupants) runs 1 gp per night; a spot in the common room costs 1 sp. Nerrin serves neither food nor drink. Such provisions can be purchased from cheerful Mother Aran of The Stumbling Giant, a fine tavern also on Fountain Square.

Temple: The local chapel (along the inner bailey wall) is open for worship of all accepted deities, but Avandra is esteemed above others. Chendera, the striking half-elf caretaker and priestess, is a devotee of the luck goddess. She spends much of her time mingling with folks in The Stumbling Giant.

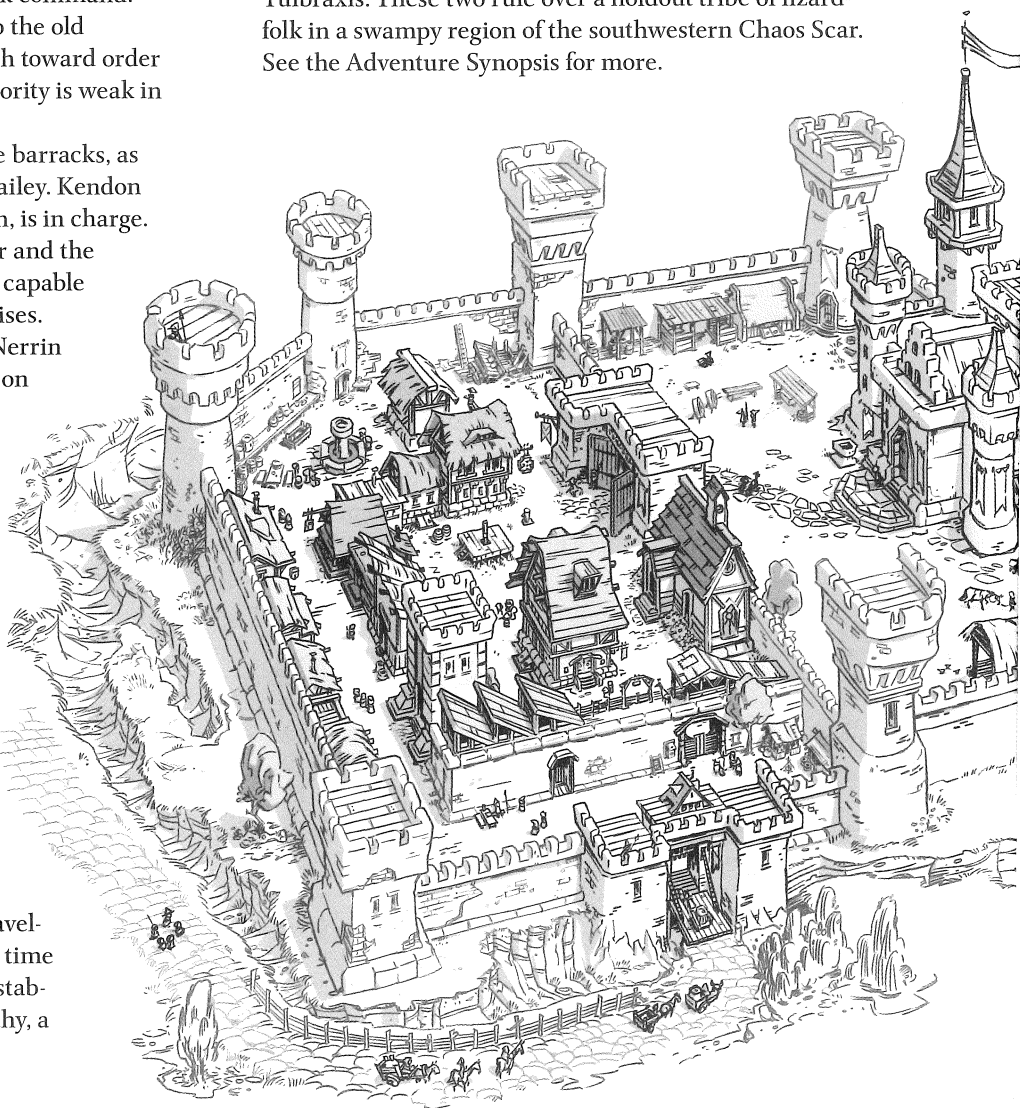
Other Services: Local farmers and traveling merchants set up stands from time to time in the keep's Fountain Square. Regular establishments include a trader, a bank, a smithy, a jeweler, and a mage's guildhouse.

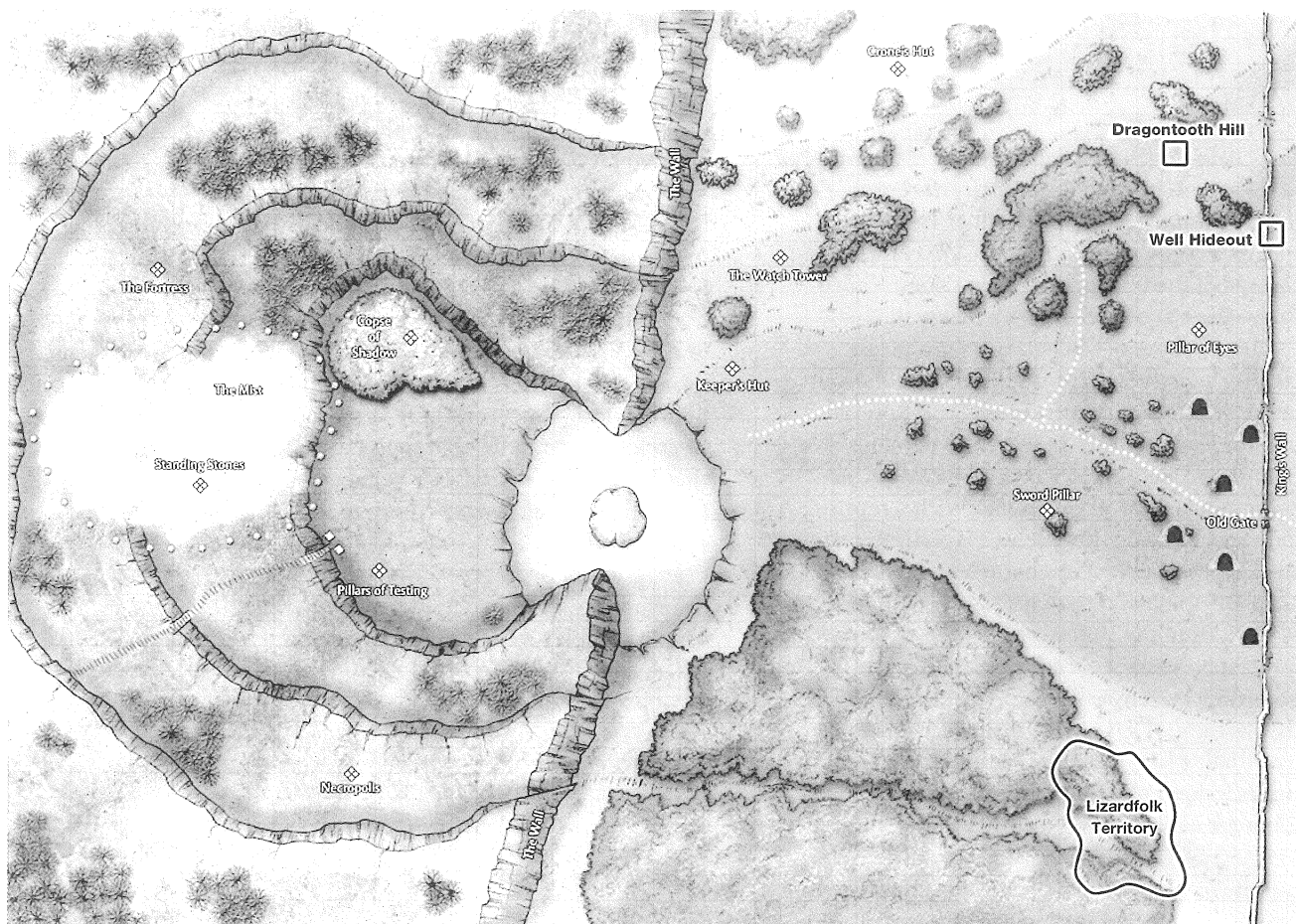
The Serpent Strikes

Benwick played the part of a jolly friar who worships Avandra, Ioun, and Sehanine. He's actually a follower of Zehir, the god of serpents. Benwick revealed his true colors in the last chapter by betraying the characters. Now, most likely, he has fled to the Chaos Scar to further his plot.

The friar's actions up until this point have been aimed at turning the keep into a stronghold for worshipers of the snake god. He has been courting the local lizardfolk for his plot. Benwick used the characters to help frame and eliminate Ferdinand Ronnik, the banker in the keep, by using doppelgangers to link him to a Tiamat cult that threatened Benwick's hold over a local tribe of lizardfolk. Benwick also got his hands on the *Serpent's Eye*, a jewel sacred to Zehir's faithful. Most recently, he acquired a small fortune when the characters aided him in recovering the trove of Greysen Ramthane, a dwarf bandit lord that once ruled the keep.

Now Benwick is cementing his alliance with the lizardfolk. With the *Serpent's Eye* and treasure, he plans to bribe two young black dragon siblings, Vermastyx and Yulbraxis. These two rule over a holdout tribe of lizardfolk in a swampy region of the southwestern Chaos Scar. See the Adventure Synopsis for more.





The Chaos Scar

For eons, an evil comet roamed the space between worlds, seeking a place to touch down and wreak havoc. It settled on this world.

As the falling star passed through the sky, milk curdled, livestock fell dead, and ill fortune flourished. The celestial body crashed into the Nentir Vale with deafening force, carving a valley-sized furrow in its wake. Red radiance lit the sky for a week. Thus, the Chaos Scar was born.

Over a mile long and several hundred feet deep, the Chaos Scar is an angry, blighted gash in the world. As the star carved its path through the earth, shards and fragments tore away until only its heart remained, embedded in an escarpment at the far end of its new home.

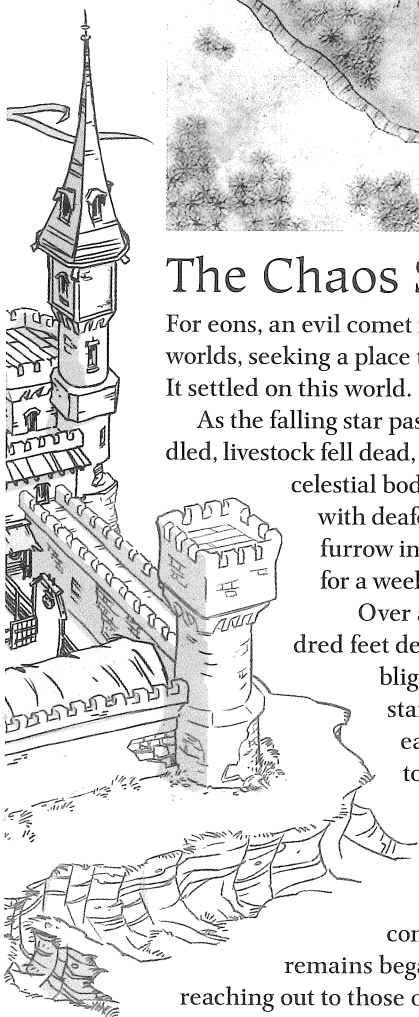
Patient beyond mortal comprehension, the malevolent remains began to sow seeds of wickedness, reaching out to those of a perverse and corruptible bent. Over the centuries, creatures of evil spirit have been drawn to this beacon.

The dark sentence spurs competition among the malefactors who carve out dominions within the valley's many caves. The weakest ones settle near the mouth of the valley and the plain beyond. The strongest villains lair closer to the comet's heart and in the fortress that now encloses the upper wall.

Rulers have tried to contain the threat of the Chaos Scar in the past, with little to no success. A long-forgotten king erected a wall across the valley's mouth. It still stands, partly in ruins, its gates open and unguarded.

The Chaos Scar is filled with malice, promising death to those who enter. It is riddled with caves both natural and tunneled by generations of monstrous denizens. The deeper one travels into the valley, the deadlier the foes lurking in its hollows.

Many adventurers have entered the Chaos Scar seeking wealth and glory. Few have returned. Those heroes that survive its depths weave dark stories of cults, inhuman tribes, and monsters working in blasphemous concert. Other explorers tell of monstrous creatures engaging in vicious, unrelenting warfare. All seekers agree that fatality is far more prevalent than fortune.



ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The characters have been very successful up to this point, helping Benwick frame Ferdinand Ronnik, destroying a cult of Tiamat, and recovering Greysen Ramthane's treasure. At the end of the last chapter, they also defended themselves against Benwick's betrayal.

One or more of the betrayers in the last chapter surrendered and spilled the details of Benwick's plot against Ferdinand Ronnik and his flight to the Chaos Scar. There, he plans to bribe two black dragon siblings that command a tribe of lizardfolk. With a reptilian army backing him, Benwick plans to seize the keep for Zehir. The characters must warn Lord Drysdale and perhaps save Ferdinand Ronnik from the gallows.

Despite setbacks, everything is going according to Benwick's plan. With Yulbraxis in tow, the evil friar plans to enslave more lizardfolk while Vermastyx greets the adventurers in her lair. If the characters perish, Benwick wins. If the characters slay or subdue Vermastyx, he also wins. Vermastyx's defeat is just the leverage Benwick needs to ensure Yulbraxis attacks the keep.

Session 13: Lord Drysdale tasks the characters with pursuing Benwick while he prepares the keep's inhabitants for a battle he hopes never comes. The adventurers head southwest toward the Chaos Scar. They know to look for an unnamed waterway and a trail lined with ancient standing stones. After fighting bands of lizardfolk, the adventurers find their way into the black dragons' lair, where Vermastyx awaits them.

After talking to Lord Drysdale, the characters must hasten southwest to catch their quarry, Benwick. They enter lizardfolk territory and follow a trackless path. A skill challenge determines whether they stumble into danger on the journey or proceed with a survivalist's savvy. See **Session 13: Chasing the Snake**, page 8.

Session 14: The characters head deeper into lizardfolk territory. They come upon a tiny part of a dispersed lizardfolk settlement and receive a hostile welcome. Hostilities cease when the lizardfolk realize the adventurers are too strong. Defeated, the lizardfolk are all too happy to direct the adventurers toward the dragons' lair, where they expect the heroes will meet their doom. See **Session 14: Watchers in the Water**, page 10.

Session 15: The characters come to an old ruin in the wilderness. Dragonborn statues and carvings on ruined walls suggest the site has long been home to draconic and reptilian creatures. Local lizardfolk see the dragons as leaders, if not more. The strongest warriors of the tribe guard the lair entrance, and defeating these monsters gains the characters a level. See **Session 15: Sacred Ground**, page 10.

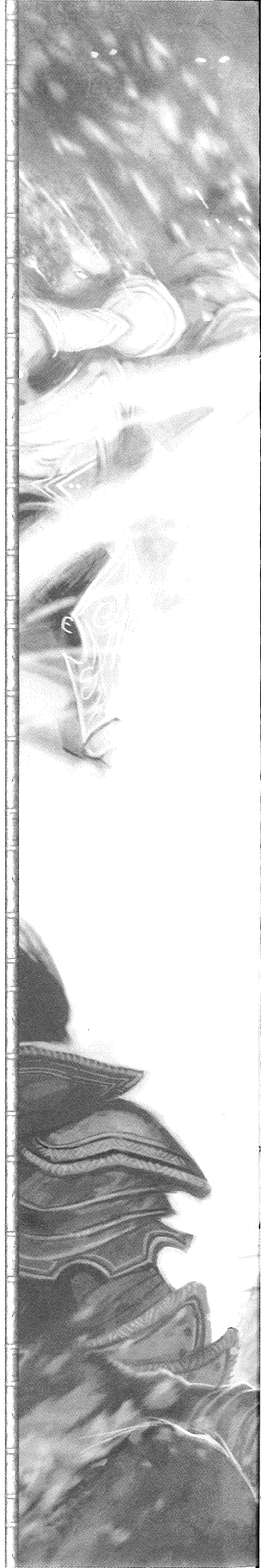
Session 16: The heroes face the black dragon Vermastyx in her partially flooded home. Vermastyx is a tough opponent within her own lair. However, there is no sign of Benwick, forcing the characters to conclude that he must be elsewhere. Vermastyx is the only one who knows where to find the evil friar and what he's up to. Subduing the dragon might be necessary to learn this information. Vermastyx's defeat spurs Yulbraxis to seek revenge in the final chapter of the adventure. See **Session 16: Into the Dragon Lair**, page 11.

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTERS

Chapter 4 assumes you have a normal party of five 2nd-level characters and players familiar with the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game at your table. Compare the party at your table to this assumption, using the following guidelines.

Weak Party: You have a weak party at your table if it consists of only four characters, or most or all of the players are new to the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game. If you have a weak party, remove one of the lowest level or least important non-minion monsters from the encounter. For instance, in Encounter 4-13 (level 2 encounter), you might subtract one ambush spider.

Strong Party: You have a strong party at your table if it consists of six characters, or most or all of the players are veteran 4th-Edition *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* players who like added challenge. If you have a strong party, add one of the simplest non-minion monsters among those in the encounter whose level most closely matches the encounter level. For instance, in Encounter 4-13, you might add another ambush spider.





CHAPTER 4: HERE BE DRAGONS

After talking with Lord Drysdale of Restwell Keep, the characters pursue Benwick into the Chaos Scar and clash with the reptilian creatures therein.

ROLEPLAYING

Some of the adventure's sections call for roleplaying, and all of the encounters allow for it. A portion of the information in this book exists to help you roleplay with the players. You might prepare a list of names to use if players want to talk to creatures unexpectedly. As long as all the players are having fun, and it's not going to make the session too long, play it up and enjoy. Just make sure to include everyone.

Further, allow for cinematic maneuvers and clever strategies. Try to reward bold play and clever play. Let players use their characters' skills and powers. Encourage this sort of gaming by being prepared, and by using the monsters, NPCs, and scenarios boldly and cleverly yourself.

Session 13: Chasing the Serpent

The players need a recap of the story thus far. Begin by asking them a few questions.

- ◆ **Who has played Chapters 1 and/or 2 of this season?** If no one has, then you need ask no further questions. Anyone who has played Chapters 1 and/or 2 should be asked the next question.
- ◆ **What happened to Ferdinand Ronnik?** If the majority of players killed Ronnik in Chapter 2, he's dead for this session. If the majority subdued Ronnik, he's in the keep's dungeon, under Lord Drysdale's authority, waiting to be hanged.
- ◆ **Which of the enemies survived Chapter 3?** Go with the prisoners the majority of players at the table took. If no one has played Chapter 3, assume the doppelgangers, Gordi and Sal, survived and told the characters of the plot.

If the players need a refresher, read the following text describing the story so far:

Shortly after you arrived at Restwell Keep, the Keep on the Borderlands, you began to work with a jolly friar named Benwick. Claiming to worship Avandra, Sehanine, and Ioun, he led you to believe Lord Drysdale, the keep's lord, was a rigid and warlike disciple of Erathis. He also led you to believe that the keep's banker, Ferdinand Ronnik, was the leader of a Tiamat cult in the area. With Benwick's guidance, you defeated Ronnik and the cult, and you recovered a jewel known as the Serpent's Eye.

Benwick then had you use the Serpent's Eye to complete a task for the benefit of a captain of the watch, a dwarf named Gorn Hammerfall. Away from the watch of Lord Drysdale, you delved into the old trove of Gorn's ancestor, Greysen Ramthane, a bandit lord of Restwell Keep more than a hundred years ago.

That's when Benwick and Gorn turned on you. You prevailed, but Benwick escaped with much treasure and the Serpent's Eye.

You have now learned the full extent of Benwick's treachery. Benwick framed Ronnik. And now he's taken the treasure to bribe a pair of black dragons named Vermastyx and Yulbraxis. These dragons reside in the swamp on the edge of the Chaos Scar. With these draconic allies and the lizardfolk tribe under their command, Benwick plans on driving Drysdale and all good folk out of the keep.

You know Benwick is heading southwest to the dragons' lair. Standing stones line an old path to the location, which is in the center of a lizardfolk tribe's territory along a large stream. You have a good idea what those stones look like.

It turns out you have unwittingly helped a servant of Zehir. Now it's time to make things right by telling Lord Drysdale of the imminent dangers.

The adventurers might be eager to chase after Benwick, but technically, they've just finished the Ramthane Delve and need an extended rest. This should give them enough time to tie up loose ends at the keep before setting out. In any case, the characters probably have prisoners to turn over to Lord Drysdale.

Quests: If Ferdinand Ronnik is still alive, the characters gain a minor quest to see him freed.

Preparation

When the characters approach the gate to the inner bailey, Drysdale's personal guards stop the party. The guards take little convincing to let the adventurers pass. You can gloss over this scene or allow players to roleplay briefly with the guards. The guards escort the characters to Lord Drysdale.

When the adventurers are taken to see Lord Drysdale, read:

Guards escort you through a courtyard and up the steps to the main fortress. After passing through a set of enormous doors, you arrive in the great hall.

A silver-haired human with weathered skin and sharp eyes greets you. His hair is cut in a close-cropped military fashion, and he sports a long mustache.

"I am Lord Peridin Drysdale. I heard of your heroics regarding Ferdinand Ronnik. Well done. Now, what news do you have that my guards saw fit to bring you here so urgently?"

Roleplaying the Scene

Allow the players to describe how their characters relate the situation to Lord Drysdale. They don't need to recite the whole tale, but you should know what they tell the lord about Benwick, Ferdinand Ronnik, and any prisoners in their custody.

Drysdale is grave and bluntly honest, but tries to be friendly. However, he is a practical military man. He tolerates little flowery speech or beating around the bush.

When the characters reveal all that has occurred, Drysdale is visibly upset. He first orders any prisoners taken to the dungeons. Then he orders Ronnik, if he lives, removed from his cell and cared for. Then he comes back to the issue of Benwick and the plot against the keep:

"This is a fine mess and explains why Benwick has been spreading rumors that I wanted to stir up trouble in the Chaos Scar. I thank you for acting with honor and coming to me immediately.

"I have to prepare the keep for an attack, so I must put some responsibility on your shoulders. Someone needs to pursue that snake Benwick.

"You clearly have the mettle for the task. Hunt down the friar. Strike at his allies if you can. And bring me the heads of those dragons if you have the power to do so.

"Most important, gather information and return here to tell me what you've learned. I need to know what we're up against.

"Take the morning to rest. You look like you need it. Then, after lunch, pick up the chase."

The issue is not up for negotiation. Drysdale expects the characters to undertake the task. He offers no reward, expecting them to do what duty and hard times demand. He has little patience for "mercenary thinking" in a crisis.

Quests: The characters gain a major quest to gather information on the keep's would-be attackers.

If Ferdinand Ronnik is set free, the characters complete a minor quest.

Departure

When the characters leave the keep in pursuit of Benwick, set the scene:

The sun is high in the sky when you depart. Already, the keep shows signs of preparing for battle. Heading southwest, you pass the King's Wall and cross into the Chaos Scar. Soon you are trudging through wet woodlands, looking for the standing stones that mark the path to the dragons' lair.

Skill Challenge: Finding the Path

As the characters make their way toward the lizardfolk tribe's territory, they traverse rough terrain. Navigating the wilderness to find the standing stones marking the trail is a skill challenge.

Level: 2 (XP 375).

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Athletics, Endurance, History, Nature, Perception.

Athletics (DC 13): The character leads the way through the tough terrain, clearing paths and climbing over obstacles in order to help his or her companions.

Endurance (DC 13): The character helps make the journey easier for others by carrying some of his or her companions' gear or by blazing a trail through dense brush.

History (DC 20): A character recalls the historic lay of this land from old sources, making the course to the ancient site more sure. Pieces of ancient structures might be found indicating the right path.

Nature (DC 13): The lay of the terrain tells the character where a larger stream might flow, as well as what might make good living space for the water-loving lizardfolk.

Perception (DC 16): The character spots potential hazards while the group can still avoid them, saving time and effort.

Success: The characters make good, comfortable time through the forest. By mid-afternoon, they find an intact set of standing stones along what looks like a game trail leading southward. Go to Encounter 4-13, page 12.

Failure: The characters find the going rough, having to chop through brambles, cross gullies, and generally making poor time. Each character loses a healing surge. In the late afternoon, they stumble on an intact set of standing stones along what looks like a game trail leading southward. Go to Encounter 4-13, page 12.



Lizardfolk
Territory

Session 14: Watchers in the Water

The characters rest up then proceed along the standing stones trail. They soon emerge on the banks of a stream. The banks are home to several hostile lizardfolk. Set out the map and go to **Encounter 4-14: Lizardfolk Lookouts**, page 14.

ROLEPLAYING LIZARDFOLK

Lizardfolk are fierce and primitive, and they take an aggressive stance toward intruders. If the characters wish to speak to the lizardfolk, you can use the fact that a character speaks Draconic or assume one or more lizardfolk in the encounter speak broken Common. If you have both options, do whichever seems most fun or suits your DMing style and the situation.

Lizardfolk Names: Arak, Buvash, Cresh, Deeld, Esst, Gur, Heem, Iyess, Jeed, Leelt, Mossi, Neeg, Ootoor, Reeld, Sleest, Tak, Tash, Ukeem.

Session 15: Sacred Ground

The adventurers follow a swampy path lined with ancient standing stones. As the characters near the dragon's lair, they can see crumbling ruins poking up above the treetops.

Read the following text and then go to Encounter 4-15: Honor Guard, page 16.

Ahead, the forest thins and opens up. Crumbling walls are evident through gaps between the trees. A hulking form, indistinct at this distance, stands among the ruins.



ZOLTAN BOROS & CABOR SZIKSZAI

Session 16: Into the Dragon Lair

Having defeated the lizardfolk guarding the crumbling ruin, the adventurers descend into the dragons' lair by way of a pit that's covered by a net.

The distance to the cave floor below is 30 feet. A rope ladder extends down to the bottom.

Before beginning the encounter, remind the players that their characters have a major quest to gather information on the keep's attackers. They might need to talk to the dragon.

When the adventurers climb down the pit that leads to the dragons' lair, read:

The ladder leads to a large cavern. The sound of flowing water fills the chamber. With the descent, daylight from above gives way to a green glow below. An odor of death and blood mixes with the smell of fresh water.

When the characters reach the bottom of the entry pit, lay down the map and proceed with **Encounter 4-16: Vermastyx**, page 18.

Subduing the Dragon

Vermastyx is sarcastic, cruel, hateful, and proud. However, if she is reduced to 44 hit points or fewer, the dragon realizes she might have bitten off more than she can chew and asks what the characters want. A non-bloodied adventurer can convince the battered dragon to surrender with a DC 20 Bluff or Intimidate check (standard action). If the check succeeds, Vermastyx ends her assault and shares what she knows. If the check fails, Vermastyx continues to fight.

Once subdued, Vermastyx admits that she and her brother plan to join Benwick in assaulting Restwell Keep. Her brother, Yulbraxis, took Benwick north to meet with other lizardfolk tribes. The attacking force is quite large, but Vermastyx doesn't know how big or where they are marshaling. Vermastyx was to meet the army tomorrow morning when the attack was to begin.

Vermastyx promises to stay out of the fight if the adventurers spare her. Her word is worthless, though. If allowed to live, she shows up as part of the forces attacking the keep in Chapter 5. She's also a poor liar (Insight DC 13 to detect her lie).

Concluding the Adventure

The characters recover about 200 gp in coin, which they can recognize as the rest of Greysen Ramthane's treasure. There's an additional mix of gems and primitive art. Each player receives a total of 103 gp in wealth. They also find a common level 6 suit of magic armor (player's choice), an uncommon level 5 magic implement or magic weapon (player's choice), and the *Serpent's Eye*.

Serpent's Eye

Level 1 (Rare)

This spherical tiger's-eye gem has Avandra's symbol etched on one side and Zehir's symbol etched on the other. It glows softly in its bronze holder, which is suspended from a bronze chain.

Wondrous Item 360 gp

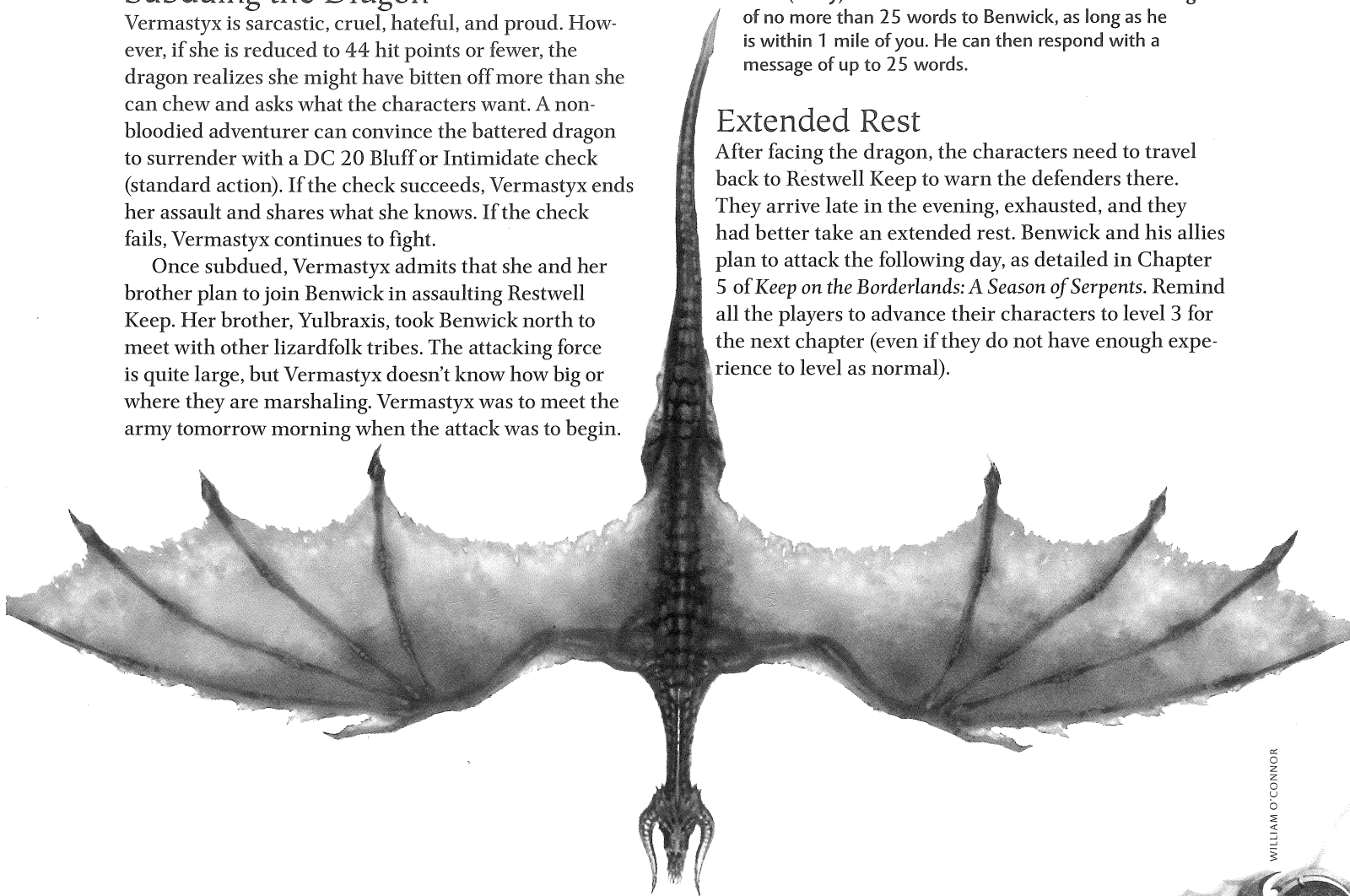
Property: You and your allies within 5 squares of you gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws against poison effects.

Power (Daily): Minor Action. You or one ally adjacent to you can make a saving throw against an effect that a save can end.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You send a short message of no more than 25 words to Benwick, as long as he is within 1 mile of you. He can then respond with a message of up to 25 words.

Extended Rest

After facing the dragon, the characters need to travel back to Restwell Keep to warn the defenders there. They arrive late in the evening, exhausted, and they had better take an extended rest. Benwick and his allies plan to attack the following day, as detailed in Chapter 5 of *Keep on the Borderlands: A Season of Serpents*. Remind all the players to advance their characters to level 3 for the next chapter (even if they do not have enough experience to level as normal).



ENCOUNTER 4-13: A STICKY SITUATION

Encounter Level 4 (902 XP)

Setup

2 greenscale raiders (G)
4 poisonscale needlers (P)
2 ambush spiders (S)
6 unseen web sheets (traps)

The lizardfolk spotted the character crossing into their territory and have set up an ambush, using the presence of the spiders to their advantage. Have the players place their characters in the Start Area.

After the players place their characters, read:

A clearing opens up in the woods ahead, the trail disappearing into it. Standing stones mark the trail here, but none are visible elsewhere. In the center of the meadow is a stand of trees draped with spider webs.

On the other side of the webs stands a group of lizardfolk, poised to attack.

Perception check

DC 21: *Lurking in the central trees, among the webs, are spiders the size of wolves.*

Tactics

- ♦ **The ambush spiders** wait in their nest until prey is trapped in a web, comes within 5 squares, or attacks. Initially, they delay or ready actions to attack those who meet these preferences. The spiders consider both the adventurers and the lizardfolk their enemies. If a spider has a choice of targets that include both adventurers and lizardfolk, roll a d6: On a result of 5 or 6, it attacks a lizardfolk.
- ♦ **The greenscale raiders** move out and throw javelins at the characters. When the adventurers manage to bypass the webs and get close to the raiders, the raiders use *sidestep attack* to attack and then use a move action to dash away.
- ♦ **The poisonscale needlers** stay in the tree line and attack from a distance. They consider the adventurers a more serious threat than the spiders.

Features of the Area

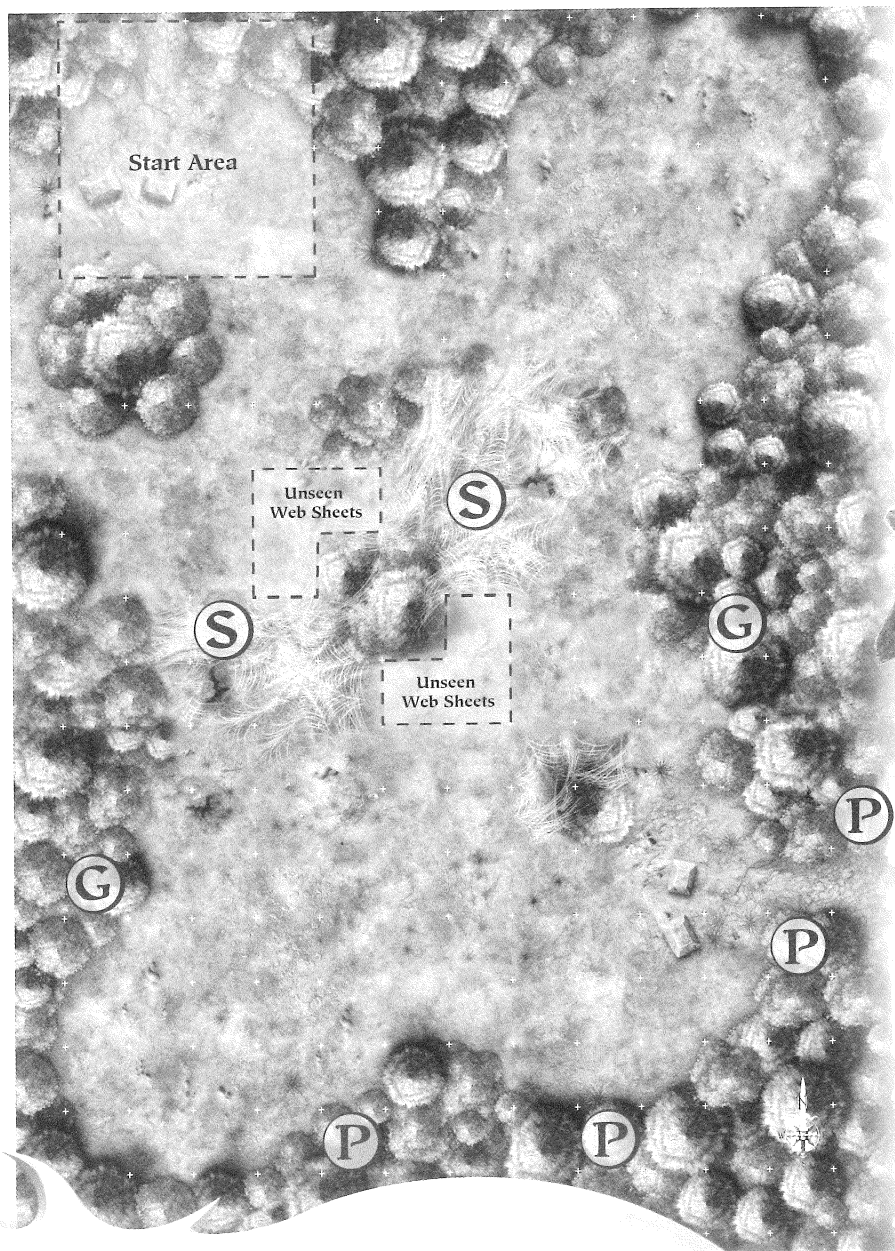
Illumination: Bright light.

Standing Stones: These markers indicate the northern and southern parts of the trail. They are difficult terrain.

Treasure: Among the webs is a dangling corpse on which the adventurers find a level 4 or lower common arms-slot magic item (player's choice).

Trees: Forested squares are difficult terrain and provide partial cover against ranged attacks. Stumps are difficult terrain. The trees are 15 to 20 feet tall (Athletics DC 8 to climb).

Unseen Web Sheets: Squares marked on the map contain fresh web sheets that are nearly invisible. A creature that starts its turn or moves adjacent to a web sheet can detect it with an active or passive Perception of 20 or higher. The lizardfolk and spiders know of these sheets already.



Visible Webs: These dirty and tangled masses are difficult terrain and provide partial cover when attacking a creature on the opposite side. A successful attack against a defense of 10 clears a square of webs. Fire attacks gain a +2 bonus to the attack roll.

6 Unseen Web Sheets

Level 1 Minion Trap

Object

XP 25 each

Detect Perception DC 20

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a web sheet.

AC 10, Fortitude 10, Reflex 10

Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions;

Resist 10 all except fire

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

④ Entangle ♦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature enters the web sheet's square.

Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 0 (the triggering creature); +6 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).

2 Greenscale Raiders (G)

Level 4 Skirmisher

Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk

XP 175 each

HP 54; Bloodied 27

Initiative +6

AC 18, Fortitude 17, Reflex 16, Will 15

Perception +8

Speed 6 (swamp walk)

STANDARD ACTIONS

④ Spear (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage.

⑦ Javelin (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +9 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage.

↓ Sidestep Attack (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Effect: The raider can shift 1 square and then use *spear* or *javelin*.

MINOR ACTIONS

↓ Feral Tail Lash ♦ At-Will

Requirement: The raider must be bloodied.

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC

Hit: 1d6 damage, and the raider can shift 1 square.

Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +9

Str 17 (+5)

Dex 15 (+4)

Wis 12 (+3)

Con 14 (+4)

Int 8 (+1)

Cha 8 (+1)

Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic

Equipment light shield, spear, 5 javelins

4 Poisonscale Needlers (P)

Level 3 Minion Artillery

Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk

XP 38 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

Initiative +5

AC 17, Fortitude 13, Reflex 16, Will 14

Perception +3

Speed 6 (swamp walk)

STANDARD ACTIONS

④ Claw (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC

Hit: 5 damage.

⑦ Blowgun (poison, weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 5 poison damage. On a critical hit, the target also falls unconscious (save ends).

Str 12 (+2)

Dex 18 (+5)

Wis 15 (+3)

Con 11 (+1)

Int 7 (-1)

Cha 9 (+0)

Alignment unaligned

Languages Draconic

Equipment blowgun, 10 poisoned blowgun needles

2 Ambush Spiders (S)

Level 2 Lurker

Medium natural beast (spider)

XP 125 each

HP 28; Bloodied 14

Initiative +7

AC 16, Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 13

Perception +8

Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb)

Tremorsense 5

TRAITS

Camouflage

The spider can make a Stealth check to become hidden when it has partial cover or partial concealment instead of needing superior cover or total concealment.

STANDARD ACTIONS

④ Bite ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

↓ Venomous Bite (poison) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

Special: When charging, the spider can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Skills Acrobatics +9, Stealth +9

Str 13 (+2)

Dex 17 (+4)

Wis 14 (+3)

Con 10 (+1)

Int 4 (-2)

Cha 7 (-1)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

ENCOUNTER 4–14: LIZARDFOLK LOOKOUTS

Encounter Level 2 (652 XP)

Setup

- 4 **poisonscale needlers** (P)
- 2 **poisonscale magi** (see below)
- 2 **poisonscale savages** (see below)

None of the monsters are apparent when the characters enter the area. The lizardfolk shown on the map lurk among the trees (needlers) or are submerged (savages and magi).

When the party enters the area, read:

The sound of running water becomes clear, and you emerge on the banks of a wide stream that follows the trail. A heron squawks and takes flight as you come to a clearing. Woods line the clearing, which has two ponds in it, as well as a fallen tree and some standing stones. The trail continues southward beyond the clearing.

Perception check

DC 17: Lizardfolk armed with blowguns lurk among the trees at the clearing's edge.

DC 20: The pools seem shallow but have darker sections indicating openings at the bottoms.

Nature check

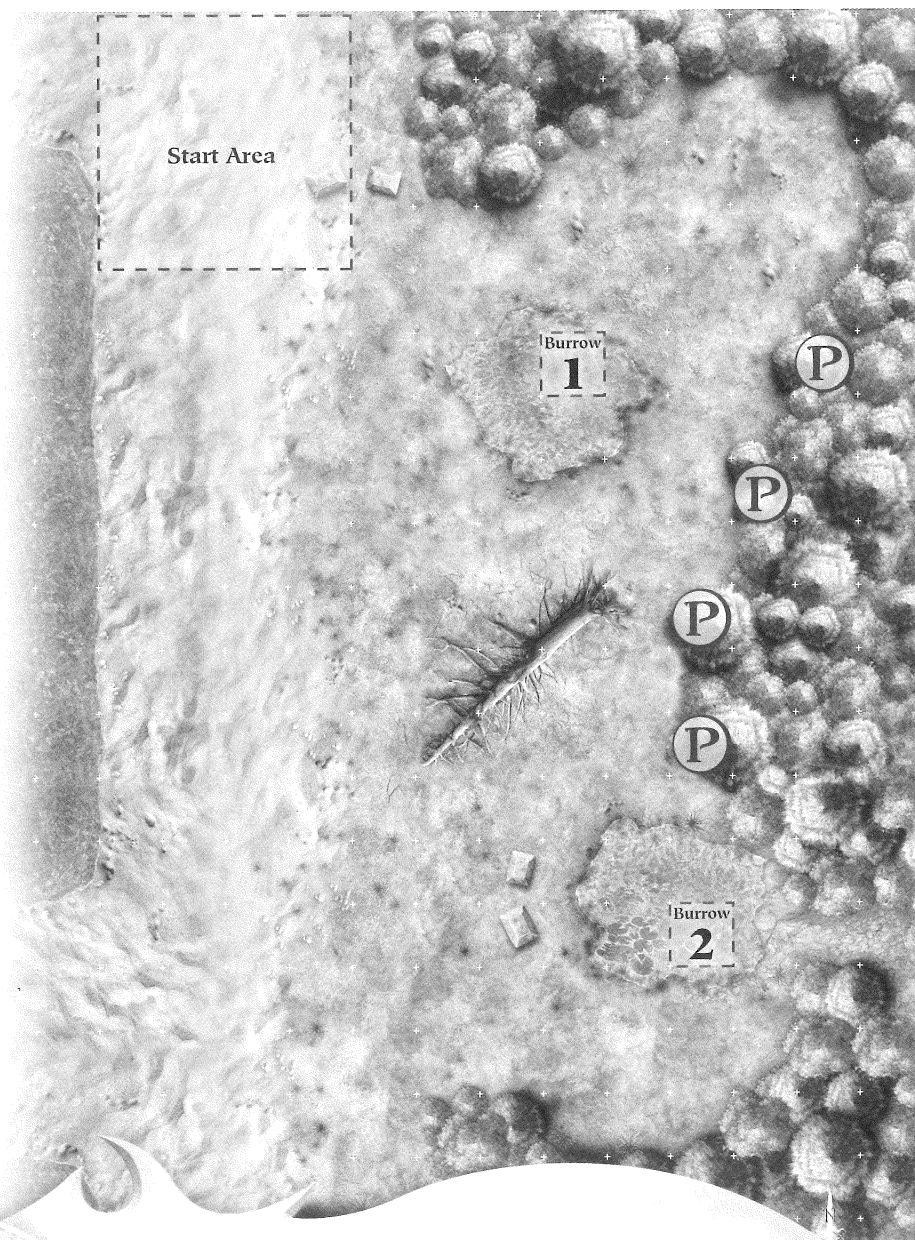
DC 16: Pools such as these often serve as the entrances to lizardfolk burrows.

The lizardfolk attack as soon as the adventurers arrive in the clearing. Any character that has a passive Perception of 16 or lower is surprised. The needlers attack during the surprise round. The only action the savages take during the surprise round is to emerge from the pond. The magi wait until the subsequent round of combat to emerge and attack.

Tactics

If only a needler is left, or if only one lizardfolk remains and it is bloodied, that lizardfolk surrenders. If the adventurers accept the surrender, see “Lizardfolk Surrender” (opposite page) and also “Roleplaying Lizardfolk” (page 10).

- ♦ **The poisonscale savages** emerge from burrow 1 on an initiative count of 15. They engage the nearest foes, trying to protect the magi and needlers.
- ♦ **The poisonscale magi** emerge from burrow 2 after the surprise round. They try to stay amid the trees while using ranged and area attacks.
- ♦ **The poisonscale needlers** hide behind trees, shooting darts at the adventurers. They act on an initiative count of 10. At the start of combat, they are hidden to any character that has a passive Perception of 16 or lower. Their sniper trait allows them to remain hidden if they miss.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light fills the area.

Fallen Tree: This low obstacle is difficult terrain.

Ponds: Marshy ground gives way to shallow pools that form difficult terrain.

Stream: The shallow water is difficult terrain.

Standing Stones: These markers indicate the northern and southern parts of the trail. They are difficult terrain.

Trees: Forested squares are difficult terrain and provide partial cover against ranged attacks. Climbable parts of the trees are 15 to 20 feet tall (Athletics DC 8 to climb).

2 Poisonscale Savages	Level 2 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk	XP 125 each
HP 45; Bloodied 22	Initiative +3
AC 14, Fortitude 15, Reflex 13, Will 12	Perception +2
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	

STANDARD ACTIONS

- ⊕ **Greatclub** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 4 damage, and the target falls prone.
- ⌘ **Javelin** (poison, weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

MINOR ACTIONS

- † **Poison Tail** (poison) ♦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: Ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8

Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)

Con 15 (+3) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 8 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic

Equipment greatclub, 2 javelins

2 Poisonscale Magi	Level 2 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk	XP 125 each
HP 30; Bloodied 15	Initiative +2
AC 14, Fortitude 15, Reflex 13, Will 12	Perception +4
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	

TRAITS

Repel Corrupt Blood

If the lizardfolk deals ongoing poison damage to a target already taking ongoing poison damage, the lizardfolk can slide the target up to 3 squares.

STANDARD ACTIONS

- ⊕ **Dagger** (poison, weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d4 + 2 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).
- ⌘ **Poison Blood** (poison) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 4 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

☼ **Poison Rain** (poison) ♦ **Encounter**

Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst);

+7 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d10 + 5 poison damage.

Effect: The target gains vulnerable 5 poison (save ends).

Skills Athletics +7, Stealth +7

Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 17 (+4)

Con 12 (+2) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 8 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic

Equipment dagger

4 Poisonscale Needlers (P)	Level 3 Minion Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk	XP 38 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

AC 17, Fortitude 13, Reflex 16, Will 14

Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Initiative +5

Perception +3

TRAITS

Sniper

A hidden needler that misses with a ranged attack remains hidden.

STANDARD ACTIONS

- ⊕ **Claw** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.
- ⌘ **Blowgun** (poison, weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 5 poison damage. On a critical hit, the target also falls unconscious (save ends).

Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+3)

Con 11 (+1) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 9 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic

Equipment blowgun, 10 poisoned blowgun needles

Lizardfolk Surrender

If the lizardfolk surrender, the characters can question them and make a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check to coerce the lizardfolk into sharing what they know.

DC 8: The lizardfolk confirm that the path leads to an old ruin beneath which is the lair of the black dragons Vermastyx and Yulbraxis.

At this DC, the adventurers can also verify that Benwick passed through here this morning on his way to the dragons' lair. He intended to speak with the dragons. The lizardfolk haven't seen him since, but they consider him to be an ally.

DC 13: Powerful lizardfolk guardians watch over the ruin. They include a blackscale bruiser, two very strong warriors, and acid-spitting drakes.

Below the ruin is a subterranean cave where the dragons lair and accept offerings of meat and treasure. ("Meat" includes people the lizardfolk capture.)

DC 20: Only one dragon remains in the lair—the female Vermastyx. The lizardfolk were told that the other dragon, a male named Yulbraxis, left with Benwick to speak with other tribes of lizardfolk about an upcoming war on the "fortress beyond the old wall."

These lizardfolk aren't partaking in the assault on the keep, but some among the tribe are already on the march. Vermastyx, they say, knows the whole plan and the whole truth.



ENCOUNTER 4–15: HONOR GUARD

Encounter Level 3 (850 XP)

Setup

- 1 **blackscale bruiser** (B)
- 2 **poisonscale brawlers** (P)
- 2 **spitting drakes** (S)

If the characters approach the ruins cautiously, each character can attempt a DC 14 Stealth check. A group that accumulates more successful results than failing ones reaches the edge of the ruins and gain combat advantage against its guardians during the first round of combat.

When the characters reach the clearing, read:

The path ends at two standing stones like those you've been following. Within this clearing are the remains of a roofless stone building with deteriorating walls engraved with vague reptilian or draconic images. A 10-foot-tall stone dais set in the center of the area supports six worn statues of what could be dragonborn warriors.

A crude stone dolmen, like an altar, stands before a short stairway that ascends to the platform. At the top of steps is a massive lizardfolk that has glistening black scales and a large club.

Another muscular lizardfolk, this one with green scales, stands atop a mass of tumbled building stones farther to the east.

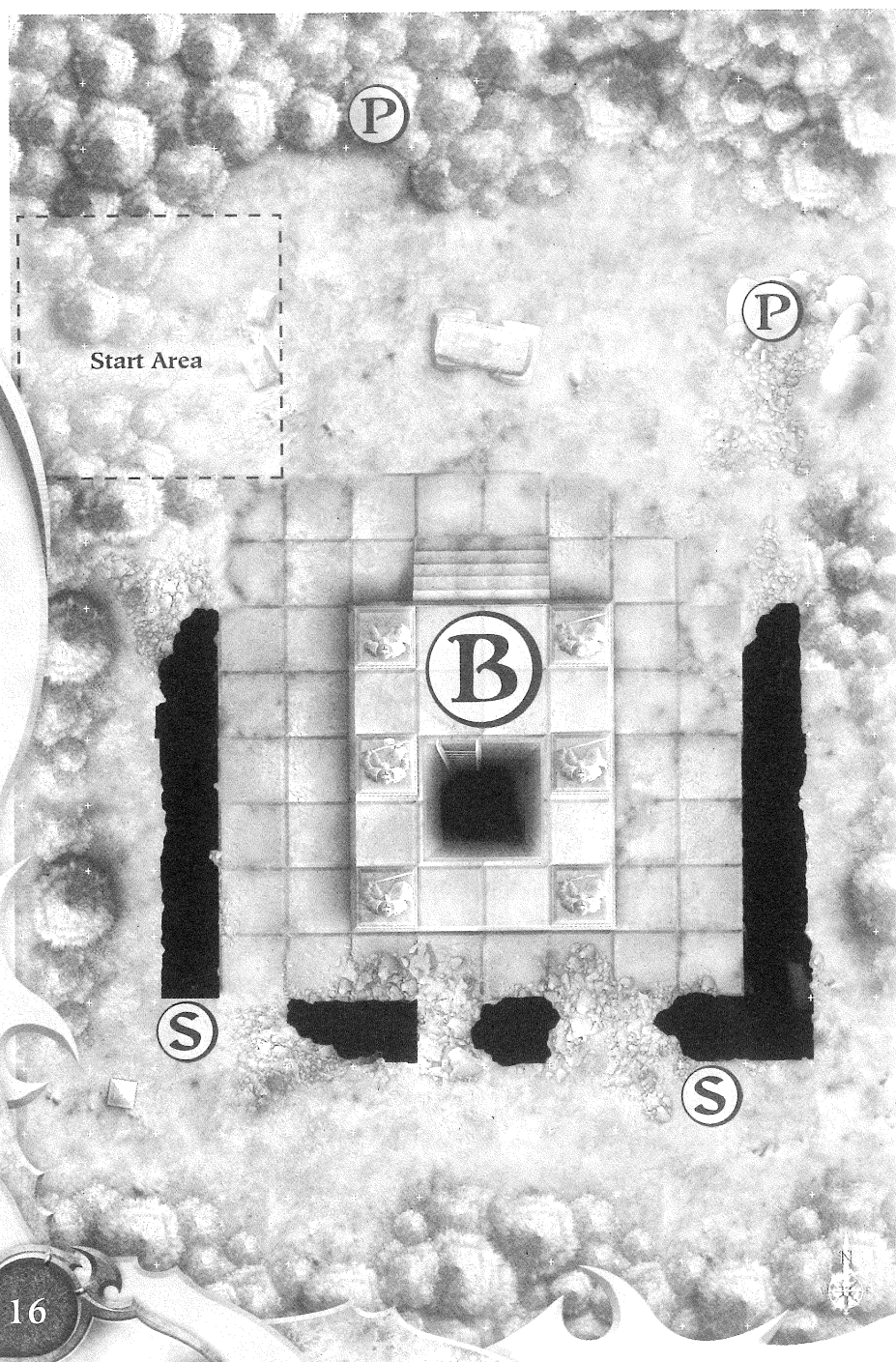
Seeing you, the lizardfolk call out a warning and attack.

Perception check

DC 20: *Another bulky green-scaled lizardfolk warrior crouches among the trees to the north.*

Tactics

- ♦ **The blackscale bruiser** guards the entrance to the dragons' lair. At the beginning of combat, it whistles to call the drakes into the combat. It prefers to occupy any area that prevents enemies from climbing the stairs to the top of the platform. The bruiser never surrenders.
- ♦ **The poisonscale brawlers** attack in ways that give the blackscale bruiser combat advantage. They grab not only to crush their enemies but also to keep enemies within the bruiser's reach. They neither surrender nor flee while the bruiser lives. After the bruiser dies, each brawler can be compelled to run away (Intimidate DC 20; standard action) but not to surrender.
- ♦ **The spitting drakes** keep their distance and spit at targets. The drakes flee if bloodied or if no lizardfolk remains to command them. A drake also flees if it is the last enemy standing.



2 Spitting Drakes (S)	Level 3 Artillery
Medium natural beast (reptile)	XP 150 each
HP 38; Bloodied 19	Initiative +5
AC 17, Fortitude 14, Reflex 16, Will 14	Perception +3
Speed 7	
Resist 10 acid	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬆ Bite ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.	
☞ Caustic Spit (acid) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 acid damage.	
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 18 (+5) Wis 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 3 (-3) Cha 12 (+2)
Alignment unaligned	Languages –

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Boulders: These rocks are 5 feet high and treated as blocking terrain. Climbing them requires 1 square of movement and a DC 13 Athletics check. A failure ends the climber's movement.

Dais: The top is 10 feet high. Climbing them requires 2 squares of movement and a DC 13 Athletics check. A failure ends the climber's movement.

Dolmen Altar: These squares are difficult terrain.

Pit: This square hole in the top of the dais drops 15 feet before opening into the ceiling of a 15-foot-high cave. A sickly green light and the sound of trickling water issue from below.

A net is fastened over the pit. A creature that falls in drops only 5 feet, taking no damage. The net's surface is difficult terrain. Climbing out is a move action (no check required).

It takes four standard actions to unfasten and remove the net. A rope ladder extends down to the bottom of the pit.

Rubble: Stone debris is difficult terrain.

Stairs: The staircase is treated as difficult terrain while ascending it, or normal terrain otherwise.

Standing Stones: The squares containing these markers are difficult terrain.

Statues: These worn statues of dragonborn warriors are blocking terrain.

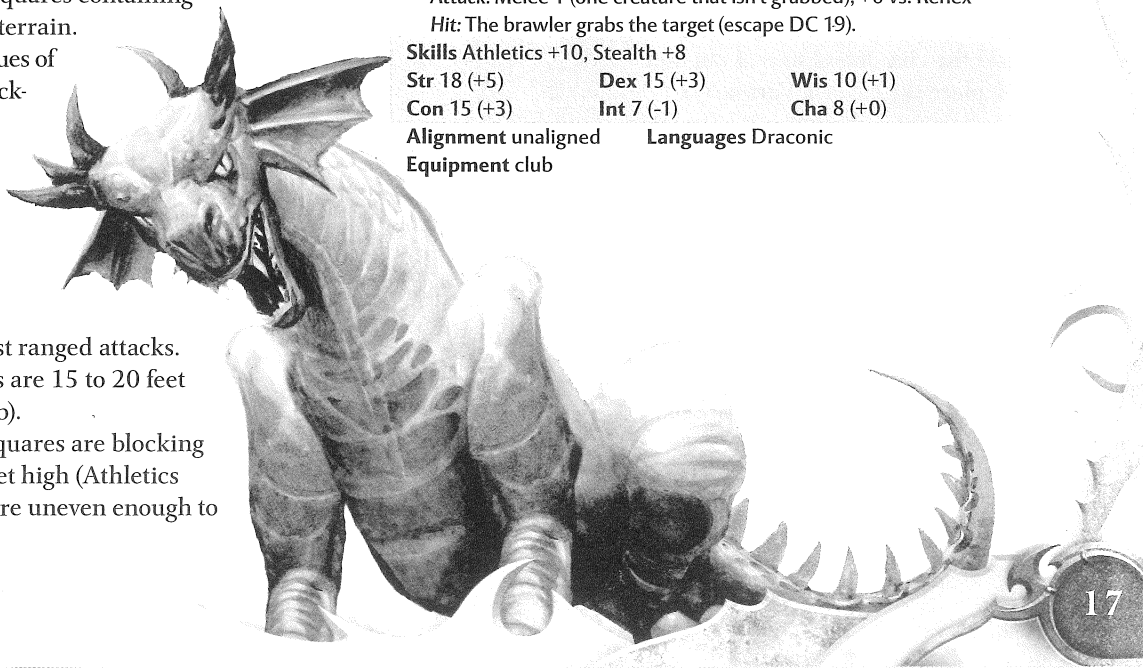
Treasure: The bruiser has an elaborate copper and ivory necklace (6 gp per character).

Trees: Forested squares are difficult terrain and provide partial cover against ranged attacks. Climbable parts of the trees are 15 to 20 feet tall (Athletics DC 8 to climb).

Ruined Walls: These squares are blocking terrain. The walls are 15 feet high (Athletics DC 15 to climb). The tops are uneven enough to be difficult terrain.

Blackscale Bruiser (B)	Level 6 Brute
Large natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk	XP 250
HP 86; Bloodied 43	Initiative +6
AC 18, Fortitude 19, Reflex 16, Will 16	Perception +4
Speed 8 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬆ Greatclub (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the bruiser can push the target 1 square.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬆ Feral Bite ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The bruiser must be bloodied.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
☞ Tail Swipe ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Trigger: The bruiser takes damage from an enemy within 2 squares of it.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close blast 2 (creatures in the blast); +7 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Str 22 (+9)	Dex 16 (+6) Wis 12 (+4)
Con 16 (+6)	Int 5 (+0) Cha 6 (+1)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Draconic
Equipment greatclub	

2 Poisonscale Brawlers (P)	Level 3 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk	XP 150 each
HP 55; Bloodied 27	Initiative +3
AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 13, Will 12	Perception +1
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬆ Club (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.	
⬇ Crushing Grasp ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The brawler must be grabbing a creature.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the brawler); +6 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d6 + 7 damage.	
Miss: Half damage.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬇ Feral Grab ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Requirement: The brawler must not be grabbing a creature.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature that isn't grabbed); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: The brawler grabs the target (escape DC 19).	
Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +8	
Str 18 (+5)	Dex 15 (+3) Wis 10 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 7 (-1) Cha 8 (+0)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Draconic
Equipment club	



ENCOUNTER 4-16: VERMASTYX

Encounter Level 4 (801 XP)

Setup

Vermastyx, young black dragon (see below)
4 acid breath echoes (see below)

Characters arrive in or adjacent to the start area. The dragon is hiding in waters that flow below the chamber and shouldn't be placed on the map right away. The breath echoes don't yet exist.

When the party enters the lair, read:

You arrive on a central ledge between the cavern's upper and lower areas. A dim green light issues from crystals that sprout from the cavern floor.

Water flows from openings in several of the walls. It collects in a stream flowing into the room's lower reaches.

Strewn around the immediate area are the grisly, partly consumed corpses of at least ten humanoids.

Arcana check

DC 13 (Detect Magic): The crystals give off a magical aura that suggests elemental resonance. They are likely to amplify or echo elemental effects.

Heal or Nature check

DC 13: In addition to being partially devoured, the corpses have been partially dissolved by acid.

Arcana or Nature check

DC 20: The character intuits the crystals' effects (see Features of the Area).

Let the characters spread out and explore the cavern. Vermastyx waits until a character is adjacent to a bolt hole before emerging.

When Vermastyx appears, read:

A black dragon, its body the size of a large horse, emerges from the water, its dusky scales glistening with moisture. Its eyes glow green, and acidic spittle drips from its fanged maw as it hisses.

"Benwick told me a few tasty morsels might deliver themselves to me. Time to dine!"

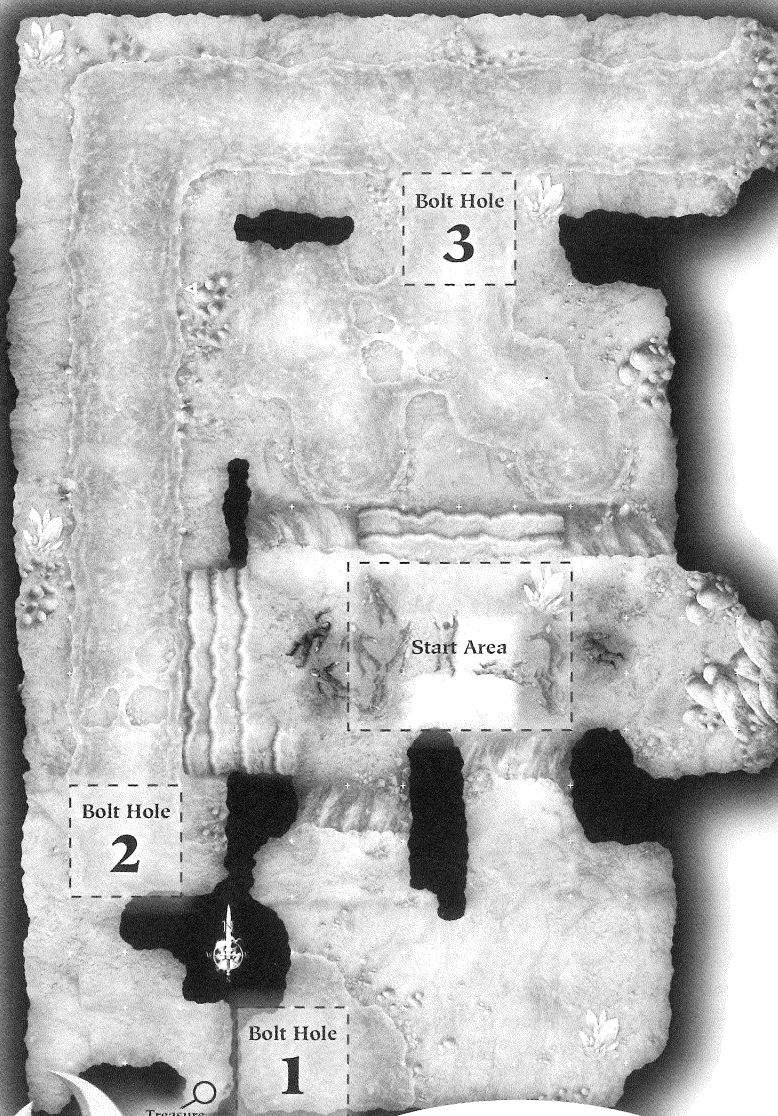
Tactics

- ♦ **Vermastyx** opens with *instinctive devouring*, using the attack against the nearby adventurer. Once several characters surround her, she uses *shroud of gloom* and spends an action point to use *breath weapon*. She then retreats down the bolt hole.

It takes Vermastyx a turn to travel between bolt holes using the network of submerged passages. After spending a turn moving between the holes, she emerges from a bolt hole of her choice. She avoids becoming pinned down, taking wing or using the bolt holes when necessary. Until she's bloodied, she worries little about opportunity attacks.

Once Vermastyx is reduced to 36 hit points or fewer, she is inclined to talk; see "Subduing the Dragon," page 11.

- ♦ **The acid breath echoes**, once formed, move toward the nearest enemy and attack.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light.

Ceiling Height: 15 feet above each tier of the cavern.

Bolt Holes: Dug into the cavern floor are three bolt holes connected to one another by underwater passages. The water above a bolt hole is deep enough to require swimming (Athletics DC 8). A character that fails the Athletics check is swept away by the current, emerging from a random hole at the start of his or her next turn.

Crystals: The cavern contains five crystal outcroppings. In addition to shedding dim green light, these crystals react to elemental attacks.

The first time Vermastyx's *breath weapon* includes one of these crystals in its blast, four acid breath echoes (barely sentient clouds of acidic vapor) appear in the squares occupied by the other four crystals. Roll initiative for the group of minions.

Entry Pit: A ladder descends from the hole in the cavern ceiling to the floor.

Ledges: Each ledge is a steep incline, requiring 3 squares of movement to ascend. No Athletics check is required.

Rocks: These squares are difficult terrain.

Stairs: The rough-hewn steps count as difficult terrain to ascend and normal terrain otherwise.

Stepping Stones: These appear slippery but are actually safe.

Water: The pool on the upper ledge and the stream are difficult terrain, except over the bolt holes (see above).

4 Acid Breath Echoes

Small elemental animate

Level 4 Minion Brute

XP 44 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

Initiative +5

AC 16, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15

Perception +3

Speed 3; fly 5 (hover, maximum altitude 1)

STANDARD ACTIONS

⬇ **Breath Echo** (acid) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 7 acid damage.

Str 4 (-1)

Dex 18 (+5)

Wis 13 (+3)

Con 12 (+3)

Int 2 (-2)

Cha 2 (-2)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

Vermastyx, Young Black Dragon Level 2 Solo Lurker

Large natural magical beast (aquatic, dragon)

XP 625

HP 144; **Bloodied** 72

Initiative +10

AC 16, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 13

Perception +8

Speed 7 (swamp walk), fly 7, swim 7

Darkvision

Resist 10 acid

Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

TRAITS

Acidic Blood (acid)

Whenever the dragon takes damage while it is bloodied, each creature adjacent to it takes 5 acid damage.

Aquatic

The dragon can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.

Instinctive Devouring

On an initiative of 10 + its initiative check, the dragon can use a free action to charge or to use *bite*. If the dragon cannot use a free action to make this attack due to a dominating or stunning effect, then that effect ends instead of the dragon making the attack.

Action Recovery

Whenever the dragon ends its turn, any dazing, stunning, or dominating effect on it ends.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⬇ **Bite** (acid) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +7 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Miss: 4 acid damage.

⬇ **Claw** ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +7 vs. AC. If the dragon targets only one creature, it can make this attack twice against that creature.

Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage.

⬇ **Breath Weapon** (acid) ♦ **Recharge** ☐ ☐

Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 2 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

Shroud of Gloom ♦ **Encounter**

Effect: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst). The target gains vulnerable 5 acid and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the encounter. A character can use a standard action to attempt a DC 10 Heal check to end this effect on himself or herself or an adjacent ally.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⬇ **Tail Sweep** ♦ **At-Will**

Trigger: An enemy misses the dragon with a melee attack.

Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 3 (triggering enemy); +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, and the target falls prone. In addition, each of the target's allies adjacent to the target takes 2 damage.

⬇ **Bloodied Breath** ♦ **Encounter**

Trigger: The dragon is first bloodied.

Effect (Free Action): *Breath weapon* recharges, and the dragon uses it.

Skills Stealth +11

Str 16 (+4)

Dex 20 (+6)

Wis 15 (+3)

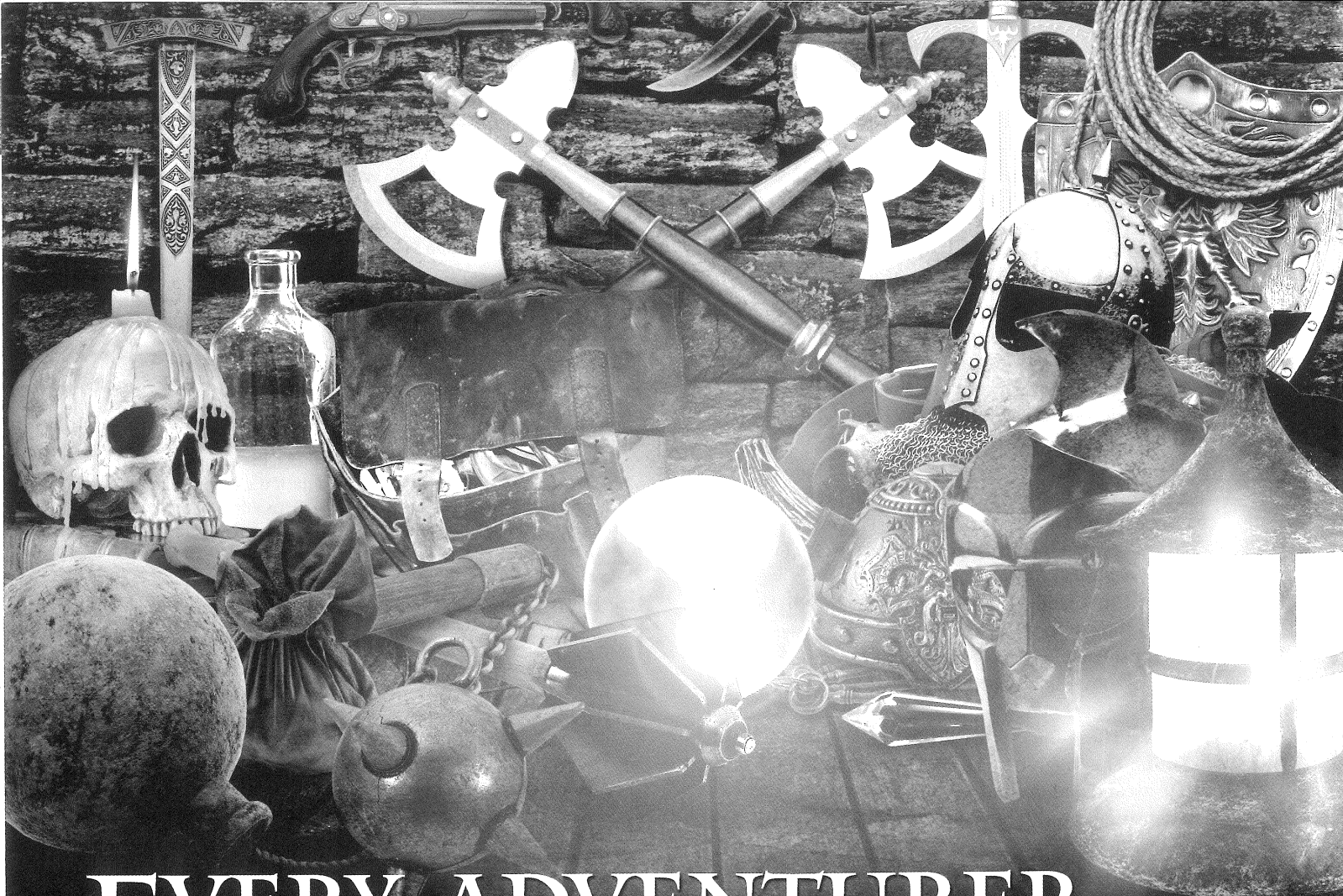
Con 12 (+2)

Int 12 (+2)

Cha 14 (+3)

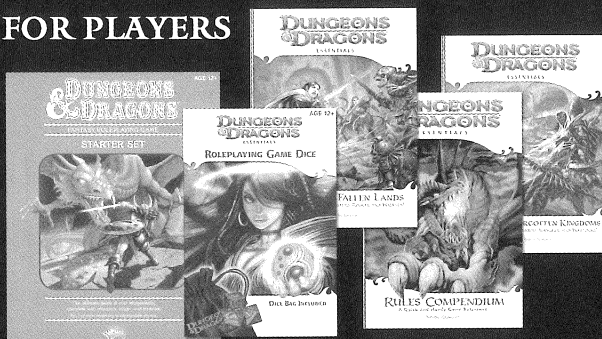
Alignment evil

Languages Common, Draconic

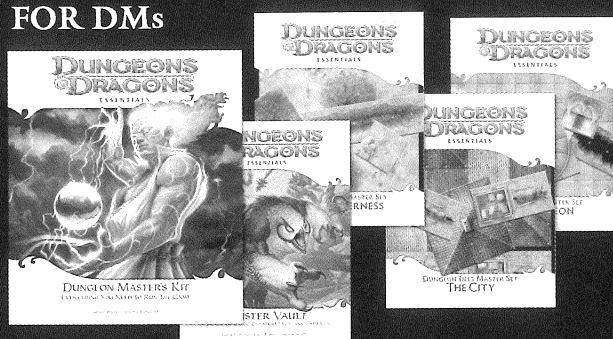


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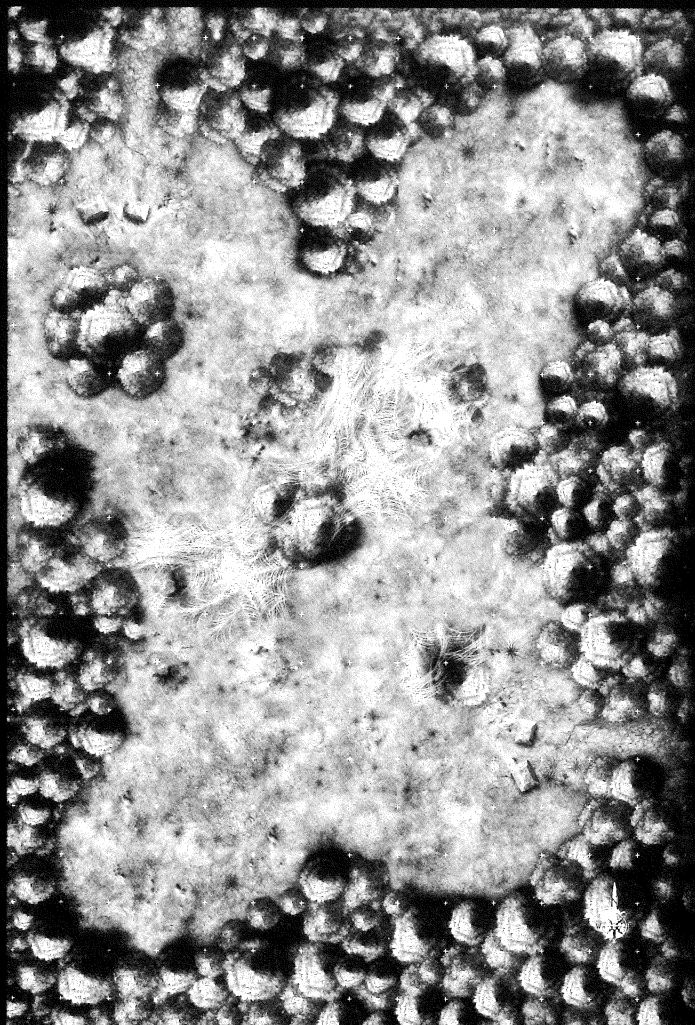
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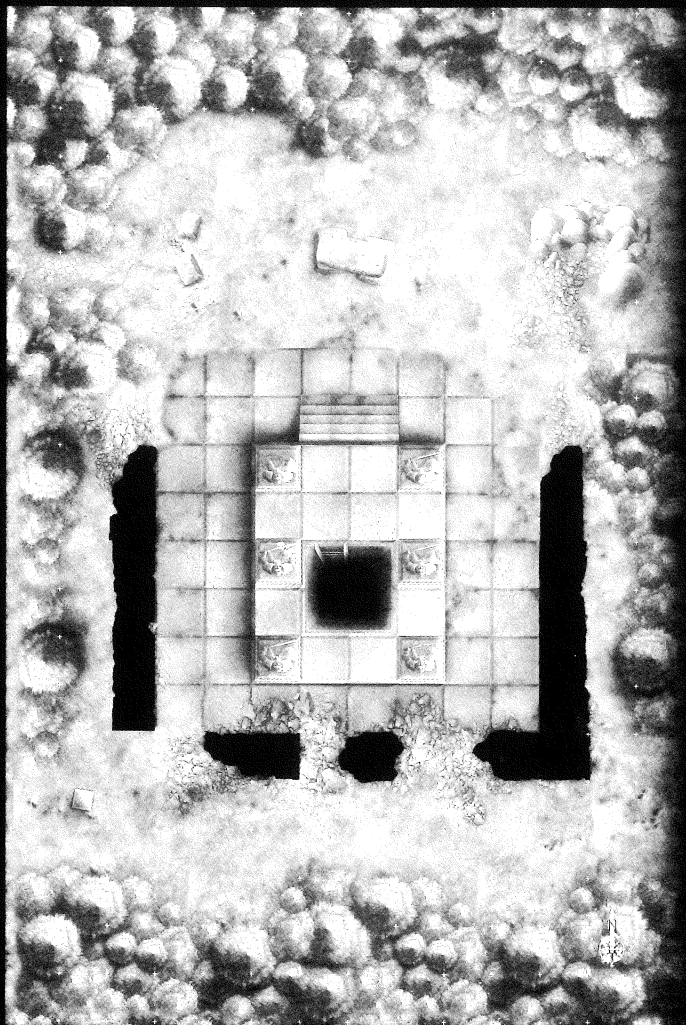
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ENCOUNTER 4-13:
A STICKY SITUATION

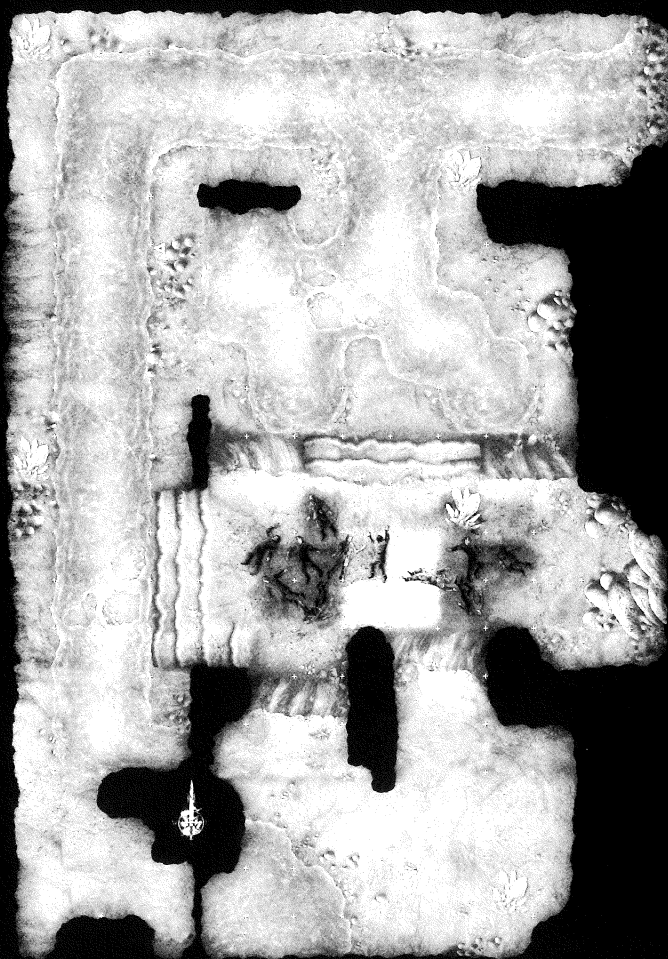
ENCOUNTER 4-14:
LIZARDFOLK LOOKOUTS





ENCOUNTER 4-15:
HONOR GUARD

ENCOUNTER 4-16:
VERMASTYX



THWART A DRACONIC THREAT

Benwick's betrayal still stings, but you learn that he has more nefarious plans afoot - he means to take the Keep on the Borderlands by allying with the nearby lizardfolk tribe and a pair of black dragons. Can you save the keep, restore your honor, and bring Benwick to justice before his forces are brought to bear?

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