Great Wyrms of Drakha

Seven epic-level draconic adventures in Drakha, the Red Moon

Great Wyrms of Drakha

A HIGH-LEVEL ADVENTURE COLLECTION FOR 5E

Introducing the **Dragonbond** Universe
by **Draco Studios**

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GETTING STARTED

Welcome to the first complete RPG product published in the Dragonbond Universe, our upcoming, massive fantasy setting. Besides introducing you to Dragonbond, this book intends to provide established 5e gamemasters with various high-level challenges, including original creatures and environments guaranteed to freshen up your campaign or at least surprise your most advanced players.

All seven of the adventures presented herein feature a final encounter with an epic-level dragon; bigger, meaner, and harder to beat than even the toughest legendary creatures. Each of the adventures includes a series of short encounters that lead up to the final confrontation, intended to be played as several game sessions but which you can also run as a single long, epic session.

While each of the adventures included in this book is a complete story, the focus is doubtlessly on the final encounter and the epic dragon battle awaiting the player characters at the end of the road. In fact, we care so much about that final encounter that we have created an additional rules system to make the battle that much more involved and challenging. Every dragon boss fight in this book follows our Epic Encounters combat system, detailed in the "Fighting the Great Wyrms" section, which adds unprecedented layers of complexity, variation, and fun to every encounter.

How to Use This Book

You do not need to know everything about Drakha or the Dragonbond setting to run the adventures. Most places and situations, as well as NPCs and creatures, will be explained throughout the text, and you will have all the information you need to focus on telling a fun story.

While we recommend these adventures for more experienced gamemasters, there's nothing to stop you if you have recently decided to make the switch from being a player to running your first games as a GM or if this is your first time playing at all. Just keep the following points in mind.

You Have the Last Word

You know your group best, and can probably adapt best to the players you'll be sharing the adventure with. Remember that this adventure provides a guide, but ultimately, you can improvise or go off script if it feels right, as long as the spirit of the adventure is maintained.

Challenge Your Players

Because these are high-level adventures, your players will be equipped to deal with most of what you can throw at them. Gauge their experience and knowledge early on and adjust the adventure to cater to them as players while also challenging them where it seems most beneficial. The 5e rules contain many broad yet useful guidelines on how to balance encounters according to the number of player characters involved.

Give different players the ability to shine and always reward creative thinking and complex ideas, even if they are not directly referenced in the adventure itself. Always make room for the players to think of unique ways to solve problems.

Keep the Adventure Moving

If you feel the players are getting bored or stuck on a puzzle or problem, feel free to provide clues or shake things up with unplanned encounters. Try to keep the pace flowing and the adventurers moving while also letting them explore alternative options and have a full play experience.

You Have All the Information Required

All the creatures we created for our adventures, as well as most of the content you need to run them other than spells and similar 5e general rules information, are contained in this book, whether it is in the adventure's text itself or in the creature or item stats which can be found in the pertinent sections within the appendices.

Drakha, the Red Moon

Drakha, also known as the Red Moon to the Valernians, is a moon of Rhaava, the most important world in the Dragonbond setting, and the place from where the characters in these adventures originate.

The most important landmass on Rhaava is Valerna. It is the biggest continent and where the first sentient beings appeared out of Vaala, the Prime Magic, which only manifests in the world of Rhaava. These beings were the Protogons, massive creatures of limitless power. They shaped the world, not out of a clear objective but simply by how their immense size and power caused the landscape to be altered wherever they walked. Amongst these Protogons was the great Kadmos, the Primordial Dragon, who learned to multiply itself, giving birth to the dragon species. Fearing Kadmos' power and ambition, the other Protogons exiled all dragons to Drakha. There, without access to Vaala, the dragons were doomed to eventually perish.

But the Protogons' plan failed, for dragons thrived in Drakha, even forming different broods and naming azhurma dragon lords to rule their budding civilization in the Red Moon. Furthermore, as Kadmos and their progeny were stranded on Drakha, they managed to create a tear in the fabric of the material plane through sheer will and power, forging a temporary portal between Valerna and the Red Moon. Every twenty-seven years since, this tear would again open this portal, allowing the dragons to return to their ancestral home and unleash their anger against those who exiled them.

So the dragons would henceforth wait for the opening and raid Valerna, mainly to gather Vaala to secure their existence but also for their personal glory, using it to climb the hierarchies within their particular broods. They ravage, destroy, and plunder the realms of Valerna, and during these incursions, all dragons feast on the vast sources of Vaala to be found there. Once satiated, most seek to bring back gifts for their azhurma to further increase their standing and individual power. More often than not, these gifts end up being live Valernians.

Those native to Valerna—or anywhere in Rhaava—tend to not last long on the Red Moon, as the dragons are quick to eat them for their Vaala, empowering and invigorating them. In rare cases, some of them escape captivity, or with the opportunities presented by the Golden City, they can be awarded some sort of livelihood as servants or low-class citizens. That is not to say that Valernians don't have a chance to lead longer lives elsewhere. In the various regions of Drakha, some will find further uses as agents, spies, or choice test subjects for the dragons' usually macabre, ongoing experiments.

The Red Moon Environment

Compared to Rhaava, Drakha is a barren, dismal landscape, with dry terrain, reddish skies, and strange rock formations. Natural hazards, extreme weather, and other environmental features are exceedingly hostile to humanoid life. Every lifeform is predatory or dangerous in some way, as the whole world evolved to challenge—and survive—a large dragon population. Only the toughest creatures survive on Drakha, and even the most insignificant bugs of a dragon's world are frightening threats to mortal life.

The Draconic Hierarchy

While dragons are not native to Drakha, having been exiled from Rhaava at the dawn of time, they have become the moon's dominant species after decimating the titans that used to inhabit the Red Moon, replacing them as supreme beings.

The wyrms of Drakha organize themselves in broods—that is, a differentiated branch of the dragon species and their common ancestor—and revere one of their brood elders, known as azhurma, as their parent, ruler, and master. The azhurmas of each brood are the mightiest dragons in Drakha, and thus, the mightiest beings in existence.

After the azhurma come their brood dragons, whose relative power and rank varies mostly by the amount of Vaala they have consumed. These form the upper echelon ruling over the rest of the creatures on Drakha. Their subjects, or "commoners," are their far-removed relatives, known as dragonkin.

The dragonkin are weaker, medium-sized offshoots of dragons with a high level of diversity in their evolutionary and physical traits. Most dragon broods have adopted at least one specific dragonkin species as their subjects and followers, and they tend to share a few traits, or at least a superficial physical resemblance, to their master brood. Dragons universally regard dragonkin as lesser beings, and each brood treats their dragonkin with varying degrees of condescension.

The Eye of Kadmos

While dragons are kept apart from most mortals by the cosmic gap between their worlds, a magic phenomenon known as the Eye of Kadmos allows dragons to cross into Rhaava, so that every 27 years, for a few days, they can literally fly from one world to the other. In Valerna, Rhaava's largest continent and the site where most Dragonbond adventures take

place, the days of dragon incursions are known as Red Moons, for Drakha shines big, bright, and crimson in the sky during this time.

During a Red Moon, dragons raze mortal settlements across Valerna, killing at their leisure and gorging on the abundant Vaala, then take countless prisoners to live under the dragons' yoke back at Drakha. These Valernian prisoners constitute the lowest caste in the Drakhan power structure. A few of them become serfs or servants, at best, but the majority end up stored for food or test subjects. While most mortals on Drakha have been abducted from Valerna during a Red Moon raid, there is a growing number of those who are born on Drakha, having known no life other than that under dragon rule.

Playing on the Red Moon

Some game terms and rules work differently on Drakha than in other worlds, be they official game supplements, other licensed third-party content, or those of your own creation. The most important differences are listed below.

DAY/NIGHT CYCLE

Drakha is a satellite of Rhaava; thus, all measurements are relative to a standard Rhaavan day. Drakha completes one revolution, a full rotation on its own axis, every twenty-seven days. This means that using a normal day on Rhaava as a metric, the Red moon has three days of sunrise, ten days of daylight, four days of twilight, and ten days of night. Players should keep this in mind when they plan their actions. Since days and nights are longer, planning for a night raid or tactical attack might be a bit more complex than usual.

Player characters can tell the actual time relative to a Rhaavan day by looking at Rhaava in the sky, which also turns on its own axis at a much greater speed, revealing different portions of itself throughout the day. Mortals on Drakha have learned to tell time by which side of Rhaava they are looking at. If a player asks what time it is, assume that they look at Rhaava and know an approximate time, or have them try a DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check if you want to add a challenge.

Valernians and other player characters on Drakha still need to take a long rest every twenty-four hours to avoid exhaustion, as well as to replenish their class skills and abilities.

WATER ON DRAKHA

Water is very scarce on the surface of Drakha. However, there are a few established methods for finding or obtaining naturally occurring water, which most Drakha-bound Valernians are aware of. The most common are finding a cave that connects to the underground, where there is a vast cavern system with water, or digging a deep well to find the natural water level, usually about thirty-to-sixty feet deep and taking about an hour to dig.

You can simply ask your players to succeed at a DC 25 Wisdom (Survival) check to find water too. When water is magically created, the spell always yields half the spell's capacity. The liquid is usually murky with a certain bitter taste, but it is otherwise drinkable.

FINDING FOOD ON DRAKHA

Food is difficult to come by on Drakha. Adventurers can find roots and some plants on the surface nutritious enough to keep them alive. For protein, the small, rodent-like vyr is the most common edible animal on the Red Moon. These creatures are hard to catch, but one adult specimen can provide enough food for a six-person meal. Alternatively, insects are present in many shapes and sizes, and can all provide adequate nutrition if consumed in enough numbers, after disposing of any venomous appendages or sacks some of them have, of course.

FAUNA ON DRAKHA

Few non-draconic species remain on the Red Moon. These species all avoid dragons, but some can hunt and kill dragonkin—and Valernians too. Most creatures are very territorial and will fight to the death if confronted near their lair, hunting down whatever they find intruding in the area around it. Throughout the adventures, you will find several mentions of creatures with their names printed in **bold.** This indicates that you can find their stat blocks in appendix A.

DIVINITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Creatures in the Dragonbond Universe do not have souls, and there are no deities whatsoever. Vaala is the essential source of the universe, and it infuses every living being except for dragons and their kind. Vaala is the origin of all magic in Rhaava and the most coveted resource on Drakha, one the dragons devour to empower themselves and store in Va'ra crystals for later consumption or to power their experiments and creations.

Prayers by clerics from other worlds are answered by the corresponding Draconic Rune representing the essence of the cleric's faith, and perhaps by one of the azhurma themselves, which can be the embodiment of one of the aspects assigned to or controlled by those alien deities residing on some other world or plane elsewhere in the endless corners of the Omniverse.

MAGIC ON DRAKHA

Some magic works differently on Drakha than in any other standard fantasy setting. As the Red Moon is cut off from Vaala and as draconic magic is fueled by Kadmic runecraft, the effects of certain spells are either diminished or non-existent.

Revivify, raise dead, resurrection, true resurrection and similar spells only work on bodies that did not have their Vaala completely taken at the moment of their death. Any dragon that consumes a sentient Valernian instantly absorbs their Vaala. Similarly, all Va'ra crystal weapons absorb Vaala when injuring a Valernian, meaning a Valernian killed by one of these weapons cannot be revived by any means.

Teleportation and similar magic is very unstable on the Red Moon. Only Coatl dragons have perfected teleportation through their extensive studies. Thus, when determining the success of a teleport spell, any "on target" result is considered "off-target" unless the caster is a dragon of the Coatl brood. Other teleportation effects can function normally if they have a short range. However, when teleporting greater distances, such spells and effects don't quite work as usual, or at all.

Create water yields are cut in half, and they produce lukewarm, murky water, with a sour taste to it, as it is not created as much as it is brought forth from the underground reservoirs crisscrossing the Red Moon. Any magically created water overheats and noisily evaporates if left exposed for 1 hour or more. On the other hand, *destroy water* will make it go out with a bang and create a thick cloud of steam lasting 1 minute.

Control weather, control winds, and similar effects require the caster to succeed on a DC 30 Wisdom saving throw to maintain concentration for each round of the effect's duration.

All dragons have advantage on saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities, and dragons of any brood are immune to the *maze* spell.

Magical constructs that are typically immune to most damage or that normally cannot be dispelled, such as the *forcecage* and *wall of force* spells, can be normally damaged or dispelled. Such magical structures are considered to have an AC equal to 10 + the spell's level and resistance to all types of damage, and each of their sides has hit points equal to 10 × the spell's level. (E.g., each side of a prison or box made with a 9th-level *forcecage* spell has 90 hit points, and it has an AC of 19.)

Character Creation

Players can create their character using any available 5e-compatible content you allow them to or bring any pre-made 17th-level character from such a source. As long as you as the GM allow it, the players can use any character, race, or class that they prefer.

If your players want to create a character from scratch to play on the Red Moon, we recommend the following steps:

- Use the basic character creation rules. That is to say, choose the character's race and class (or multiclass) then level the character up to 17th level, giving it all the class abilities, spells, and ability modifiers allowed for said character.
- Choose the starting equipment, then add three uncommon, two rare, and one very rare magic items.
- As part of a character's background, consider giving Draconic as a known language since adventurers are assumed to have lived on Drakha long enough to be semi-literate in it.
- Any new equipment exclusive to Drakha, offered to the player characters throughout the adventure or as part of the adventurers' starting loadouts, will have all of its relevant information in appendix B.

Fighting the Great Wyrms of Drakha

Great Wyrms are gargantuan, intimidating creatures. Fighting them isn't easy, especially if you rely on a disordered strategy and enter the fray without any information about your opponent. Finding the correct approach to each encounter and emerging victorious will always prove to be a challenge.

Great Wyrm combat is slightly differently from normal 5e encounters, especially regarding the monster's actions. In this system, the GM and the players participate in a battle of wits where the players must discover the weaknesses of their foe and apply the correct strategy while the GM uses a wide range of attacks and actions that make every fight truly unique.

The new rules provide an alternative to traditional battles against frighteningly powerful creatures wherein—despite the power of legendary actions—players could still easily overwhelm the opponent, creating the sensation that the encounter was not challenging enough or simply too

similar to others of its kind. In order to break out of this mold, we've introduced a few new systems which are all explained in the "Battle Mechanics" section below.

Battle Mechanics

The large-scale combat encounters against the dragons in these adventures utilize a series of new mechanics to provide a dynamic, and threatening, experience for the players.

SCALABILITY

The encounters herein use a scaling system that adapts to the number of adventurers in the party. Many of the characteristics of the fight, such as a dragon's hit point maximum and number of actions, are determined by the number of player characters in the encounter. Whenever an N appears in a formula in the rules text, it refers to the number of adventurers currently participating in the encounter.

Although the scalability rule is intended to adapt the Great Wyrms to various gaming group sizes, all the encounters in this book are optimized for a party of four player characters. The difficulty of various encounters in the adventures can be modified, however, by adjusting the number of enemies.

PHASES

Great Wyrms are fought through a series of phases. These are specific to each dragon and determine not only the behavior and state of the creature but that of the environment as well, both setting a stage and moving the combat forward. Whenever there's a change of phase, new mechanics and actions may become available, while others might no longer be usable. Additionally, the behavior of the monster changes.

Each phase specifies the number of actions per round that the Great Wyrm can perform, any special actions or situations that exist during that phase, and the conditions that must be met in order to end the current phase and transition to the next phase.

ACTIONS AND THE ACTION POOL

Great Wyrms have an action pool consisting of a number of actions currently available to the dragon, defined by the phase of the fight and the number of characters they are facing. A dragon's available action pool is equal to N (the number of player characters) + a phase modifier listed under the specific details for the current phase of the battle. The cost in actions for each of the dragon's actions is listed in parentheses after the name of the action. In some cases, an ability may add extra actions to the pool.

The unique actions available to the dragon from this pool can be performed on its turn, but they can also work similarly to legendary actions, in that the dragon may use these actions after any other creature has taken an action. However, unlike legendary actions, the dragon can use more than one of these actions in a row after another creature's turn. Most of a dragon's abilities require more than one action to be spent from the action pool to be performed, reducing the number of actions currently available in the dragon's action pool accordingly. The different unique actions Great Wyrms can take are specified in their stat block at the end of each adventure.

The Great Wyrms can, of course, still use any of the regular actions available to any creature, such as Dash, Disengage, Ready, etc. These actions can only be performed on the dragon's turn, and they each cost one action from its action pool.

UPKEEP

Upkeep is the moment when an azhurma replenishes its action pool and can use special passive abilities called upkeep actions. An azhurma's upkeep happens every round at the beginning of its turn based on its initiative.

Any unspent actions in the dragon's action pool are lost at the beginning of a dragon's upkeep. That is, the action pool never exceeds its maximum as defined in the details of the fight's current phase. Keep track of any of the dragon's abilities or lair effects that activate during upkeep.

EXPLOITS

Fighting a Great Wyrm is a difficult and highly perilous endeavor. Exploits are specific materials, situations, or actions available to player characters, if they can figure them out, that can debilitate an azhurma or otherwise turn the tide in the adventurers' favor.

A party that wants to have any hope of survival should investigate the creature beforehand, over the course of the respective adventure, to find its exploits. If the adventurers attempt a course of action that aligns, or mostly aligns, with one of the exploits available to use against the Great Wyrm they are fighting, use the mechanics detailed in that exploit to resolve their efforts.

BODY PARTS

The azhurma are so massive that their hit points and statistics are divided into separate body parts, standard among all seven of the dragons: upper and lower torso, left and right claws, left and right legs, wings, tail, and head. Each body part has its own specifications, which affect only that body part.

Whenever a player attacks a Great Wyrm, they should choose the specific part they want to target. It could make sense to assume that some attacks automatically target one specific body part, if you decide. For example a halfling's sneak attack could be required to target one of the legs, one of the claws, or the tail, or psychic attacks have to target the head.

Area of effect attacks and spells damage all the body parts that are caught in the area effect, as if they were separate targets. However, the azhurma is allowed only one collective saving throw per attack, spell, or effect for all targeted body parts. Additionally, spells and effects that may kill or destroy a target outright, may only destroy or affect an azhurma's individually targeted body part, rather than the entire creature.

Scores and Statistics

Great Wyrms use a normal 5e creature stat block but with a different action structure and increased hit points divided among separate body parts with varying ACs. Some body parts have specific saving throw bonuses stated; if not, they use the saving throw bonus listed in the dragon's main stat block. Additionally, some may have special rules that override those in this section.

Hit Points. Each of the azhurma's body parts has a set amount of hit points. The hit point maximum for each of their body parts is expressed as N × a base hit point value for the body part, which helps scale the encounter according to the group's size.

Breaking Body Parts. When a body part reaches zero hit points, it is considered broken. Either the dragon can't use it in combat anymore, or it otherwise becomes heavily impaired. When a body part is broken, the text listed under that part's broken condition provides a short, flavorful description in italics to read aloud to the players and establishes the effects of that body part being so severely injured.

Armor Class. AC works exactly the same as it does in traditional 5e systems. It is the number required to get a successful hit on the body part.

Damage Reduction. Each dragon has a damage reduction (DR) trait equal to its Constitution modifier. After applying resistances and vulnerabilities, any damage from an individual source, whether physical or magical, is reduced by the dragon's DR. For example, a dragon with 8 DR who is resistant to fire and who takes 5 bludgeoning damage and 10 fire damage from a single source will only receive 2 damage total.

SPECIAL PLAYER ACTIONS

The system also allows for some new actions that player characters may perform during combat to gain an advantage against the Great Wyrm.

Mount

On their turn, any character may use the Mount action to attempt to climb a Great Wyrm in an effort to deal direct melee damage to a body part that's higher or out of reach.

The character must start on a low body part (legs, arms, or tail) and use their movement to get to other body parts by using a Strength (Athletics), Dexterity (Acrobatics), Wisdom (Animal Handling), or Wisdom (Survival) check against that body part's shake DC. While mounting the dragon, characters cannot be targeted by its melee attacks, but they are still subject to effects that target an area.

Shake DC. A body part's shake DC is the DC of the Strength (Athletics), Dexterity (Acrobatics), Wisdom (Animal Handling), or Wisdom (Survival) check required to climb the corresponding body part via the Mount action. If the dragon uses the Shake action described in their list of actions, or certain other actions available to them as defined there, this is also the DC of the Strength or Dexterity save the character must make to avoid falling.

Examine

If you allow it, a player character may use the Examine action to make a DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), Intelligence (Investigation), Intelligence (Nature), or Intelligence (Religion) check to obtain information on the Great Wyrm. If the check succeeds, the character learns the details of one of the Great Wyrm's actions or abilities and their rough action pool percentage at the moment (e.g., the dragon has "almost all", "about 50%" or "almost none" of its action pool still available).

THE VOICE OF DISSENT

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

"Be witness thus to your Brood Sire
As shining sun, my glorious fire!
We be His Radiant Majesty!
Follow, share my glory, see
How I bring order, light the way
And hold Drakha's darkness at bay."

—Aureus' Promise, etched upon the Golden Gate

Aureus Fulgen, greatest among the azhurmas, founded and rules the Golden City, a beacon of civilization unique on Drakha, its dream-like landscape glimmering atop the Advent Peaks.

Here, dragonkin and Valernians swarm its busy streets, finding safety within its walls. Still, the city is not perfect, and not everyone is equal. Valernians are low-class citizens, and the pressure has been mounting over many centuries.

Now, a group of brave warriors decides the time has come to put an end to the dragons' rule, as they intend to claim their freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to "The Voice of Dissent," a Dragonbond adventure and part of the Great Wyrms of Drakha adventure series.

The Golden City is the most developed settlement in all of Drakha, and the only true foothold of civilization in the desolate surface of Rhavaa's red moon. Monumental barely describes the proportions, size and scope of its creator's project. Swarming with Fulgen dragons and their dragonkin, their mark can be felt in every nook and cranny. Then, at the end of the base of this pyramid, are the Valernians—the luckiest of all of the abductees taken by the dragons—who carry on with their lives under the rule of the wise and powerful Azhurma Aureus Fulgen.

Running the Adventure

"The Voice of Dissent" is an epic adventure meant for three to five characters that will start at 17th level. During the course of the adventure, the characters will advance to 20th level through the use of milestones before entering the final battle against Aureus Fulgen, His Radiant Majesty. For additional information on the Red Moon and other notes in general refer to the "Getting Started" section at the beginning of this book.

If you need some specific details on how time and some magic work in this setting, the "Drakha, the Red Moon" section near the start of this book provides valuable information. The "Adventure Background" section below tells you everything you need to know to understand this adventure's immediate setting. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run, giving you a broad sense of the events involved and how they will unfold throughout the adventure.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.

The Golden City

The only real jewel amid the Drakhan wastelands, the Golden City is a cultural and architectural wonder, its monolithic beauty shining across the landscape for dozens of miles around, as Aureus intended. Although, over the ages, the Golden City has become a melting pot of sorts, it was built with dragons in mind, so almost everything in it is truly enormous in size. This means that moving from one place to another can take several hours and most of its architecture is of gargantuan proportions.

The city's layout is perfectly circular and divided into three concentric rings. The Outer Ring is where most of the dragonkin and Valernian populations take residence, toil away, trade, train, and tend to their needs. Thus, this is where the adventurers will find houses, inns, warehouses, and other places of economic activities. Dragons present in this area usually are on patrol or visiting with a specific purpose in mind.

The Middle Ring and Center Ring are where most dragons live and train. These sections house the six most notorious locations in the city: the Scriptorium, the Academy, the Gardens of Healing, the Court of Trials, the Repository, and the Gilt Library. Only Valernians provided with special dispensations are allowed inside either of these two rings, and they'll be closely watched upon entering. At the heart of the Center Ring stands the Golden Palace, the highest landmark in the city, visible from many miles away. That is where Azhurma Aureus Fulgen watches over his mighty and breathtaking creation.

This adventure includes the Golden City map indicating the areas the players are most likely to visit.

Valernians in the Golden City

Although they greatly contribute to the city's wealth and serve the Fulgen dragons in almost every capacity, Valernians are always considered second-class citizens at best. While many of them were captured on Rhaava and brought back to the Golden City, the majority were born on Drakha, descendants of Valernians captured during one of the previous dragon raids.

Although Valernians have some rights under Aureus' rule, many still dream of finding a way to return to their ancestral home one day, while a small-yet-growing group seeks ways to overthrow their dragon oppressors.

The Charred Claw

A vast, secretive network with tendrils reaching far into several places on Drakha, the Charred Claw has roots burrowed deep into the Golden City. Their main goal is to exile all Valernians from their lands, which itself requires the secondary goal of overthrowing Aureus Fulgen and seizing power in the Golden City.

The Charred Claw's ranks are exclusively made up of dragonkin led by dragons, and its membership is known for its sheer viciousness, resourcefulness, and secrecy. They all take pride in never letting themselves be captured alive to face judgment.

Of one mind over their ultimate goal, but not on how best to achieve it, there are several splinter groups with particular ideas regarding the Charred Claw's mission. Still, all of these cells are working from the shadows to bring victory forth, requiring them to be engaged in myriad activities vital to the Golden City's daily life. This is how they spread their insidious presence, and none will rest until Aureus Fulgen is brought low and his dream of coexistence with lessers goes up in flames.

Adventure Background

A plot to overthrow Aureus is being devised by a group of influential Valernians and their dragonkin allies. If they succeed at their goals, they will have enough resources and muscle to stage their uprising. However, should their plans fail or be discovered, the authorities in the Golden City will swiftly round up all those found to be involved in planning or helping to further sedition in any capacity. Needless to say, they will be arrested and sentenced to death after a trial by Aureus.

Prasimun

A renowned water-broker by trade, Prasimun was taken at a very young age from a settlement in Valerna two Red Moons ago.

Although he is a very well-known and successful trader, he has never stopped thinking about ways to return to Tyveria or, failing that, striking back at the dragons who caused him so much grief over his long life.

Azarax

A Valernian porter working at the Golden City's Commerce Court, Azarax was one of the first individuals to support Prasimun's plans and, now, is one of the leaders in the uprising.

Luuthara

A tinker and artisan, well known and well liked among both local Valernians and sympathetic dragonkin, Luuthara is living proof of Valernian willpower and courage. Her greatest asset is the rare skill that dragonkin refer to as mechanicism, as she is the greatest mechanician in the Golden City.

Xinlei

An Ellari illusionist who was moved by Prasimun's talk of rebellion, Xinlei was a servant to an Allarian alchemist prior to her capture and transport to Drakha. She has been commissioned by the rebel leader to design explosives and find discreet ways to acquire all of the necessary components to craft them.

The insurgents' plan is to use her explosives to blow up a section of the city's Middle Wall, turning the guard's attention there and allowing a separate infiltrating force to reach the Inner Ring relatively unimpeded.

Dhu'Myr

Posing as a Fulgen dragonkin art broker from the Golden City, Dhu'Myr is, in truth, a shapeshifted Magnifex dragon. For decades her true mission has been to secretly obtain runes and powerful artifacts from Fulgen territory, which she smuggles among the art she sends to brood Magnifex. She has built a vast network of contacts all over town, with whom she has mostly cordial and mutually beneficial business relationships.

Solimarnex the Cunning

A young, ambitious Fulgen dragon who supports the Charred Claw and their conspiracy to topple Aureus, Solimarnex the Cunning has a place among His Grand Majesty's High Council of Advisors. He is nothing if not opportunistic, and once he found out that his political enemy, the dragonkin Sulakkos, was entertaining many of the Valernians' complaints and demands for better treatment, he immediately set his agents to spy on Sulakkos' contacts.

This. however, attracted the attention of a certain group of very resourceful individuals who struck a deal with him: Solimarnex was to feed both the rebels and Aureus himself with misinformation aimed at delaying both the actual Valernian uprising and Aureus' prompt response to the growing unrest, all in exchange for "a position of far greater privilege in the regime soon to come." Already a counselor, Solimarnex could only wonder what this position could be and readily accepted the deal.

While he is not being considered to become a full-fledged member of the Charred Claw, the group has found in him a well-connected ally and a perfect scapegoat

Sulakkos the Agreeable

A high dragonkin representative in the Inner Ring, Sulakkos the Agreeable is absolutely loyal to Aureus but very sympathetic to the Valernian cause, and he supports their uprising as long as it leads to a positive result and a better quality of life with as little violence and destruction as possible.

Sulakkos possesses information crucial for the adventurers, which is why the Charred Claws want him silenced.

Zunrūs

A dragonkin veteran, Zunrüs is a former member of the Goldclaws, the elite dragonkin guard in the Golden City. When Zunrüs' zeal caused an indiscriminate massacre against a group of quarreling Valernian traders, he was dismissed from the Goldclaws, which vexes him to his day.

Zunrüs festering, increasing hatred against the "illogical and unjustifiable value that Aureus sees in Valernians, to the detriment of dragonkind," made him an ideal candidate for the Charred Claw. He is the Claw's current intermediary between them and Solimarnex, and should the High Counselor begin to deviate from their plans, Zunrüs is to remove Solimarnex for good.

Zunrüs is behind the sabotage of the adventurers' first missions, and he is also the one that gathers all of the evidence against the party for Solimarnex, who intends to frame the PCs as the sole instigators of a traitorous rebellion, accusing them before Aureus himself.

Sulakkos

Adventure Overview

"The Voice of Dissent" consists of five sections, including a prologue and four acts.

The adventure leads the party into helping various NPCs within the Golden City, which in turn gradually involves the adventurers more and more in the uprising plot, until they are forced to confront Aureus himself, the lord of the city and self-styled ruler of the Red Moon. Whichever way this final confrontation may go, it will seal the future of all Valernians living in the Golden City.

You will be using map 1.1: The Golden City both to lead your players through the adventure and as a reference for timekeeping. When the adventurers move between city areas, use the numbered locations on the map to find the relevant section in the text.

PROLOGUE: IN THE SHADOW OF RADIANCE

The opening of the adventure where the player characters get acquainted with life in the Golden City and first encounter the personalities behind the coming uprising, a few days before the Founding Festival, the Golden City's most important celebration.

The human merchant Prasimun seeks out the adventurers, hoping they share his ideal of freedom from Aureus. Over the past several years, he has been staging a plan to rebel against the rule of His Radiant Majesty. Little by little, he—along with other hidden allies—has managed to gather support and obtain weapons to back his plan. Its main thrust is to attack strategic points within the city and take temporary control over them, fending off the dragons and guards long enough for Prasimun and his people to reach the Court of Trials and invoke their right to duel as stated in the Golden Codex, thus forcing Aureus to face their challenge and, at least, hear the Valernians out.

ACT 1: FROM TAIL TIP TO HORN POINT

To succeed at their goal, the insurgency needs to have enough weapons and alchemical components to secure control over the chosen key locations, both within the Outer Ring and in the Barrier Quarter next to the Middle Ring's wall.

The resources for carrying this task out are obtainable, but the insurgents need to get them to key points within the city to make these easily accessible to their forces once the uprising begins. Thus, whoever accepts this task must go about it unnoticed, quickly, and with no unnecessary questions asked.

Unbeknownst to the conspirators, the Charred Claw's agents are furthering dissension and backing the rebellious Valernians, intent on sabotaging the deliveries to arm their own revolt against Aureus while also drawing attention to Prasimun's Valernian insurgents.

If the player characters succeed, they are tasked with meeting Sulakkos, Prasimun's ally at the Golden City council, for some very important information about the uprising.

ACT 2: SMALL FAVORS

As they wait for the day of their meeting with Sulakkos, the adventurers receive an invitation from Dhu'Myr, a well-known and respected dragonkin merchant, who is unconvinced by Prasimun's plan and remains mostly neutral in the coming revolt. Yet, she has a proposition for them, based on their "unmatched skills and distinguished careers."

Dhu'Myr presents the adventurers with a copy of an arcane tablet. She explains it is a masterful forgery of the Golden Codex, Aureus' code that rules over every aspect of life in the Golden City. The forgery was commissioned by a third party, interested in acquiring the original tome, who tapped Dhu'Myr as an intermediary. Dhu'Myr wants the adventurers to take the forgery and replace the original codex with it, which is currently sitting at Aureus' Scriptorium, being prepped for its regular exhibition during the week-long Founding Festival.

Dhu'Myr promises a very enticing reward for the task and provides the adventurers with a map to the Forlorn Lanes, the half-hidden network of abandoned streets between the Golden City's three rings. If the adventurers accept the job, they must do their best to go in, complete their task, and get out undetected, or else they may jeopardize the uprising by drawing undue attention.

ACT 3: NEITHER DAGGERS NOR SHIELDS

The adventurers have now, hopefully, completed both prior missions and established an indisputable reputation with both the leaders of the uprising and certain other NPCs with positions of power or influence within the Golden City. They also have managed to attract the Charred Claw's attention, which strikes simultaneously at two fronts.

First, the player characters are informed that an important city dignitary has marked Sulakkos for assassination during his meeting with the PCs. Second, the party has left some evidence behind in their previous escapades, and Dhu'Myr has been informed that the same dignitary is in possession of this evidence, which singles them out as being behind a revolt against the city's ruler.

If the uprising takes place, His Grand Majesty Aureus will doubtlessly mark the adventurers as its sole instigators.

But before worrying about that, the party must race against the Charred Claw, both literally and figuratively, to stop the assassination attempt and acquire Sulakkos' information to help the uprising.

ACT 4: TO RISE AND DIE

Despite the uprising's outcome, which in the canon of the Dragonbond setting's history failed spectacularly, the actual events during the final confrontation against Aureus Fulgen are up to the player characters through both their previous actions and their choices during this final act.

The Charred Claw's constant meddling is finally revealed and the adventurers will have a more complete view, and hopefully a clearer understanding, of the real intentions behind the Claw's various machinations.

Be it as hard-pressed saviors or willing agents of chaos, the adventurers will finally come face to face with Aureus. The battle's aftermath, and the fate of Drakha, depends on the party. Do they really support the uprising? Were they forced into confronting Aureus? Will the Golden City fall? Or will it stand proud, shaken from the recent events but still a beacon of law in the Drakhan Mountains?

Adventure Hooks

This adventure assumes that the party is made up of Valernian residents of the Golden City, brought to Drakha as prisoners but now respected because of their skills.

If the characters have specific variant backgrounds, assume they were in fact summoned to Drakha, or to the Golden City, by one of the interested parties—Dhu'Myr and Solimarnex both have contacts and artifacts with the power to summon help from other worlds—to aid them in their plans to destabilize Aureus' rule:

During their normal adventures, the adventurers have noticed a strange red moon, an unusual event in the sky of their world. Shortly after the rise of this red moon, the characters encounter a scroll, a letter inviting them to be part of an event that will change an entire world, for a glorious cause, and reap exorbitant rewards.

The letter is actually a magical scroll, intended to spirit the adventurers away to Drakha upon reading. It was, of course, planted on their world by Dhu'Myr, Solimarnex, or one of the Charred Claw leaders, hoping to snatch an adventurer that is skilled enough and unfamiliar enough with Drakha to serve as a tool, and patsy, for their scheme. You may make the scroll's power obvious, or you may hide it to trick the player characters into reading it.

In any case, once they read the letter, the PCs are transported to the Golden City, a metropolis where human-sized, biped dragons seem to be the majority population, and other humanoid peoples seem to be their inferiors. Let the player characters take the city in, describe it a bit, and proceed with the prologue as soon as they enter an inn or tavern.

Timekeeping

Time is an important factor in "The Voice of Dissent." The party has under three standard days, 64 hours to be precise, to fulfill a series of complex missions before the Founding Festival, and the time they take to carry out each task will reflect on their ultimate success or failure.

Be sure to keep a careful tally of the number of hours the player characters take to fulfill their missions during the adventure, and use the Golden City Map to calculate the time they spend moving from one area to the next. This has many consequences throughout the story, and the free hours they may enjoy to rest and prepare before Act 4 can make a great difference in their final battle against Aureus.

Remember that, while time in the Golden City passes differently, adventurers still need to take a long rest for 8 hours out of every 24, or risk exhaustion.

MAP 1.1: THE GOLDEN CITY

PROLOGUE: IN THE SHADOW OF RADIANCE

The player characters begin their adventure taking a stroll around the Golden City. Describe the city briefly to them, pointing out the strange differences in time from the adventurers' homeworld. Daylight on Drakha lasts for roughly ten Rhaavan days, and currently the city is in the last days of its night cycle.

Also, the adventurers notice that the population is preparing for a major event coming in a few days: the Founding Festival, a citywide commemoration of Aureus' grandest creation—the Golden City itself. It is the only festivity in the city that non-dragons may attend, and Aureus uses it to mark the time when he inscribed the Golden Codex, which serves as the city's written law book, and commanded his brood to begin the construction of his city.

1. East Neighborhood

The adventurers begin in the Outer Ring's East Neighborhood, which is filled with humanoid-size dwellings, lanes, stores and businesses. As they walk, a lean man approaches them, smiling warmly.

> *"Forgive me for approaching you thus, kind heroes."* The man's voice is low-pitched and calm. His face is angular with sharp cheekbones and a strong, if a bit pointy, chin, and his hair is a bit matted, dirtied from hard work. As he smiles at you, once more, you notice he is missing a couple of teeth and that, even though he looks slender, he has visibly wiry muscles.
>
> *"You sure are quite… noticeable individuals. I won't dally with long explanations: Prasimun, the water broker, would like to see you as soon as you have time. He'll be waiting at one of the private rooms over at the Broken Fang. Come as you will, but don't keep him waiting for long. He's an old man and needs his rest."*
>
> Without sudden moves, the lean trader slowly stands up and walks away, raising his hands to show he means the adventurers no harm, and dismisses himself saying, *"Until we meet again, mak'tir ur'hrah."*

Any character that understands Draconic recognizes that the last phrase means "beloved of the same brood" or "the same dear people as me."

If the party has spent at least a few days in the Golden City, they have heard of this old trader Prasimun. He is a harmless and well-liked human merchant in the Outer Ring, brought here during a raid on the world of Rhaava decades ago. Otherwise, a DC 22 Intelligence (Investigation) check will confirm this information.

Asking any citizen, dragonkin or otherwise, about the Broken Fang reveals that it's a well-known Valernian-only inn, meaning that, for the most part, dragonkin don't frequent it, down in Matharek Square, a good half hour's walk away from the East Neighborhood. As soon as the adventurers proceed to the Broken Fang, mention the preparations for the Founding Festival again as they walk to their meeting.

2. The Broken Fang

A well-known but utterly discrete "Valernian Only" tavern in one of the many market plazas across the Outer Ring, the Broken Fang has functional and unremarkable interiors, even if certain important Valernians are rumored to come here and trade in "luxury items and choice information."

Once the adventurers enter the building, the familiar noises and warmth of a "normal" tavern greet their senses. The place is cozy and well-furnished, and the player characters notice its patrons are all Valernian, that is, humans, elves, gnomes, halflings, and other non-draconic peoples. They are mainly businesspeople and traders, and seem at least moderately successful. Most of the patrons mind their business, but a few look at the party with mild curiosity.

The adventurers notice the man that approached them earlier to deliver the invitation to meet Prasimun here. He stands from his table and greets them, leading them to a more private part of the hall. There, an old man in fine robes is sitting on a cushioned high chair. He addresses the player characters directly.

> *"I'm pleased you agreed to come. Your reputations precede you and, of course, speak for themselves. This is the reason that I dare present you with a… proposition that requires utmost discretion."*
>
> The old man looks at the man standing next to the table, who nods. *"Idannlor here is a requisition collector. He knows everyone in the trader squares and those dragonkin most willing to do business with us. Especially those who are most sympathetic to Valernian concerns regarding our… station in the order of things. Tell me, what do you know of the Golden City?"*

Prasimun (N male human **commoner**) and Idannlor (LN male human **commoner**) tell the party all about the Golden City. Let the player characters ask any question they wish, but mostly take this opportunity to explain the city and its class struggle between dragons and their Valernian subjects. Prasimun and Idannlor assume the adventurers will, of course, automatically side with Valernians on this issue.

When the party more or less understands the situation, Prasimun explains how a growing number of influential Valernians have become fed up with their lot as second-rate citizens and want to do something to change it. Knowing negotiations for improved conditions will ultimately end in a stalemate, if they even reach Aureus' High Council, the "league" has agreed that it is time to move on to a more active way of having their demands met.

If the adventurers question him further, he will answer their questions and make it quite clear that yes, this thing they are planning is an uprising, and they have the means to carry it out.

Prasimun wants the party to help some of his allies prepare for the uprising before the Founding Festival. Once the player characters are satisfied with the information provided, he presents them with three missions. If the player characters ask what's in it for them, he tells them that, being so "notorious and capable," they will most likely be among the first to be considered for positions of leadership in the "new order of things'' to come. If that doesn't seem to interest the party, Prasimun also promises they will be rewarded for their efforts.

Prasimun doesn't care which mission they chose to carry out first, as long as they complete all three of them. These are the missions, as he explains:

- "Try to get in touch with Luuthara, the mechanicist. She has unique skills that could help the cause but is… reluctant to directly cooperate with us. Her partner Meerynna is more agreeable to our ideals, but she will support Luuthara first and foremost. She might help you change her partner's mind or at least find a way to help you."
- "Also, my old friend Azarax from the porters guild is ready to provide us with a load of magical weapons, supposedly good against dragons, and other smuggled goods, but he needs your help carrying them to the warehouses he has near the Middle Wall, where our people can readily access them."
- "Then there's Xinlei, a very smart elf alchemist and a loyal supporter. She has developed a powerful explosive which she keeps in a secret storage area. However, this place is no longer useful. The explosives need to be moved to a safer, more convenient location."

Whichever of the three missions the adventurers choose to fulfill first, it's up to them; however, Prasimun and Idannlor stress that it must be done quickly and, above all, discreetly.

Prasimun points at where his associates operate on the Golden City Map: Luuthara's workshop is in an industrial district in Area 3, Azarax can be found at the Commerce Court in Area 4, and Xinlei has a laboratory in Area 5.

After giving these instructions, Prasimun leaves. Idannlor can debrief the party on Luuthara, Xinlei, or Azarax, as described in the "Adventure Background" section, and discreet paths to their respective locations. He also suggests meeting with Luuthara first. She may have something to help the other two tasks move considerably faster.

Idannlor estimates that all errands should be completed within 24 hours, depending on how the party handles the transportation. They can take longer if they wish to carry lighter loads or be more cautious, but Idannlor suggests they don't, as the Founding Festival is barely three Rhaavan days away.

Once the party is ready to perform any of the three jobs, the prologue ends and the adventure proper begins.

Roleplaying Prasimun

Old for a human, the water-broker Prasimun was offered a place in the Golden City after he created a small emporium by himself in the outskirts of Aureus' vast territory, which gained him a reputation as a careful developer and aggressive competitor, something the Fulgen dragons found pleasing and worth preserving.

Despite his professed loyalty to the Golden City, he believes in freeing Valernians from their second-rate status and, perhaps some day, creating a law that allows them—or at least those that will come after him—to return to their lost homeworld.

His plan is to instigate a grassroots movement, a people's revolt, that spreads across the Golden City during the Founding Festival, forcing Aureus to meet him and his people in the Court of Trials, the ceremonial challenge arena, and to listen to their reasonable demands.

Prasimun

ACT 1: FROM TAIL TIP TO HORN POINT

The adventurers are free to decide who they want to visit first between Azarax, Xinlei, and Luuthara, so we suggest you read this section beforehand to prepare for any decision by the player characters. Should anything unexpected happen, a couple of random encounters (see the "Random Encounters During Act 1" sidebar) can be easily accommodated here to get the player characters back on track.

Timekeeping

Many of the missions during Act 1 indicate the number of hours they take to carry out. Keep a tally of these hours, adding any hours spent in short or long rests, and make a record of the total when the party finishes Act 1.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS DURING ACT 1

While the adventurers are still virtual unknowns at this point, it is possible for their activities to draw the wrong kind of attention. When the text calls for it, or when you consider the player characters to have been too careless, roll once on the Golden City Encounters table and run the indicated encounter. The stats for all listed creatures can be found in appendix A.

Golden City Encounters

1d10	ENCOUNTER	NOTES
1	Dragonkin Thugs	Some drugged dragonkin looking for trouble with "filthy Vh'lernians"; if the adventurers let themselves be provoked into a fight, a troop of Fulgen guards (see result 4–6) arrives to round everyone up
2-3	Dragonkin Snoop	Sent by the Charred Claw or Dhu'Myr to tail the adventurers from a distance; if the party detects him with a DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check, he tries to escape.
4-6	Fulgen Guards	A common dragonkin patrol, looking for anyone acting suspicious around the city; the adventurers may convince them they are not "acting suspicious" with a DC 21 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check
7-8	Fulgen Goldclaws	An elite patrol, warned about a "group of dangerous radicals" that match the adventurers' description
9	Charred Claw Assassin	An elite agent of the Charred Claw, sent to kill one of the adventurers and escape; she flees if forced to face more than one adventurer at the same time
10	Adult Fulgen Dragon	A dragon passes overhead, ignoring the adventurers unless provoked

3. Luuthara & Meerynna's Mechanicism Workshop

If the party has already visited both locations 4 and 5, they have drawn some attention to their activities. Roll for a random encounter on the Golden City Encounters table while the adventurers travel to this location.

Luuthara and Meerynna's workshop is in one of the busy warehouse and industry districts of the Golden City. Take note of the time the players spend reaching this point, and read the following as they approach the location:

> You arrive at a busy part of the City's main trading square. At the end of a tidy cobbled street, you spy several parked carts of unusual design, with porters flexing their muscles or relaxing nearby. They are in front of the open gates of a square building from which you hear hammering, sawing, creaking, and mild yet heartfelt cursing in a sweet, feminine voice.

The place is a midsized warehouse outfitted with several workstations where saws, workbenches, and strange-looking contraptions are placed. Many assistants come and go carrying wooden planks, rods, or sections of insect shells or pushing unattached wheels. Others busily tend to boiling cauldrons in which they place a gelatinous, three-inch-thick membrane given to them by still other shop hands who scrape it from the inside of the chitinous insect shells. The air in this section of the workshop is thick with a pungent cinnamon-like smell.

> *"So, what can we do for you?"* A woman's voice comes from behind a pile of planks. A second voice, the one you heard cursing as you entered, chimes in, *"And better be quick 'bout it! We're 'bout to test our latest prot'type!"*
>
> *"So…?"* the human woman, presumably Luuthara, asks as she slides around the piled planks and stops before your eyes. She's sitting on a… chair that's set atop treads. She has short auburn hair and muscular arms. Next to her, you see a pepper-blonde pint halfling, smiling coyly while caressing the back of Luuthara's chair, filled with pride. This must be Meerynna.
>
> *"Yeh, so geddit out already! What can we do for youse, huh?"* The pint says.

These are Luuthara (female N human **commoner**), the neighborhood's only mechanicist, and her partner Meerynna (female NG halfling **commoner**). The party is to try and convince them to aid the uprising by lending whatever equipment they can. Try to nudge the adventurers into using real arguments and deploying their own diplomacy instead of resorting to die rolls to gain the mechanicists' help

If convinced, the couple take the adventurers to the end of their shop to show them their latest innovation: the treadcart. This is a gloriously awkward contraption, made of wood and shells, like most Fulgen-made carts, but furnished with two sets of treads. One is a triangular treadmill that replaces the usual two-wheel axis, and the other is a powered treadmill at the front, which allows for an operator to carry three times the load at three times the usual speed.

Luuthara has four prototype treadcarts that she may sell to the uprising, but the adventurers must pay 500 gp for each of them with their own gold, since Prasimun gave them no advance. The player characters may halve the amount with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or pay only 50 gp per cart if they sign a voucher and promise to return the prototypes later.

Regardless of the deal struck, the adventurers need to "steal" the carts out of the workshop, so that Meerynna and Luuthara have plausible deniability if they are caught with the carts. They let the party break in and steal the prototypes later that day while the workshop is closed. The player characters must wait **1 hour** before the shop is closed, after which it remains closed for eight more hours.

Sneaking into the closed workshop requires a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If it fails, the party makes enough noise for the GM to roll once on the Golden City Encounters table. If the check succeeds, the adventurers need do nothing else, as Meerynna leaves the workshop open for them. If the PCs try to rob anything else, or actually steal the prototypes without dealing with Luuthara first, they do raise an alarm, calling 6 **Fulgen guards** to the scene.

With or without the treadcarts, once the adventurers leave this area having tried to arrange a deal with Luuthara and Meerynna, the player characters' task is complete. If the party has already visited both locations 4 and 5, you can proceed to the "Rewards" section at the end of this act before moving on to Act 2.

Roleplaying Meerynna and Luuthara

Meerynna and Luuthara are a couple of sympathetic and supportive women, but not quite willing to risk their lives or livelihood by getting directly involved in the uprising. Meerynna is particularly adamant about not doing anything that might put Luuthara in danger.

Luuthara lost the use of her legs during the raid that brought her to Drakha. However, Rivo Saego, a gnomish warehouse worker, took in the crippled child and helped her survive her injuries. He made sure to teach his craft to Luuthara and that she never forget "the power of her willing mind applied to tools." Once Luuthara was strong enough to work, Rivo designed a couple of crutches and a skid she could use to move around their small hovel and inside the grain warehouse where they worked.

As she grew older, she began modifying her skid to have it become a bench first, and then, after much trial and error, the ubiquitous trademark treadchair everybody associates her with nowadays.

As her mechanicist skills developed, Luuthara came up with a system of pulleys which allowed for lifting and moving bigger loads onto and off of the carts used to transport grain sacks around the city. That was around the time when she met Meerynna, a lithe, enthusiastic, and skilled pint who entered her workshop as an apprentice and, over the years, chose "Chief Mechanician Luuty" as her partner and lifelong companion. It was between them that they came up with the idea of the tread cart, allowing even a pint to move heavy loads at speeds faster than the fastest courier could on foot.

4. Commerce Court

Possibly the busiest part of the Outer Ring, Commerce Court is where Valernians, dragonkin, and dragons all meet to swap, trade, and offer almost all manner of legal goods and regulated services.

As the adventurers approach Commerce Court, read them the following:

> Commerce Court is an enormous decagon surrounded by buildings of all sizes and dotted with tents on all its ten sides—a few of the bigger ones are closer to its center—and teeming with Valernians, dragonkin, and dragons, all peddling, haggling, or looking for all kinds of goods and services. Torches illuminate the stalls and the walkways between them, leaving few places in shadow.
>
> An enormous statue of Aureus, made of the same rock as the city's walls, stands majestically amid the busy plaza, lording over the court. Its base has all of its ten sides inscribed with the dictum that rules every transaction held here: "For honest trade, forge a fair deal."
>
> You also notice several units of Steelclaws, Valernian city guards, patrolling the place, and a couple of dragonkin watchers sporadically interacting with them. All seem very relaxed and unsuspecting, used to the busy yet uncomplicated and cordial environment of Commerce Court.

If the party has already visited both locations 3 and 5, they have drawn some attention to their activities. Roll for a random encounter on the Golden City Encounters table as the adventurers walk across Commerce Court.

The party's mission is to find Azarax, gather his hidden weapons and gear, and transport them to secret stashes around the city. While they look for Azarax, this is a good opportunity for them to buy some equipment.

There are all kinds of food, tools, clothes, healing potions, and alchemical items on sale. If the player characters look for weapons, armor, or magic items other than scrolls or potions, they can find them through unlawful channels by succeeding on a DC 26 Intelligence (Investigation) check, but successful or not, this draws attention, requiring a roll on the Golden City Encounters table.

No violent interactions are allowed in Commerce Court, but there is some aggressive wheeling and dealing between the Valernians and some dragonkin, all under the amused scrutiny of the Steelclaws. However, there are certain places where bets are placed on fighting cricket' matches, with the mild cursing and shoving that comes with losing.

If the player characters succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check or if they ask for Azarax by name, they find their way to the farthest corner of Commerce Court, where the activity is less frantic and the space is less crowded.

Azarax

As you reach the spot known as Azarax's Corner, you see a man with a deep tan and long black hair tied into a tight knot in the fashion of the Primalian mountainfolk of Valerna. His frame can best be defined as muscled without being imposing. His face is rugged, and his gaze deep. But his smile seems sincere. He's sitting atop a cart's box and placidly sipping his mukura tea.

With a side glance, he notices you as you approach his place of trade and raises a hand. *"I'm on my break, friends,"* he tells you and takes another sip of his tea. *"A man needs his rest. Still, should you need to move something heavy… to please your older relative and his big, big family… I'm all ears."*

Azarax (NG human male **commoner**) says the last words with a wink, indicating he knows why the adventurers are here and hinting at the fact he's referring to Prasimun and his league. If the party fails to catch on, you may allow them a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check to understand his meaning.

He leaps off his box, and leads the party to where he's stashed his empty carts and their porters. If the party has secured the treadcarts from Luuthara and Meerynna, they don't actually need these, but they still need Azarax's map of where the smuggled weapons are and where they must be taken.

Azarax has a map that shows a cave just outside the city, where the weapons his people have been smuggling for years remain hidden. The map also shows the three warehouses near the Middle Wall where the weapons need to be taken so that they will be ready for the insurgents when the time comes. He gives this to the adventurers and offers his carts and the service of his colleagues to accompany the party to the marked places.

If the party doesn't already have Luuthara and Meerynna's treadcarts, they must pay Azarax 90 gp for the use of six carts. This is non-negotiable, as Azarax needs it all to look like a lawful transaction to the dragonkin inspectors. Azarax and a few of his porter friends offer to pull the carts for free, however, unless some adventurers volunteer for the job.

Once the deal is sealed, Azarax loudly addresses one of the adventurers, asking them to "Come up with a more reasonable offer if you want my associates' services," and bidding them a good day, so that the meeting raises no suspicion among onlookers.

Roleplaying Azarax

Azarax is Valernian from Sabaar, where humans are considered second-class citizens. After being kidnapped, taken to a different world, and finding himself in the exact same position, he has finally become fed up with it. He joined Prasimun's conspiracy as a representative of the common folk, the porters, the market workers, and everyone who makes a living by working for people like Prasimun.

Azarax is a renowned porter, one of the several hundreds of Valernians who sell their physical strength, vital to the transportation needs of Commerce Court merchants, and he is popular among the Commerce Court porters.

He is also one of the few Valernians ever granted the rare Maerush'knat ("Trusted One") dispensation by dragons, allowing him regular access to the Inner Ring without needing to renew it for every trip. This has won him status among his colleagues, turning him into a leader of sorts among the porters and couriers, and helping his "side jobs" go unnoticed, so far.

This helps Azarax remain both liked by the city's Valernians and largely ignored by dragonkin. He can manage to pass largely unnoticed by the Golden City's security forces, the Steelclaws (Valernians loyal to Aureus, which Azarax despises as "sellouts and collaborators") and the Goldclaws (the dragonkin elite guard).

The Delivery

When the party is ready to travel to the smugglers' cave, explain to them they must proceed to the hidden stash at the smugglers' cave in the Dried Banks, a ravine in the city outskirts (**Area 6** in the **Golden City Map**), take the weapons, and bring them back to the Middle Wall warehouses (**Area 7** in the **Golden City Map**). The staff at both locations have been briefed of the adventurers' arrival, so no questions will be asked at either the pickup or any of the dropoff points, especially if the party has Azarax with them.

Use the **Golden City Map** to make a note of the time required to make the run from **Area 4** to **Area 6** and back to **Area 7**. The adventurers require at least one short rest during the operation, which adds at least **1 hour** to their timetable (or more if they choose to take a long rest instead). The players may perform the delivery on foot, by using Azarax's carts, or use faster means of travel if they have them; however, Azarax insists that the sight of Valernians pulling carts is quite normal in the city, so that method would draw minimal attention.

In the event the adventurers have secured Luuthara and Meerynna's treadcart prototypes, they may halve the time required to reach the stash and bring it back, plus they can perform the entire operation without requiring a rest.

5. Xinlei's Compromised Laboratory

Xinlei's makeshift laboratory is in one of the living quarters closest to the Outer Wall. If the party has already visited both locations 3 and 4, they have drawn some attention to their activities. Roll for a random encounter on the Golden City Encounters table while the adventurers head to their destination.

Read the following when the adventurers finally reach the Outer Wall dwellings:

> As you are walking toward the address that Prasimun gave you for Xinlei's lab, a cowled figure turns the corner, surprising you.
>
> *"My friends!"* The hooded figure tells you and raises her hands to show she means you no harm. *"I'm glad I found you here and didn't have to walk all the way to your quarters."* Under the cowl, the figure turns out to be an Ellari woman, a silver elf with a pale complexion and white eyes that seem to have no pupils. Even though she looks happy to see you, her eyes betray long hours of worry.
>
> *"Come, let me walk with you."* The elf's voice is polite, but no longer tinged with joviality. *"Give no hint of surprise. Chat casually among yourselves and ask no questions. I'm Xinlei. I can't meet you at my laboratory."*

Xinlei (CN female elf **Mage**) is Prasimun's alchemist friend. Allow the player characters to react to her sudden appearance. Any attempts to reveal her motives or uncover her true identity confirm that she is telling the truth. She continues:

> The elf exhales as she leads you away from the widest avenues. *"I'll explain. I fear my cover is going to be blown soon. Bolgo, that smelly saltrock picker, is as ambitious as he is a gossip. In his obsession to collect the largest load before returning to the city, the gnome wandered too far from the walls while looking for saltrock and too near to where I was testing another of my mixtures. You need to act fast. Here's the key to my lab. Act before that lumper warns the guard, or worse."*
>
> With that, Xinlei claps and loudly laughs as she stops walking. *"I'll be sure to remember that one, my friends! It was my pleasure to meet you. Be well!"* The elf then turns away and shuffles into the crowd, vanishing as quickly as she arrived.

Again, any efforts to determine the truth of what Xinlei is saying reveal that, while she is indeed a bit paranoid, she is being honest. The talkative gnome she mentioned has been gossiping about strange goings-on in her lab, and it's only a matter of time before the rumor, or Bolgo himself, reaches the authorities. The party needs to be both quick and careful about taking the explosives out of Xinlei's lab and to Prasimun's warehouses along the Middle Wall (**Area 7** in the **Golden City Map**).

Once the adventurers have the key that the frightened elf gave them, retrieving the explosives is straightforward enough. She left the substance neatly packed in two large crates and labeled them simply "these."

As the adventurers exit the warehouse, they see a gnome that runs quickly away. If they give chase, they can stop or kill him easily (AC 12; 10 hp), but this draws attention, forcing a roll on the Golden City Encounters table. Let the adventurers know that the guard has been alerted to them, and they must transport the explosives as fast as they can to avoid being caught.

Taking the explosives to the Middle Wall requires at least one short rest, which adds **1 hour** to the required travel time. However, if the adventurers have secured the treadcarts from Luuthara and Meerynna, they halve the time required and need no additional rest.

The party may further halve the time required for transport by running, but this would risk destabilizing the explosives.

For every hour that the adventurers lug the explosives through the city, each adventurer hauling one of the crates must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity check, adding their proficiency bonus if they have the land vehicle proficiency. If the player characters are running to halve the time spent, the DC of this check increases to 22. If the save fails, the crate's loaded vials begin to rattle, and hissing and bubbling sounds can be heard, indicating that the load is destabilizing.

For additional flavor and tension during this scene, you may describe how the sides of the carts dangerously bump into walls, have the adventurers trashing stalls as they speed through them, or have the carts jumping down stairs or ramps or diagonally from atop ledges and onto a lower terrace. Do not, however, put the adventurers in a situation where their carts will unavoidably roll over, catch fire, or have a head on collision against some unmovable object, unless they willingly make it happen.

If the adventurers continue to move a crate with a destabilizing load, it will become apparent that the noises are growing louder, and the crate will begin to shake mildly. If the adventurers continue moving a load in this state, it explodes, causing everything within one city block, including the other crate if it is present, to explode as well.

All characters in the area, which may include innocent passersby, must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 90 (20d8) fire damage and begin to burn, taking an additional 9 (2d8) fire damage every round. A successful saving throw halves the initial damage and negates the ongoing damage. Any character who was carrying one of the exploding crates gets disadvantage on this save. A burning creature may use an action to put their flames out and stop receiving fire damage. This can also be achieved by dowsing the flames with water.

The destabilizing load in a crate can be restabilized by leaving it stationary for one hour, as revealed by a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Without success on such a check, however, the noises coming from the crate, even if it is left alone, make it difficult to discern when the load has become stable again. After one hour of waiting, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check will inform the adventurers that the load in the stationary crate has restabilized, but failing that check provides them with no information besides the various nerve-wracking sounds from within, which subside after two hours of the crate being stationary.

For every **3 hours** that the adventurers spend carrying their load, roll once on the Golden City Encounters table. If they blow up a crate, **4 Fulgen Goldclaws** arrive within one minute and quickly single out any adventurers remaining in the area as responsible for the explosion.

Once the party arrives at the Middle Wall safehouses at **Area 7** and delivers the explosives, or the news that they have exploded, their task is complete. If the party has already visited both locations **3** and **4**, you can proceed to the "Rewards" section below before moving on to Act 2.

6. The Dried Banks

The weapons await at the Dried Banks, a ravine and canal network located just outside the Golden City.

This is where the insurgency has been hoarding whatever weapons they have been able to scavenge, steal, or improvise over the years, including a prized collection of thirteen dragon slayer weapons obtained from the black market, in preparation for the uprising to come.

As the players arrive, a few insurgents posted at the site lead them to the weapons cache. They have the adventurers' descriptions and were warned of the plan, so they offer no obstacle to the mission.

The stash is not too big, but it will arm at least 300 rebels with masterwork axes, scythes, and spears in good condition; about a dozen elite warriors with dragon slayer swords; and several hundred more with common weapons. The area is dotted with caves of usually small size, yet most have enough room to accommodate hidden caches… or several living creatures.

Prasimun and his allies don't dare dream that a thousand armed people, even with dragon slayer weapons, will be enough to challenge draconic rule, but perhaps it will be enough to incite a good portion of the Valernian population to join the uprising as it spreads along the Outer Ring. In fact, the plan depends on that.

7. The Warehouses

These are three nondescript warehouses at the edge of the middle wall, chosen specifically for their unassuming appearance and location.

Bringing the weapons cache or Xinlei's explosives back to this area should be pretty straightforward, unless the players used faster means of transportation than simply carrying Azarax's carts.

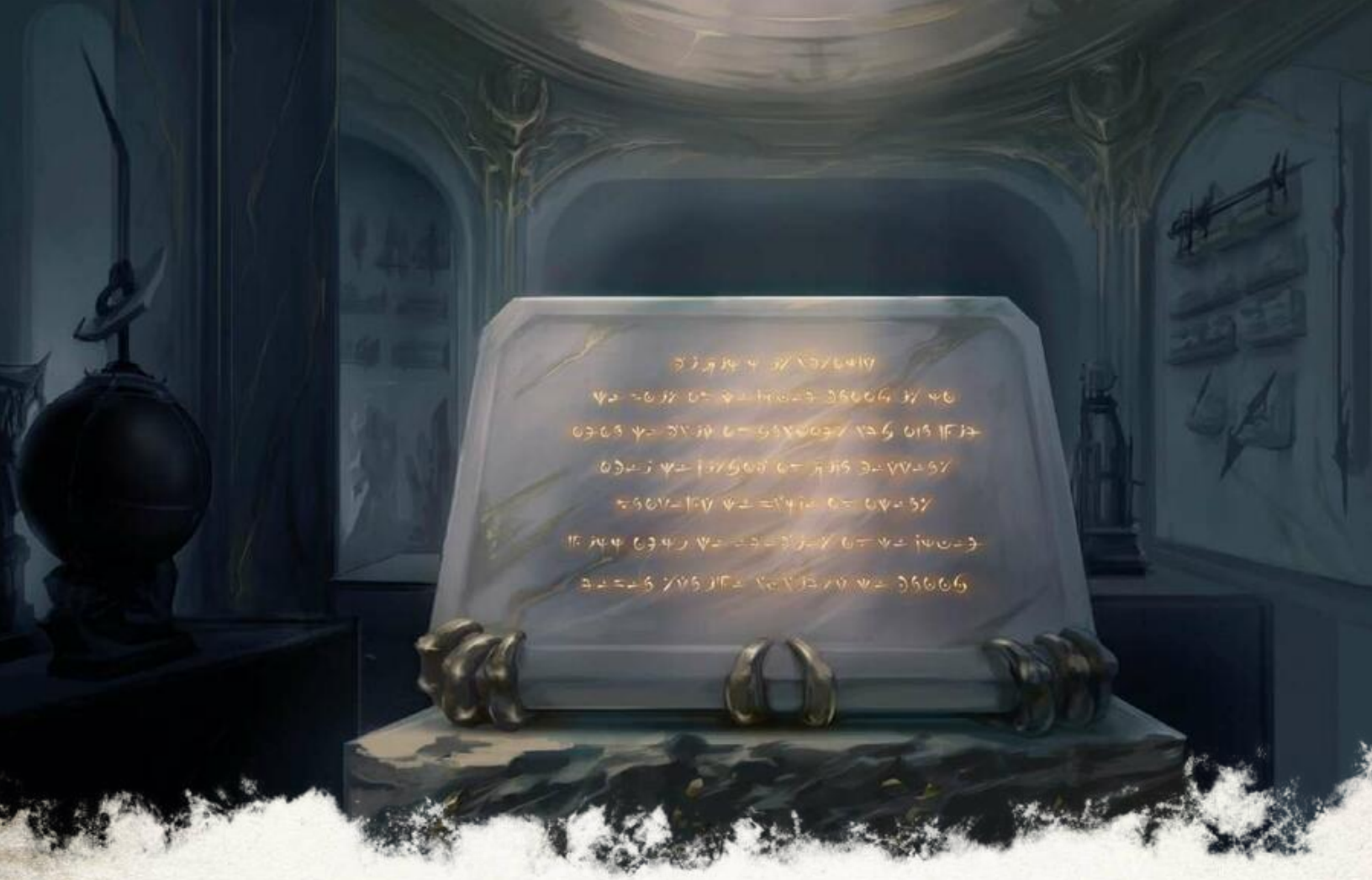
If the party used only the carts rented from Azarax, they draw little attention to themselves. However, the sight of Luuthara's strange carts, or more outlandish means, draws far more attention, requiring **two rolls** on the **Golden City Encounters** table as the adventurers deliver the load between warehouses.

Once the adventurers have delivered the load, their task is complete. If the party has already visited both locations **4 and 5**, you can proceed to **the "Rewards" section** at the end of this act before moving on to Act 2.

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 18th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

Lawbreaker Weapons



ACT 2: SMALL FAVORS

Act 2 begins when the player characters report their success, or failure, to Prasimun and leads to an unexpected, and potentially dangerous, side quest.

Timekeeping

As Act 2 begins, tally the total number of hours the party has spent performing the tasks in Act 1.

- If it took the adventurers **24 hours or less** to finish Act 1, it is still deep in the night when Act 2 begins. The streets remain dark and lit by torches.
- If it took the adventurers between **24 and 36 hours** to finish Act 1, the sky gradually cleared without them noticing, and Act 2 begins in a clear, sunless twilight.
- If it took the adventurers **more than 36 hours** to finish Act 1, dawn surprised them halfway through their missions, and Act 2 begins in broad daylight. It won't be night again for nearly 10 Rhaavan days.

Payment

When the characters head back to Prasimun, he gives them 1,000 gp if they successfully fulfilled at least one of the three tasks.

If the party fulfilled all three tasks successfully, Prasimun also presents them with one dragonslayer sword, set aside from Azarax's special delivery. The characters can request any sword type, as the cache contains different weapons, and he will graciously offer whichever sword style they ask for.

After this, Prasimun leans back in his chair and addresses the player characters gravely:

> *"You have proven to be resourceful, and we are in dire need of resources,"* Prasimun says, softly coughing into a napkin. *"One of our supporters in the highest spheres of the city, a dragonkin magistrate from Aureus' council, has promised us certain maps, showing quick routes and patrol blockades, so we can avoid Aureus' guards during the festival. He was supposed to send these maps to us days ago, but he has been under constant surveillance. He has promised to meet us at the Silver Wing inn but only four hours before the Founding Festival. This leaves us very little time to prepare."*

Allow the party to intervene or comment if they wish, before Prasimun continues:

> *"At that date, I will be needed to coordinate the various groups readying the attack. We need to attack not only Aureus but also his sense of law by attacking the city, its citizens, and its structures; and I need to check on the bombs, the mob movements… I need someone to be at that meeting and retrieve those plans for us right before the Festival. Someone trustworthy. Someone resourceful."*

If the party agrees to this mission, Prasimun thanks them even further, and tells them the contact's name is Sulakkos, known as "the Agreeable." They are to meet him in the Silver Wing inn in the Mid Ring (**Area 11** in the **Golden City Map**), four hours before the Founding Festival. After thanking the party again, Prasimun dismisses them and goes back to his business.

In timekeeping terms, the meeting with Sulakkos takes place at **hour 60**. Let the adventurers know how much time they have until then, and inform them they may do anything they wish in the meantime.

As soon as the adventurers leave Prasimun's presence, a hooded courier approaches them and hands them a letter, claiming it comes from "the parties responsible for their presence in the city" (which, if they arrived by the teleporting letter-scroll trap, is the truth).

The letter politely requests that the party meet with a well-known and respected dragonkin merchant going by the name of Dhu'Myr. This person claims to be unconvinced by Prasimun's plan. Yes, she knows about it, but she intends to remain neutral during the coming revolt. Yet, Dhu'Myr has a proposal for the adventurers, as she's aware of their reputation and… "certain courier activities they likely want to keep secret."

This should be enough to convince the player characters that whoever sent the letter is, at least, not fooling around. If the adventurers question Prasimun or Idannlor about this Dhu'Myr, they tell them she is a rich and very well connected merchant from the upper-class neighborhoods and would be a priceless asset to the uprising; trying to win her over would be time well spent for the cause.

8. Procurers' Lane

When the player characters decide to seek the sender of the mysterious letter, they may follow the directions on it to Procurers' Lane, a neighborhood known for housing the most reputed and expensive shops in the Outer Ring.

To reach this neighborhood, the adventurers must take the Outer Ring's High Street, marked by an increased presence of dragonkin merchants and customers, all of which seem to have a much higher social status than the most successful Valernians. There are three guard posts across the wide avenue, and while it looks busy, the crowd here is not as big as in any of the other parts of the Outer Ring.

Dhu'Myr's business, a mix of a parlor, shop, and gallery, is a massive building dominating the corner of Procurers' Lane and High Street, with an ornate sign that reads *Suur'lansche* ("Pleasant Respite" in Draconic). Read the following aloud when the adventurers enter the building:

> As you enter the shop, the sheer amount of luxurious and varied items overwhelms you. Armor pieces of the highest quality for both dragonkin and Valernians are fixed for display on the wall to your right. The left one is adorned with fabrics and tapestries of myriad colors, but all tastefully placed to create a huge, abstract mosaic pleasing to the eye. Bottles of perfume sit over an exquisitely carved bone table, opposite the spirits in transparent vials and corked decanters presented on a table hewn out of a single rock.
>
> Wealth is both apparent and everywhere, yet somehow, there's neither excess nor lack of taste in how it is displayed. Everything is precisely set to please and entice the onlooker.
>
> A beautiful Fulgen dragonkin, wearing a taaba silk gown patterned to look like mauve cobwebs, makes her way toward your group and greets you effusively. *"At long last, you are here!"* Dhu'Myr nods and slowly extends her hands.

After the introductions, Dhu'Myr welcomes them warmly and politely and invites them to the back of the shop, where she has "something that should catch your eye and appetizers sure to please your palate." Then, she gracefully makes her way to the back of her emporium and effortlessly opens a heavyset door into her office. Even a dragonkin should not be moving a door that heavy with such ease.

Dhu'Myr slides a shelf to one side, revealing a hidden, descending stairwell. She bids the party to follow her down, amused at any reaction of wonder or surprise. When the party follows, the stairwell leads down to an archway and then to a wide storage room. When the last of the adventurers enters the room, the arch slams shuts behind them. Dhu'Myr asks them not to be alarmed. This is only to protect *their* privacy. Then, she cuts to the chase.

Dhu'Myr reveals that she is well aware of both Prasimun's plot and the adventurers' association with him, including most especially their activities so far. She is quick to assure the party that she does not intend to act on that knowledge. Her interests have always been more artistic than political. In fact, the tidbit about Prasimun, as well as the idea of contacting the adventurers, came "from a third party, one well outside my regular circle of friends. But don't fret, my darlings… A very interesting deal sprung from this exchange of information, which is what brought you to my shop and into my private vault."

Any spell or effect aimed at detecting falsehood or evil intent reveals Dhu'Myr is being fully honest with the player characters. She's telling the truth. However, she is hiding something. The aforementioned spell or effect, or a successful DC 28 Wisdom (Insight) check, gives the adventurers the feeling that there is something slightly odd about her. This, of course, is the powerful *shapechange* spell that makes the cunning Magnifex dragon appear like a Fulgen dragonkin. A *detect magic* spell also reveals her intricate ring has a very powerful transmutation effect.

Once she feels she has calmed the adventurer's misgivings, Dhu'Myr produces a breathtaking tablet, radiating an aura of order. She explains it is a masterful forgery of The Golden Codex, Aureus' book of law. She wants the adventurers to take this forgery and put it in place of the original, which is currently sitting in the city's Scriptorium. The Codex spends most of the long season secreted away in a vault. It is only before the Founding Festival that they take it out and prepare it for public exhibition. And this is the best time to make the switch.

Then, Dhu'Myr gives the adventurers a map detailing the Scriptorium's exterior and interior. She nods lightly and continues:

> *"As I said, there is a certain… interested party, who wants to acquire The Golden Codex. They offered a stunning reward for it and honored me and my information network with their trust to carry out the plan. They, however, suggested I tap… outsider talent for the most unsavory part of the sting. That you got involved with Prasimun's little rebellion before I could reach you is of no consequence to me. What I care about is your ability to approach the Scriptorium undetected, switch The Golden Codex with my copy, and bring the original back here. I have never received such a formidable or dangerous commission… But I never fail a customer."*

Once her real objective is exposed, Dhu'Myr proves to be a cold and exacting negotiator. She makes it clear that she is more than willing to use what she knows about the adventurers if they refuse or back out. However, she sweetens the deal with 20,000 gp in coin and jewellery as the player characters' take in this joint venture, if they play their part satisfactorily.

Finally, Dhu'Myr admits that she sees the planned uprising as both viable and game-changing, so "it is in my best interests to actively protect your reputation. It wouldn't do to have the revolution crippled before it had a chance."

Dhu'Myr remains polite and calm during the whole meeting, never showing any sign of aggression or any pleasure in the idea of her blackmailing them. If the adventurers confront her about being cajoled into stealing for her, Dhu'Myr reveals that she is, in fact, the reason that their identities have not become public knowledge yet and that the guard is not hot on their heels right now. She has used her considerable influence and contact network to distract the authorities and make the law of the Golden City, a mighty adversary indeed, look the other way while the party blundered about.

If the adventurers agree to her terms, Dhu'Myr nods politely, turns around and takes a small box from a bloodstone bookshelf.

"There is one last favor I require of you, in fact, the actual reason I agreed to do this, although the reward offered by my client is rich indeed… I'd like you to bring me something else from the Scriptorium. It entails no additional risk, and you can solve both matters in a single trip.

What I desire is a rune… a written rune… a beautiful carved piece and supposedly one of Aureus' most cherished mementos. Yet, His Grand Majesty never visits it or has it in a proper display… And it bothers me to no end to have such exquisite pieces of craftsmanship merely lying there, utterly unappreciated. This rune you'll bring me will be kept here, along with the unfounded rumors of your involvement in anything related to… unlawful activities… within the Golden City."

Then, Dhu'Myr gives the adventurers three silk ropes, a dark cloak for each character (counts as a *cloak of elvenkind*), and a map of the city, seemingly sketched by a child. She insists that these items are gifts. "Consider them a gracious downpayment for your service."

Dhu'Myr's map shows the location of the Atrium plaza (**Area 10** in the **Golden City Map**), where the Scriptorium is, and the directions to it through the Forlorn Lanes (**Area 9** in the **Golden City Map**), a semi-hidden section of the city. The lanes look like a confusing, multicolored mishmash of lines, but Dhu'Myr's map makes the way across them clear.

Dhu'Myr's map also shows a small bureaucratic building across the plaza from the Scriptorium, which she mentions as a possible lookout spot.

Dhu' Myr

Dhu'Myr also shares the following information:

- The guard changes roughly every twelve hours.
- There are two patrols making rounds on the Atrium, the ample plaza outside the Scriptorium.
- The building's upper terraces remain mostly unguarded and are the best option for gaining entry and remaining unnoticed.
- There will likely be traps and other security measures within.
- The Vaults hold many relics, but most are useless mementos or gifts, which Aureus keeps out of public sight. Dhu'Myr advises against stealing anything other than the book. It could alert the guards to the switch of the Codex.

Finally, Dhu'Myr reminds the adventurers to do their best to get in, complete these tasks, and get out without being detected. "There's only so much one can do once discretion is no longer an imperative."

You can give the adventurers a few minutes to plan how they will proceed before their trip down the Forlorn Lanes to the Atrium and the Scriptorium.

Roleplaying Dhu'Myr

The dragonkin art collector is in fact a shapeshifted **Adult Magnifex dragon**, who has been spying in the Golden City for Brood Magnifex for more than a century. During this time, she has built a strong network of contacts, very few of which know her true nature.

To the adventurers, Dhu'Myr plays the part of the delightful host, displaying great taste and care in every word and motion. If the player characters came to Drakha by using the mysterious teleporting scroll described in the "Adventure Hooks" section, she starts off by admitting she did write, and enchant, the letter herself, costing her a lot of vaala and paying a lot of people to get the materials and knowledge to make such a powerful item, because traveling to and from Valerna to the Red Moon is no small feat. She needed "skillful agents, who were unknown in the Golden City, and as you know, hiring Valernians outside of the Red Moon is, well, *such* a chore… So, here we are."

9. East Forlorn Lanes

Not even Aureus or his builders could foresee such a quick expansion of his majestic project once the Valernians that were brought to the Golden City began breeding, and certain city sectors quickly became unfit to offer decent living conditions. Thus, the overpopulated and decaying structures were promptly vacated and demolished in order to create better housing facilities.

This millennia-old renewal practice resulted in more than a few alleys and backstreets left amid the bigger housing complexes or buildings, meant for the building crews to efficiently move between construction sites while leaving the streets for the pedestrian and merchant everyday traffic. These hidden lanes quickly became sparsely used as the construction projects came to an end, and then were entirely discarded in favor of the wider, better lit side streets, main walks, and grand avenues. Thus, these narrow "ghost paths" remain mostly forgotten by the taller dragonkin and largely ignored by the dragons flying above them.

While not quite an example of urban decay, the Forlorn Lanes are dark, very narrow passages and remain utterly abandoned. There is a thick layer of dust almost everywhere the characters look.

When travelling across the Forlorn Lanes, the players may ignore the wall in that section of the **Golden City Map,** indicating that the Lanes allow access between the Outer and Mid Ring through forgotten, half-condemned paths.

If the player characters managed to complete Act 1 before sunrise, the Forlorn Lanes are almost pitch black as the tall buildings completely block any light coming from the inhabited portions of the city.

If it is morning or predawn, a dim light reaches them as they make their way to the Scriptorium. Also, during pre-dawn or morning you should roll once on the Golden City Random Encounters table, as the adventurers' movements are more noticeable.

Otherwise, the party reaches the buildings on the northern side of the Atrium after a mostly uneventful journey. If the players have Dhu'Myr's map, crossing the Forlorn Lanes maze takes half the time indicated in the **Golden City Map.**

MAP 1.2: THE ATRIUM

10. The Atrium

The secret route shown on Dhu'Myr's rudimentary map ends in an outer staircase that, in turn, leads to the rooftop of a large bureaucratic building facing the Scriptorium's eastern facade. There is no one guarding this rooftop, so the player characters have no problem watching the Atrium from it.

The Scriptorium is a huge, 80-foot-tall building on one side of the great plaza. While a massive building, it feels more serene and academic than most of the Golden City's grand architecture, with a more sober and subdued facade. Its walls are a bit rough, quite unlike the usual smoothness of most other buildings you've seen here, and they slightly sparkle when under sources of direct light.

There is a smaller dome at the top of the front wall, with twelve vents spread along its base and a wide circular skylight instead of a ceiling. You could climb the walls and enter through there.

There is a guard post at the entrance with two sentries, and three other dragonkin are outside. A Fulgen dragon flies overhead, watching the Scriptorium from the air.

The three dragonkin don't stand by the entrance. Instead, they make their rounds of the building. The sentries don't have their attention fixed on the exterior at all times. Similarly, the dragon keeps making rounds, flying into and out of sight.

A. The Scriptorium

The Scriptorium is a huge building with monumental walls made of blocks of Drakhan granite, a very dense and slightly porous stone with pyrite-like growths, which make climbing a complicated yet feasible task. There are two **Fulgen Goldclaws** working as sentries inside the gate's guard post, three **Fulgen guards** patrolling the perimeter, and one **Fulgen dragon** overhead.

If they time their actions right, the adventurers have roughly one minute to cross the Atrium and enter into the Scriptorium without being seen. But, if the party finished Act 1 at predawn, between 24 and 36 hours, they witness the changing of the guard, which occupies the outside guards and gives them a full five minutes to attempt the infiltration between the dragon's rounds.

B. The Atrium Crossing

If the adventurers wish to secretly cross the Atrium on foot, they must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If it is daylight, this check is made with disadvantage. Then, they must succeed at two DC 16 Strength (Athletics) checks to climb the outer walls of the Scriptorium and reach the top ledge, where they can enter the building through the twelve ventilation shafts in the dome.

C. Ledge Access

If the adventurers want to instead reach the Scriptorium and the dome across the rooftops, they must succeed at one DC 14 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, plus one DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check (made with disadvantage during daylight) to avoid detection.

Should a character fail the Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, they can make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to keep their hold.

An adventurer that fails both the check and the saving throw takes 8d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and must make a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid making too much noise and attracting the guards.

D. Sentry Post

If the player characters fail any of the Dexterity (Stealth) checks, the two sentries warn the patrol of **3 Fulgen guards**, who arrive within 1 round. The patrolling Fulgen dragon arrives within 1 minute. Make it clear to the party that they have a very short window to flee, unless they want to stay and fight. If the adventurers win the battle, the sentries sound the alarm, and the Scriptorium is now on alert. In that case, all Dexterity (Stealth) checks made while inside the Scriptorium will be made with disadvantage.

E. Dome

If the adventurers reach this area, they can enter the building through any of the twelve ventilation shafts around it.

THE SCRIPTORIUM

Once the players enter the building, use map 1.3: **The Scriptorium** to guide their exploration.

F. Stairwell

This staircase leads down from **Area E** in map 1.2: **The Atrium.** According to Dhu'Myr's information, the Golden Codex is kept in the Preservation Room, a special chamber on the east side, while the trinket Dhu'Myr wants is in a storage room to the west, in another level further down the stairs.

Fulgen Guard

If the players arrived undetected, and it was still night or predawn at the end of **Act 1**, the adventurers may move around freely without incident.

MAP 1.3: THE SCRIPTORIUM

If the players arrived undetected, but finished **Act 1** in full daylight, the adventurers must succeed at a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check to prevent the Scriptorium's dragonkin scribes and staff from raising the alarm while they move around this level.

If the alarm has been sounded, the party must succeed at a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check, made with a disadvantage, to move from **Area F** without drawing the attention of three more **Fulgen guards.**

G. Courtyard

The party can spy on the Scriptorium's inner patio through the vents. There are three **Fulgen guards** inside, more relaxed than the outside patrol, plus the two Fulgen Goldclaw sentries from the entrance, who barely pay any attention to the Scriptorium's interior. If the alarm has been sounded, however, both guard groups are alert and watchful, ready to spot the adventurers as soon as they move.

H. Preservation Room

When the adventurers reach the Preservation Room, read them the following:

> The preservation room is ample and has several long tables and shelves filled with miscellaneous tools to craft, restore, and repair artwork. On a small pedestal at the back of the room sits the Golden Codex, a large stone tablet made from the same white stone as the city walls. On it, incredibly detailed and fine draconic runes state Aureus' six founding laws.

There is a set of chime alarms that will trigger as the characters cross the room to reach the Codex. A DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to find the trap. Thieves' tools and a DC 18 Dexterity or Intelligence check are required to disable it, or a successful DC 22 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check can allow a creature to cross the room without triggering the alarm. Failure at any of these checks means the adventurers trigger the alarm when they reach for the Codex.

If the adventurers trigger the alarm, it makes a loud ringing noise that can be heard throughout the building. They have 1 minute before three **Fulgen Goldclaws** arrive at the chamber, and all further encounters within The Scriptorium should be treated as if the alarm has been sounded and the guards are alert.

Fulgen Goldclaws

Any character that knows Draconic can read the six laws written in the tablet:

My will is absolute

The Voice of the Fulgen Brood is law

Honor the might of dragons and our kin

Obey the wisdom of your betters

Protect the value of those lesser

Kill only the enemies of the Fulgen; never strike against the Brood

I. Lower Level Stairs

These stairs come down straight from **Areas E and F.** If the players arrived undetected, they may move around freely and without incident.

If the alarm has been sounded, the party must succeed at a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check, made with disadvantage, to move from **Area I** without drawing the attention of three more **Fulgen guards.**

J. The Storage Room

The storage room, containing the rune that Dhu'Myr requested, is behind a locked double gate. The locks can be picked with a DC 19 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or broken with a DC 24 Strength check. If the adventurers search the body of any guard, they find keys to this room.

If the adventurers take more than 1 minute to open the storage door, they must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check, made with disadvantage if the alarm has been sounded, or draw the attention of a guard patrol and have to fight three **Fulgen Goldclaws,** one of which will have the keys to the storage room.

Once the player characters can enter the storage room, read them the following:

> The room is a large octagonal structure with shelves lining the walls, filled with crates and coffers and with several smaller boxes and cases on various small rectangular tables. This room is incredibly tidy. Everything is stored in an orderly fashion and with a clear system in place.

The trinket Dhu'Myr wants is a shining carved rune, clearly visible in one of the display cases, sitting alongside various jewels, baubles, and strange looking pieces of jewelry. It emits a faint violet light.

There seem to be no traps, but a successful DC 28 Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (Investigation), or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that there is a magical alarm that will go off if any intruder remains in the room for more than 1 minute. A *detect magic* spell points to many objects inside the room as being magical, including the rune. It also reveals divination magic on the threshold to the room and transmutation magic on all of the containers in the room.

If the adventurers remove the trinket from the case, it ceases to shine, but it glows again as soon as it is moved near a very rare or legendary magical item, including the adventurers' own gear and some of the other items on display. A successful DC 22 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the rune attunes itself to strong magic and is in fact a powerful artifact itself. If the character that succeeds on the check also knows the Draconic language, they realize it is a Rune of Truth belonging to the Magnifex dragon brood.

If the party remains for more than 1 minute in the storage room, the magical alarms go off, and all remaining guards in the complex rush to the scene. The player characters have 1 minute before two **Fulgen Goldclaws** and three **Fulgen guards,** plus three more **Fulgen Goldclaws** if the party has not yet encountered any guards inside the Scriptorium, arrive.

If the adventurers try to snatch any of the other items in the storage room, consult the Storage Room Items table to determine what they find. Forcing boxes or display cases open to acquire these requires a DC 28 Strength, Dexterity, or Intelligence (Arcana) check to break them open, pick their locks with thieves' tools, or get around the magic sealing them, respectively. If the adventurers trigger the magic alarm, however, it seals all the cases, boxes and crates, increasing the DC to open any of the containers to 40. Any item the player characters have already secured remains in their possession, however.

Storage Room Items

d12	ITEM FOUND
1-3	Jewelled tiara or necklace (20,000 gp value)
4-6	Animated shield
7-8	Marvelous pigments
9-10	Carpet of flying
11	Scarab of protection
12	Roll Again

*Should the roll be yet another result of 12, the object found is a cursed *armor* of *vulnerability,* providing resistance to bludgeoning damage but vulnerability to piercing and slashing damage, made from the scales of a dragon that once challenged Aureus and failed.

If the adventurers have a legendary item in their possession, including the scarab of protection or the cursed *armor* of *vulnerability,* the rune starts glowing with an intense purplish light and emits a low hum that gradually increases in volume until it becomes a dissonant, loud screech that alerts every guard inside the Scriptorium to the party's presence. This effect only ends if the rune remains at least ten feet away from any legendary item or someone succeeds on a DC 28 Intelligence (Arcana) check to deactivate it.

LEAVING THE SCRIPTORIUM

If the adventurers caused any alarm while in the Scriptorium, they must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check made with a disadvantage to return to **Area E.** If the check fails, they must face **4 Fulgen Goldclaws** and, if it has not yet been defeated, the **Adult Fulgen dragon** as they leave the building. If they did not activate the alarm or if they succeed on the save, they exit with no trouble.

Once back outside at **Area E,** the player characters must succeed on a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to leave across the rooftops, taking 8d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall if they fail. The adventurers must also succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check, made with disadvantage if the alarm was sounded, or be pursued by the same **4 Fulgen Goldclaws** and **Adult Fulgen dragon** mentioned above as they try to leave.

BACK IN DHU'MYR'S EMPORIUM

Take note of the time the players take to return from the Scriptorium to Dhu'Myr's store, remembering that using the Forlorn Lanes path halves the time required.

If the adventurers return to Dhu'Myr with the stolen items, she receives the party in her private offices and leads them to her sanctum, where she asks for the Codex, first and foremost, and then for the rune.

If the characters' hand her both of the items, read them the following:

> *"I see you got the deal done,"* Dhu'Myr tells you and proceeds to place the tablet on a pedestal and caress the rune with a fixated glance. *"Thus, we savor the small victories," she murmurs as she handles the rune.*

In return for the Golden Codex, Dhu'Myr rewards the adventurers with 20,000 gp in exquisite jewelry, a fraction of her commission. For the rune, she gives them a lawbreaker short sword (see appendix B) and some very valuable information. Read the following if the adventurers give the rune to Dhu'Myr, allowing them to interrupt with questions or comments as needed:

"Well, tell Prasimun I am sorry I cannot provide direct assistance, but my heart goes with him. However, I will share this much with you: One of my sources informs me that Solimarnex the Cunning, a member of Aureus' High Council—one that especially hates Valernians—has obtained evidence of your… involvement in several illegal activities while in the city.

Now, Solimarnex has a rival, Sulakkos the Agreeable, a dragonkin merchant who is also a member of the council and is a supporter of your… peoples. He is the one that has been providing Prasimun with inside information for his planned uprising.

To dispose of his rival for good, Solimarnex has sent his agent, a coarse lout of a dragonkin called Zunrüs, to assassinate Sulakkos under the pretense of a 'very urgent meeting…' Then, they will use the evidence they have against you to discredit both Sulakkos and the Valernian cause, thus justifying the assassination before Aureus, perhaps even pinning it on you.

One last thing. It is becoming more and more obvious that whoever stands behind Solimarnex wants to pit you against Aureus, which is not good news for you I'm afraid. I can count with one hand the beings, between my world and yours, that can stand up to Aureus in his glory. So, should push come to shove, remember this: Order is Aureus' greatest strength but also his greatest weakness. Chaos, unruliness, these things distract him. I don't know if it will be of any use, but it's what I know.

Do with this information what you will, but know that Solimarnex's agent, this Zunrüs character, will be ambushing Sulakkos during a meeting at the the Silver Wing, four hours before the Founding Festival."

If the characters inquire about how to incite chaos in the city, she tells them that killing citizens, destroying buildings, and inciting riots are some examples that Aureus would certainly find displeasing.

If the adventurers came to Drakha thanks to Dhu'Myr's letter-trap, she gladly gives them another marked scroll, which should return them to their homeworld. However, the scroll will not work until Aureus is weakened. He has erected mighty wards around the city, preventing anyone from escaping. Since he is distracted by disorder, sufficient chaos should allow the party to activate the scroll and return home. If the player characters read this scroll at any moment after defeating Aureus, it immediately whisks them back to their homeworld. It doesn't work before that.

Once the adventurers leave Dhu'Myr's store, their task is complete. You can proceed to the "Rewards" section below before moving on to Act 3.

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 19th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

Zunrüs

ACT 3: NEITHER DAGGERS NOR SHIELDS

This act involves the adventurers dealing with the trap against Sulakkos, where their intervention could decide the fate of the Valernian uprising, and then leads into the uprising, which pits the party directly against the master of the Golden City, Aureus himself.

Time Keeping

As Act 3 begins, it is already full daylight and the Founding Festival looms near. It is time to make the final tally of hours passed since the beginning of the adventure, as the Founding Festival begins at **hour 64,** and the meeting with Sulakkos takes place at **hour 60** at the Silver Wing in the Middle Ring (**Area 11** in the **Golden City Map**).

Idannlor or Prasimun can let the party know how much time they have left. It is likely that they have a few hours to rest and prepare before the meeting. However, it is entirely possible they have blundered enough to spend more than **60 hours** in the first two acts, thus missing the meeting entirely.

Preparing for the Meeting

The player characters may choose to do several things if they still have time before the scheduled meeting with Sulakkos.

If they head to an inn to take a long rest, allow it if they have time. Prasimun will see their lodging expenses covered. This takes at least **8 hours.**

If the players want to tour the city and do some shopping, they can find any item in the standard equipment list at the listed price. This takes at least **2 hours** or wandering the Golden City's stores.

If the adventurers seek out Prasimun at the Broken Fang, he congratulates them on their help so far and warns them to be ready for action. If they warn Prasimun about the attempt on Sulakkos' life, he becomes very worried. Zunrüs is a mad radical, a hater of humans and other non-dragonkin, and a dangerous enemy. He urges the party to run to the Silver Wing if they can. Sulakkos is one of the uprising's most important supporters. Prasimun's people are not a match for Zunrüs, but hopefully the adventurers "can still save our people."

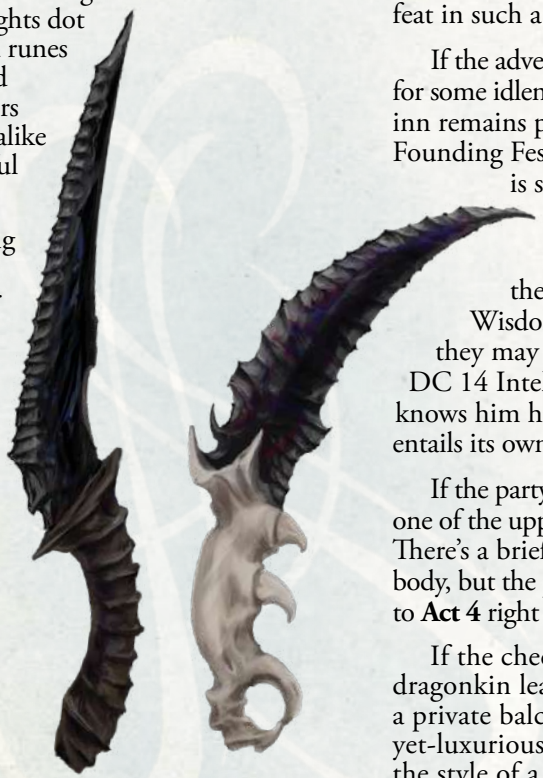
11. The Silver Wing

The Golden City's most famous open-to-all inn, the Silver Wing is a huge compound where two massive halls branch off of its foyer—one a large dome-like structure and the other a gathering of towers of different size growing from a main rectangular structure. This is a place renowned for its fine dining and exotic beverages, its many-terraced floors, and its supposedly enforced tolerance policy regarding Valernians of what they would call "some standing."

When the adventurers go to the Silver Wing, describe how the city is abuzz with the last preparations for the Founding Festival. Magic floating lights dot the streets, glowing liquid runes are spread across walls and gates, and street performers and government officials alike recite speeches and colorful illusions.

Take note of how long it took for the players to reach Area 11 from their previous location; the party should be here by hour 60 if they want to intervene in the trap against Sulakkos.

Read the following when the adventurers reach the Silver Wing:



Assassin Daggers

> The Silver Wing is a gigantic building divided into three main areas. After crossing the massive welcoming hall, you take a glance at the Roost far above, where only dragons in true form are allowed, and enter the Commons, an immense chamber the size of a small town, where shapeshifted dragons, dragonkin, and Valernians of middle and high rank can meet and have luxurious meals and taste exotic beverages.
>
> The Commons is packed and busy at this time of day, the din of a hundred conversations permeating the enormous five-storied chamber. There's thick, sweet-smelling smoke coming from braziers and communal pipes have been placed in several "puffing pits" with a mix of long rectangular tables and smaller octagon-shaped ones to accommodate the many and varied patrons' sitting predilections. The overall ambiance is one of relaxed yet sophisticated merriment.
>
> As you enter the room, a server greets you and offers you your choice of a table.

According to Dhu'Myr and Prasimun, Sulakkos is a middle-aged Fulgen dragonkin with sapphire scales who favors robes of white and bronze. However, picking out a single Fulgen dragonkin, regardless of description, is a feat in such a packed room.

If the adventurers arrive before **hour 60**, they have time for some idleness and enjoyment before the meeting. The inn remains packed and bustling in preparation for the Founding Festival. After **hour 60**, however, Sulakkos is somewhere among the crowd, and Zunrüs probably is too.

To spot Sulakkos among the crowd, the adventurers need to succeed at a DC 18 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check. Conversely they may ask around for him, which requires only a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check as everyone knows him here; however, openly asking for Sulakkos entails its own risk.

If the party fails to find Sulakkos, they hear cries from one of the upper balconies: Sulakkos was found murdered. There's a brief panic before the guard arrives to take the body, but the player characters' mission has failed. Proceed to **Act 4** right away.

If the check succeeds, the adventurers notice two dragonkin leaving a table and walking up a stairwell to a private balcony. One of them is dressed in subdued-yet-luxurious garb, while the other is dressed more in the style of a commoner with a noticeable militaristic air. That one must be **Zunrüs.**

If the adventurers follow these dragonkin into the stairwell, they can hear bits and pieces of the conversation between them, each speaking about their ideas regarding social order and station. The player characters must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check and understand Draconic to eavesdrop on the whole conversation:

> "So, this vision, which we both so readily defend as Aureus' greatest achievement, is truly worth living for," a soft voice says in Draconic, his tone emphatic and to the point. "Nevertheless, it was your… vehemence in defending our great ideals that caused your loss of station, and for that I'm truly sorry."
>
> After a pause, a sharper, deeper, more jagged and raspy voice replies, "That is what I both contend and resent, Councilor. To be elevated in this regimented charade entails increasing submission to the azhurma's deluded whims and… tolerance of these… animals which you are so keen to support, even over your own kind."
>
> Then, the unmistakable noise of steel leaving the sheath, more than once. "What is this?" says the gentler voice, trembling. "So, tell me Sulakkos," replies the raspier voice. "Is this vision you claim to… vehemently serve, even when we have proof of your crimes, also worth dying for?"

Sulakkos has been surrounded by Zunrüs and his four **Charred Claw assassins** who climbed into the stairwell from the balcony. If the party doesn't intervene within 1 round, they will kill him outright, and the player characters will have failed their task for Act 3. If they intervene, the attackers focus on the most dangerous enemies before turning back to their original victim.

If the adventurers win the battle, Sulakkos thanks them profusely, and deduces they must have come on Prasimun's orders. If the adventurers leave one or more enemies alive for questioning, they are willing to die before giving any information, but a successful DC 30 Charisma (Intimidation) check or magic such as *zone of truth* or *domination* makes them confess they are part of the Charred Claws, a group that opposes the freedom, rights, or even citizenship of Valernians. They stand against both Aureus and the uprising.

Charred Claw Symbol

They all believe that they are under Zunrüs' direct orders, and he only admits his association with Solimarnex if the player characters specifically mention him by name.

If questioned, Sulakkos tells them he only knew Zunrüs from his days as a member of the Goldclaws, who lost his position due to his prejudice against and indiscriminate killing of Valernian workers. He adds that Zunrüs appeared and told him "something urgent" had come up regarding the Valernians he expected but little else. He also gives the adventurers the plans Prasimun was waiting for, with secret routes and patrol schedules for the Festival.

Sulakkos leaves quickly to apprise Aureus of what happened, and the adventurers may now leave the Silver Wing. If the party asked openly about Sulakkos, they drew attention to themselves, which requires a roll on the Golden City Encounters table as soon as they leave the inn.

Now, the adventurers have completed this task, and they have barely 4 hours to rejoin Prasimun at the Broken Fang before the Founding Festival begins. You can proceed to the "Rewards" section below before moving on to **Act 4.**

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 20th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

Charred Claw Assassin

ACT 4: TO RISE AND DIE

The final act begins at hour 64, as the adventurers return to Prasimun for the last preparations of the uprising, right as the Founding Festival begins. There is a tense atmosphere as time passes more slowly the closer the hour gets.

Prasimun is in an intense, active mood, dispatching some more orders to his allies and a handful of threats to other merchants and groups by way of calling in their substantial debts with the intention of making them join in the revolt.

The festival inauguration will take place in a specially prepared terrace near the East Inner Ring gate. Prasimun heads there in a rust-and-gold carriage, and offers the adventurers transportation on one of the many carts headed to the Inner Ring for the main event.

The Middle Ring's streets are packed as thousands of citizens flock to terraces and balconies to witness Aureus' inaugural act and the commencement of the celebration. It's likely the adventurers have never seen so many people gathered within sight. There are unsuspecting, happy onlookers mixed with detached passersby and stern-faced workers. There is no way to know who is preparing to act as the uprising is called for, or whether the population will actually join the first skirmishes.

As the party approaches the Inner Ring gate, where the crowds make it gradually harder to advance, they can see some dragons circling over various sections of the city before perching atop buildings along the Inner Wall, while many others pass in front of it as they land in the Middle Ring's numerous plazas. It is both inspiring and threatening.

12. The Court of Trials

This huge plaza is where Aureus dispenses justice on the worst offenders against the Golden City's "continued peace and prosperity." This is the place from where Aureus proclaims his newest dicta for all inhabitants to hear and so follow. Of course, most Valernians can only hear the proceedings from far away atop the public ramparts built in the Outer Ring specifically for this purpose.

Due to its significance, the leaders of the uprising want to reach the Court, invoke their collective right to duel, and publicly challenge Aureus, thus forcing him to listen to the demands of the Valernians.

When the adventurers approach a suitable vantage point over the Court, read the following:

> Suddenly, the crowds' murmuring begins to turn into a cheer, and your attention is pulled toward a bright flash coming from the Golden Palace as the majestic Aureus appears on the balustrade, his scales reflecting the early sun's light.
>
> Then, His Grand Majesty spreads his wings and takes flight, circling around the palace and then slowly flying down toward the Court of Trials as the crowd's cheers turn into a droning sound. *"Aureus, lawmaker,"* the crowd repeats over and over, in a reverberating choir of Valernian, dragonkin, and draconic voices.
>
> You all then feel the impact of rushing, hot wind before hearing a loud boom that drowns out the multitudinous choir's litany as an explosion rocks a nearby building. Quickly enough, the nearby chanting turns into cries of terror and rising confusion, and you barely recover from the shock when a second and then a third explosion sound somewhere in the distance.
>
> From among the desperate voices, your mildly ringing ears are able to pick out a sound you all know too well: clashing weapons, angry roars, and open combat.

Someone detonated explosives earlier and closer than Prasimun called for, throwing the expectant rebels off and threatening to ruin the plan. Let the player characters tell you their actions and move to any area of the city they wish to. Then, they see Prasimun's cart on its side, burning. The clashing crowds prevent access, but if the party finds some way to circumvent the mob and examine the wreck, they can confirm Prasimun was killed, presumably by an explosion.

A dragon strafes overhead, bathing the street just behind the party in a rain of fire.

Then, the adventurers witness Aureus hovering over the Middle Wall and roaring commands over more explosions and a growing number of smoke clouds. He is flanked by several elder Fulgen dragons, whose metallic glint is blinding in the sunlight yet seems dull in comparison to that of the Golden One. Stern and commanding, Aureus demands humanoid citizens subdue and submit their armed kin to the Steelclaws or otherwise sit on the floor to evidence that they are not taking part in the fighting. He also orders every dragon around to stop using their breath weapons against the Valernian population at large and focus only on the armed groups.

Neither the frightened crowds nor the dragons will be as cooperative and obedient now that there is a sort of open season on Valernians and obtaining their lifeforce would mostly go unnoticed in the chaos.

As the fighting gets worse, it becomes evident that the uprising failed before it began, even though several hundred citizens spontaneously joined in in response to the dragons' wanton killing, and the widespread chaos has caused Aureus' control over the situation to fade. But if His Radiant Majesty feels it, he doesn't let it show.

The party comes across Azarax, wounded and limping, who informs them that all rebel cells have lost contact among themselves. The uprising is unraveling. It falls on them, the adventurers, to seek and challenge Aureus as originally intended, at the Court of Trials beyond the Inner Wall.

> *"The rebellion's done for. It depends on you now, all of it. If anyone can take on the Dragon Lord of Drakha, it's you people. And the time is now, for it is said that disorder distracts him. The more chaos, the weaker he will be…"* he chuckles, as if he just said something silly.
>
> *"Well, if anyone can cause more chaos than this, it's also you, I guess."* Then, Azarax runs down the street and disappears from sight.

At almost the same time, one of the dragons flanking Aureus points at the adventurers. If at least one of the adventurers speaks Draconic, read the following to them:

> *"There, my lord!"* the silver-colored dragon roars. *"Those are the ringleaders of this uprising… the ones who stormed the Scriptorium and directed the rebellion from the start!"*
>
> The dragon prepares to rush you, but Aureus stops him. *"No, Solimarnex. This is mine to deal with. You quell this revolt. Keep casualties to a minimum."* *"Yes, my liege!"* hisses Solimarnex, and with a triumphant roar flies away with the rest of the Fulgen cadre.

Afterward, or instead if no party member speaks Draconic, read the following aloud:

> After the dragons confer and his lesser aides pull back to handle the rest of the rebellion, you barely have time to register their retreat as Aureus lands before you with a smash that shakes the earth and shatters crystals. His majestic form stands proud and furious amidst the rising dust clouds as he challenges you, as he places the blame of this on you.

The party now must fight Aureus, His Radiant Majesty, the great dragon lord of the Red Moon.

MAP 1.4: CITY SQUARE

MAP 1.5: PALACE COUTYARD

The Fight with Aureus

The battle against Aureus begins when Aureus singles out the player characters as the cause of the disturbances across the Golden City and challenges the instigators.

First Phase

Aureus is filled with righteous fury. Understanding the adventurers are here to stir up trouble, he attacks immediately, warning them to cease and desist. If the adventurers try to convince him of their innocence or the attenuating circumstances of their involvement, he asks whether they intended to aid an uprising against his rule or not. As the truth is that the adventurers did, and Aureus will know it, he dismisses all other arguments as flimsy excuses and unleashes his anger on the closest culprits he can find.

LAIR CONDITIONS

The city is busy, with citizens roaming, fighting, or fleeing all about the place.

For this phase, use map 1.4: City Square provided in this module. If the player characters wish to move between city squares, causing more disturbances, use the same map for other areas they enter.

There are still 22 (4d10) noncombatant citizens in the city square, perhaps incited to riot or perhaps just curious to see the party arrested. The party may still cause disturbances during the fight, as described in the "Aureus Exploits" section.

Six **Fulgen Goldclaws** appear to help their master, acting on their own initiative and attacking the party to the best of their ability.

Aureus' Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

Any breath weapon attacks by Aureus affect his own soldiers if they are caught in the area. Aureus tries to avoid hitting his people.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- One of Aureus' body parts is broken.
- The characters have caused at least two disturbances during the fight (see the "Aureus Exploits" section).

When one of the above conditions is met, the city begins falling into chaos of its own accord, understanding someone has challenged Lord Aureus.

Second Phase

Aureus' attacks become more violent and thorough. He realizes he needs to stop these troublemakers as quickly and finally as he can.

LAIR CONDITIONS

The city is in turmoil, with frightened citizens trying to avoid the battle area.

There are no more than 11 (2d10) noncombatant citizens in the city square, trying to get as far away as they can.

Any surviving guards leave the area, understanding the battle is above their pay grade. The adventurers may still cause disturbances during this phase of the fight.

Aureus' Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until either one of these conditions is met:

- Three of Aureus' body parts are broken.
- Two of Aureus' body parts are broken, and the characters have caused four or more disturbances.

When one of the above conditions is met, Aureus retreats to his palace to end the battle there.

Final Phase

Aureus is enraged by the chaos brought to his beloved city.

LAIR CONDITIONS

The city is in chaos seeing their lord challenged by outsiders. New riots start erupting by themselves in several squares. Aureus has taken refuge in his palace. You'll have to meet him there to finish the battle.

You march across the streets of the once proud metropolis, watching fires erupt in the distance. This may be the end of the Golden City.

For this battle phase, use map 1.5: Palace Courtyard.

There are no citizens here, but a new, fresh patrol of ten **Fulgen guards** appears to fight at Aureus' side, acting on their own initiative during the combat round. The adventurers may no longer cause disturbances during the fight.

Aureus' Actions

Actions per Round: N + 5

Any breath weapon attacks by Aureus affect his own soldiers if they are caught in the area. Aureus tries to avoid hitting his people. But killing the adventurers is his priority, and he will readily sacrifice the guard if necessary. That is the law.

PHASE END

The encounter ends when Aureus is defeated. This requires fulfilling either one of the following conditions:

- Four or more of Aureus' body parts are broken, and the player characters managed to cause more than five disturbances before reaching this phase.
- Five or more of Aureus' body parts are broken, and all of his remaining body parts are below their maximum hit points.

As soon as either of these conditions is fulfilled, Aureus accepts defeat.

Conclusion

Once Aureus is defeated, the adventurers have two choices: to kill him then and there, as Aureus will offer no resistance, or to spare his life, which allows him to recover and restore order to the city. Proceed to the appropriate section below depending on the party's choice.

Sparing Aureus

After the adventurers defeat Aureus, his dragon aides arrive to heal and restore him. He commands them not to harm the party and to instead imprison them. If the adventurers saved Sulakkos' life, he intercedes on their behalf and Aureus lets them go. They are free to leave the Golden City or, if they wish to maintain their right to stay, to help quell the disturbance.

If the adventurers are able to find and present proof of Solimarnex's manipulation or involvement with the Charred Claw, Aureus sentences Solimarnex and his closest collaborators to death and pardons the adventurers and the surviving rebels, banishing them from the Golden City but, otherwise, allowing them to go free.

Regardless of the player characters' actions, the uprising is quelled with Aureus' reign being reaffirmed that day. On the following days he will order the demolished buildings to be restored, the rogue dragons exiled, and the surviving leaders of the rebellion (the adventurers, if they did not save Sulakkos' life) imprisoned so that they can be judged at a later time.

Whether the adventurers stay, leave, or are put in a cell, Aureus approaches the adventurers for one more conversation:

"Leave us," Aureus' voice is warm and pleasant, but you cannot help but feel a little dread at his tone. *"See that the rest of my advisors start tending to the Valernian population's needs and meeting the most immediate demands for better treatment."*

Aureus' aides, dragon and dragonkin alike, leave the room without another word. *"You all are brave, highly skilled combatants. I must thank you for your service. You have tested several points in my grand scheme and, thus, helped me correct those most in need of improvement."*

Then, Aureus takes the shape of Idannlor, nonchalantly carrying the Golden Codex in one hand. *"It's the real one. I wouldn't have hired Dhu'Myr to get me an imitation."* Aureus, in Idannlor's form, doesn't open his mouth, yet you can clearly hear him chuckling to himself. His mirthful laughter gradually turns into a cavernous snickering.

"For your service to my grand plan, I will present you with a proposal: Work with me to uncover the truth behind the Charred Claw's plot and organize a better policing force with your more… subtle skills… or leave the Golden City forever. Either way, I remain pleased with the outcome."

Killing Aureus

As the adventurers deal the final blow to Aureus, he rises one last time, defiant, unbroken at his core.

> *"Enough!"* Aureus' cry shakes the very ground and walls of his palace. *"Enough,"* he repeats, raspingly. *"My strength… is gone. My city…"* He looks away with sadness, focusing on the distant fires and the sounds of rioting. *"My pride. Now I understand… how— how sma…"* Aureus keels over mid-phrase, rolling down the Great Staircase of his palace and crashing into the courtyard fountain.
>
> And there he lies, unmoving. His blood slowly pools around the water. The Lord has fallen. The Golden City is free.

After Aureus' death, Solimarnex becomes the lord steward of the Golden City, rounding up Valernian rebels, and eventually all non-dragon citizens, with the Charred Claw becoming his trusted, ruthless secret police.

The adventurers are forced to join the desperate, waning pockets of rebellion under Azarax, Luuthara, and Meerynna, who become the new leaders of the underground resistance, or else leave the Golden City forever, along with thousands of refugees that cannot continue to live under the Charred Claw's new reign of terror.

AUREUS FULGEN HIS RADIANT MAJESTY

The self-appointed lord of the Great Wyrms, Aureus of Brood Fulgen is the only lord of Drakha that has attempted to achieve at least some semblance of a peaceful society. His Golden City, his pride and jewel, is the only bastion of established civilization on the unforgiving Red Moon of Drakha.

Aureus Exploits

The following exploits can be used to take advantage of Aureus during the battle if the characters discover them.

Disturbances in the Golden City

The best and quickest way to weaken Aureus' power is to threaten the stability of his domain. During the battle, the player characters can continue sowing chaos across the city to weaken Aureus' pride and confidence.

To cause a disturbance during the battle against Aureus, which is only possible during the first and second phases of the encounter, the party must do one of the following:

- Perform a successful DC 24 Charisma (Persuasion) check to stir the people against their tyrant, inciting a larger riot.
- Kill at least N × 2 citizens or guards during a single round.
- Deal at least 40 total damage to any number of buildings or structures in the Golden City during a single round.

Things of Chaos

Chaos, unpredictability and randomness are anathema to Aureus.

- Any weapon or spell attack that was rerolled by a luck-related effect (such as a halfling's Lucky trait or a wild magic sorcerer's bloodline features) ignores Aureus' Damage Reduction if it hits.
- Aureus will not consciously target any creature under a transmutation or illusion effect that was randomly determined, such as *mirror image* or *blink*, or the results of a Wild Surge.
- Aureus suffers disadvantage (cancelling his magic resistance) on all saving throws against chaos-related spells, such as confusion, and spells with random effects, such as prismatic spray.
- All chaos-aligned attacks, such as a chaotic-aligned intelligent item, a chaotic-aligned fiend or celestial's weapons, or a spiritual weapon conjured by a chaotic-aligned cleric, ignore Aureus' damage reduction if they hit.
- A lawbreaker weapon (see Appendix B) gains advantage on its attack rolls against Aureus and ignores his damage reduction on a successful hit.

I Am Merciful

The Golden Dragon prides himself in being just and fair. Aureus' attacks and harmful abilities will never target a character that has not made an attack or used a harmful ability against Aureus since the end of Aureus' previous turn.

AUREUS FULGEN

Gargantuan dragon, lawful neutral

Armor Class see "Aureus' Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Aureus' Body Parts"
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
28 (+9)	16 (+3)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Str +18, Wis +14, Cha +16
Skills Deception +16, History +13, Persuasion +16, Religion +13
Damage Reduction 7
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened, and stunned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Draconic, Common
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. Aureus gains advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects, and he is immune to the maze spell.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Aureus fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Weapons. Aureus' weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Upkeep Actions

During Aureus' upkeep, he replenishes his action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and he may take any of the following actions.

Shake (1 Action). Aureus can shake all of his body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Aureus' body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they're holding onto in order to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and becomes prone.

Hear My Voice (1 Action). Up to three targets that Aureus can see must succeed on a DC 24 Charisma saving throw or become restrained until Aureus' next upkeep. On a successful save, their speed is still reduced to 0 until Aureus' next upkeep.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Aureus can heal one body part that has not been reduced to 0 hit points. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum.

Melee Actions

Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d6 + 9) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Aureus' claws must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the claw's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Tail Sweep (1 Action). Each creature in a 30-foot cone behind Aureus must succeed on a DC 26 Strength saving throw or take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and 14 (4d6) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Aureus' tail must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 31 (5d8 + 9) piercing and slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Aureus' head must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Wing Flap (2 Actions). Each creature in a 20-foot radius around Aureus must succeed on a DC 26 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 40 feet and take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage. Aureus can then move up to his flying speed in any direction. Any creature mounted on Aureus' wings must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the wings' shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Trial by Combat (5 Actions). Aureus attacks several enemies while questioning their intent with the power of his voice. Aureus makes one claw attack, one bite attack, and one tail sweep dealing normal damage, plus any creature targeted by this attack must succeed on a DC 24 Charisma saving throw or doubt themselves, becoming incapacitated until Aureus' next upkeep. Any creature mounted on any of Aureus' body parts must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against that body part's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Breath Weapons

Flame Tongue (1 Action). Aureus emits small bursts of fire in an arc around him. Each creature within 10 feet of Aureus must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

Dragonfire (2 Actions). Aureus breathes fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

Molten Stream (4 Actions). Aureus spews a stream of molten gold in a line that is 120 feet long and 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must succeed at a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw or take 49 (14d6) fire damage and become grappled (escape DC 26). A successful save halves the damage and avoids the grappled condition. Aureus must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Molten River (5 Actions). Aureus breathes a massive cloud of flaming, molten gold. Each creature in an 80 ft. cone from Aureus must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw or take 49 (14d6) fire damage and become grappled (escape DC 26). A successful save halves the damage and negates the grappled condition. For every round that a creature remains grappled, they take another 14 (4d6) fire damage. Aureus must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Special Actions

Aureus Commands (1 Action). Aureus asks a question. Every creature that can hear him must succeed on a DC 24 Charisma saving throw or answer the question truthfully.

Crowd Control (1 Action). Aureus targets a 60-foot cube within 120 feet. All disturbances in that square stop immediately (see "Aureus Exploits" above), and any enemy of Aureus must succeed at a DC 24 Charisma saving throw to move into the area until Aureus' next upkeep.

Judgement (3 Actions). Aureus declares a target that he can see guilty of disturbing the peace of his kingdom. The target must succeed at a DC 24 Charisma saving throw or take 44 (8d10) psychic damage.

Veto (3 Actions). Aureus selects one school of spells. Spells from that school cannot be cast within sight of him for the remainder of this round.

I am the Law (6 Actions). Aureus recites the laws of his city in a booming voice. Any creature that can hear Aureus must succeed on a DC 24 Charisma saving throw or be affected by dominate person for the remainder of this round. Aureus must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this ability again.

AUREUS' BODY PARTS

Wings

HP N × 40 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24 (grounded) or 26 (flying)

Broken. *Aureus tries to flap his wings once, then twice, slumping to the ground with a painful roar of frustration.*

If Aureus' wings become broken, he loses his flying speed and cannot use his Wing Flap any longer.

If airborne, Aureus immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Aureus' body must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 66 (12d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Aureus. If the save is successful, the creature only takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and no additional damage.

Head

Hit Points N × 55 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *Aureus looks upon you with indignation. "How dare you?!" he screams, half his face gone.*

If Aureus' head becomes broken, he has disadvantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks, his bite attack damage is reduced to 22 (3d8 + 9), and the action cost of all of his special actions is increased by 1.

Upper Torso

HP N × 70 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 22

Broken. *Aureus coughs, dramatically clutching his chest. "My subjects... my heart is failing, but my loyalty to you never will..."*

If Aureus' upper torso becomes broken, all of his claw attack rolls are made with disadvantage, and all of his special actions have their action costs increased by 1.

Left Claw

HP N × 35 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *"This was the hand that smote down the Agazhanti rebellion with one sweep! I shall mourn it after I punish you."*

If Aureus' left claw becomes broken, he can no longer use it for combat. Aureus can no longer make more than one claw attack per round. If both of his claws become broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Left Leg

HP N × 25 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Aureus tries to move his leg, then looks at you with disdain. "A limp is the mark of a fine bloodline."*

If Aureus' left leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 5 feet.

Lower Torso

HP N × 65 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 22

Broken. *"Argh! You shall pay for this indignity!"*

If Aureus' lower torso becomes broken, all saving throws to remain mounted on Aureus are made with advantage, and no ability check is required to mount this body part anymore.

Right Claw

HP N × 35 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *"This was the hand that wrote the Golden Codex! What a glorious legacy you have defiled!"*

If Aureus' right claw becomes broken, he can no longer use it for combat. Aureus can no longer make more than one claw attack for round. If both his claws become broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Tail

Hit Points N × 40 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *Aureus drags his tail like a dead weight. "Ah! And for this I shall have you quartered in the city square!"*

If Aureus' tail becomes broken, he can no longer use his tail sweep attack, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Right Leg

HP N × 25 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *"I'll wear this wound with pride, acquired in the defense of my land and the service of my people."*

If Aureus' right leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 5 feet.

THE PRIMORDIAL SHARD

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

"Everything is inferior.
The only company worth keeping is myself.
The rest fear my fury and power."

—Baastherox

There are rumors of an ancient artifact found near the lair of one of Drakha's most feared dragons. It could hold the secret to giving Azhurma Aureus the upper hand in the Red Moon's power struggle. Will a party of adventurers be able to retrieve the artifact, securing their position inside the Golden City, and prove that Valernians are worthy, even among dragons?

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to "The Primordial Shard," a Dragonbond adventure and part of the Great Wyrms of Drakha adventure series.

Aureus Fulgen, the azhurma of the Golden City, has heard a rumor of an artifact that could provide a clue to unlocking the secret of travel between Drakha and Valerna. However, this artifact is thought to lie deep within the territory of Baastherox, the strongest and least sociable of all dragons. Not wanting to anger the Mightiest, Aureus plans on sending a group of Valernians to investigate and, if the rumor holds true, retrieve the artifact.

While this adventure assumes the characters are from the many realms of Valerna, this can be changed to fit any other universe if it is being adapted into an ongoing campaign.

Running the Adventure

"The Primordial Shard" is an epic adventure meant for three to five characters that will start at 17th level. During the course of the adventure, the characters will advance to 20th level through the use of milestones before entering the final battle against Baastherox, the Mightiest. For additional information on the Red Moon and other notes in general refer to the "Getting Started" section at the beginning of this book.

If you need some specific details on how time and some magic work in this setting, the "Drakha, the Red Moon" section near the start of this book provides valuable information. The "Adventure Background", next section tells you everything you need to know to understand this adventure's immediate setting. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run, giving you a broad sense of the events involved and how they will unfold throughout the adventure.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.

Adventure Background

Long have the azhurma dragon lords of Drakha, especially Aureus and Kuxcoatl, been in search of a way to end the Curse of Kadmos and gain the power to travel between Drakha and Valerna at will. Aureus has finally heard tell of a clue that could lead to a solution to this conundrum and is now searching for the information necessary to locate it. He has been plotting how best to approach this situation, since the clue is believed to lie deep inside another azhurma's territory, one he knows it's not smart to meddle with.

Aureus's plan, meticulous and convoluted, involves using the Valernians he keeps in a military unit to collect everything needed to test a dragonkin's theory. By using the Valernians, he has plausible deniability. In the event that they fail, he can simply declare that they escaped from his city and deny any further involvement. The Fulgen azhurma has summoned a secret meeting in his palace to bestow this quest on a specific group of worthy Valernians.

Adventure Overview

"The Primordial Shard" consists of five parts. The prologue, "The Audience," serves as an introduction to the adventure, wherein the party will have an audience with Aureus Fulgen and will be given the quest to recover a piece of parchment and follow any directions it contains. They promptly receive equipment to aid in their quest and leave the Golden City by night unnoticed. This prologue is intended to set the mood and theme for the adventure; the adventurers should be guided through it to understand why they are here and the task at hand. Characters' interactions with the city and its elements will be limited since they will be required to depart hastily.

In the first segment, "The Inkling," the adventurers try to track a caravan and recover the coveted parchment. They do not know what sort of caravan they are following and have little information, other than that the piece of parchment will hold directions to what they are truly seeking.

They are led by Palan Ethen, their squad captain and long-time friend. Once they retrieve the torn parchment, they will be betrayed by Fannax, a fanatical Fulgen dragonkin whose hatred for all Valernians is outdone only by her envy for the favor Aureus promised if they prove to be successful. After this encounter, it's likely that Palan will die, leaving some hints about an alternate way to return to Valerna and abandoning the adventurers to ponder the possibilities presented by this quest.

In "The Cave of Defeat," the characters will have to traverse a very inhospitable Drakhan desert, searching for the first clue in a cave marked on the map drawn on the parchment. Here they will fight against a great desert wurm, one of the few creatures to inhabit the desert; they will also have to fight their thirst, the oppressive heat, and various environmental hazards. Once they arrive at the cave, the characters will find the first hint of how to eventually fight the Great Wyrm Baastherox in their final encounter and also learn a bit about his weak spots if they pay close attention. After getting some rest, they will have to make their way to the next cave.

"Mandate of Strength" leads the adventurers to a crevice at the bottom of a canyon, where they again have to battle the harshness of the environment and other challenges to reach their goal in the best shape they can. When they get there, they find that, unlike the previous cave, this one is inhabited. There is a cult of Fulgen dragonkin here, exiles from the Golden City who have found a new azhurma to worship: Baastherox. As he only values strength, these dragonkin constantly fight to prove themselves worthy of the great wyrm, and eventually the strongest go on to challenge Baastherox in the hopes of gaining his favor. None have ever returned. After the party fights the leader of this cult, they are allowed to enter the shrine, where they find another hint for their coming battle with Baastherox. This hint reveals how he views challenges and the worthiness of opponents.

Finally, "The Great Death" sees the characters finding their way out of the canyon and discovering the massive skull that serves as Baastherox's lair in the distance. They will traverse the worst environmental dangers here; constant storms and brimstone explosions can be quite dangerous. Finally, they will arrive at the great skull where the final piece of information about the upcoming fight is carved on a plinth at the entrance. After this, with their knowledge of Azhurma Baastherox and his weaknesses, they will have a chance to succeed and recover a shard of Kadmos' claw.

After the fight is over, the adventurers will find the missing piece of the parchment, which contains clear directions to a location in the desert and instructions for a ritual that, using the shard, can open a portal there to Valerna. It will be up to the characters to decide if they will return to Aureus or use the shard themselves to return home.

Adventure Hooks

This adventure assumes that the player characters belong to the Steelclaws, a Valernian squad loyal to the Golden Dragon Aureus Fulgen, returning victorious from a quest. Captain Palan Ethen is praised by the dragons of the Golden City; many were unsure that a squad of Valernians would be able to carry out the task. Shortly after the characters return, a dragonkin general approaches Palan directly to inform them that they will be awarded the great honor of meeting Azhurma Aureus Fulgen personally.

Alternatively, if the characters have specific backgrounds other than belonging to the Steelclaws, simply assume the party has done something impressive to gain Aureus's attention, for humanoids of such power are not common in Drakha. The Golden Dragon has requested that they attend an audience with him. He has an important offer for them to consider, and they know that his favor and whatever he has to give will likely be well worth it.

If your player characters have formed a party that comes from another setting and wish to run this adventure,

you can make the following adjustments. The party was captured by dragons and brought to the Red Moon. Since their arrival they have been kept in a magical prison, for their strength was obvious to their dragon captors. They will be taken to Aureus, who will assign Palan to keep them in check and lead them on this quest. Palan will tell them of the Golden City and its benefits and will push the idea that by completing this quest they might have an easier time on Drakha. Make sure, if you use this option, to adapt other parts of the adventure to fit the characters.

Character Backgrounds

The player characters can have a diverse range of backgrounds and stories, but for the sake of immersiveness in this adventure's plot, each player should choose a reason that they are part of the Steelclaws in the Golden City from the options below. Player characters are, of course, allowed to have their own reason for having joined the Steelclaws, as long as their DM approves it. Also, when going through this process, you can ask the players to what extent their characters know each other and should make note of any relationships between them.

FRESH CAPTURE

Characters from these backgrounds are quite new to Drakha, having been captured fairly recently. Still adjusting to this new world and their place in it, they are driven to survive in this harsh place by any means necessary, eager for any chance to secure a better position.

Combat-Tested

You were captured during the last Eye of Kadmos and were lucky enough to be brought to the Golden City, where Valernians can stand a chance of surviving. After fighting in the pits, your dragon captor saw your fighting prowess and recommended you join the Steelclaws voluntarily. You have been a member of the Steelclaws for some time now, and earned a high rank inside the organization.

Worthy

Your dragon captor chose not to devour you, giving you a second chance once it saw the potential in your mind and body. You took the chance to help it in whatever way it needed, always aiming for anything that could win you your freedom. Eventually, they offered to let you join the Steelclaws, the only official Valernian organization on the Red Moon. You accepted, seeing the opportunity to further prove the worth of Valernians in the hope that more dragons, at least those of the Fulgen brood, would allow them to live.

Escapee

You were originally taken from Valerna by a dragon belonging to another brood. You managed to escape its grasp and wandered the Red Moon for some time, eventually arriving at the Golden City, where all Valernians are given a chance to prove themselves. You enlisted in the Steelclaws knowing that, even though it is a dangerous profession, it remains the easiest way to be allowed prolonged residence in the Golden City.

SECOND GENERATION

Born on the Red Moon, these characters are well aware of the power structure in which they are allowed to continue living. Maintaining one's current existence or striving for a better station are both quite dangerous endeavors here, however, forcing one to find a motivation above survival and let it fuel them, whether with rage or aspiration, to be greater than those who came before.

Revenge

Born with diminished Vaala, you are mostly worthless to the dragons. You grew up hearing stories of Valerna and your parents' home. Your hatred of dragons led you to enlist in the Steelclaws after discovering that, on rare occasions, they actually get to fight and kill dragons from other broods. You despise these creatures but begrudgingly respect the Fulgen dragons who allow you to at least try to fight back.

Honor

Your parents have achieved high standing as aides to one of Aureus's researchers and have been accepted as citizens because of their knowledge of Valernian history. However, citizenship is not inherited; it must be earned. So you chose to join the Steelclaws in an effort to earn your citizenship in the Golden City, as your parents did.

THE AUDIENCE

The Golden City, Azhurma Aureus Fulgen's utopia, was founded on ideas and concepts intended to transcend dragonkind and bring order to all civilizations. As it stands, it is the largest city in both Valerna and Drakha, with incredible buildings and organized trade, the closest thing to what Valernians would consider a "civilized" place on the Red Moon. The circular city is divided into a series of rising rings. At the center is the Golden Palace, visible from anywhere in the city, a constant reminder of the residents' standing before and under the gaze of The Lawgiver.

The adventure begins as the party wakes up in their barracks. They are members of a military organization made up of Valernians called the Steelclaws. **Palan Ethen** (see appendix A), their captain, is going to relay news of their impending audience with Aureus.

You wake up in the barracks of the Steelclaw Headquarters, inside the Golden City. Palan Ethen, a tall, muscular Ysvalian who was picked up two cycles ago, stands before you. He is past his prime, but his fighting experience is unmatched by any Valernian in the Steelclaws. He speaks in a deep commanding voice.

"Fellows, turns out you have caught some dragon eye. The Big Golden's summoning us to an audience. At the Golden Palace no less.

"I expect it goes without saying this is not an invitation. And keep your wits once we're there. Aureus don't normally deal with Valernians. I should congratulate you, I guess, for at least it means he thinks highly of you. And whatever his business with you, we're going to be in it together, so please, tell me who you are and what you bring to the feast."

Fannax

The adventurers should take this time to make short introductions of their characters, battle roles, and important notes. Palan also asks the characters to figure out the best fighting formation for their group; this should be considered their formation when traversing the desert, unless they specify otherwise. After all of the introductions and first decisions are made, Palan gathers the party and tells them it is time to go to the Golden Palace.

The Golden Palace

Palan guides the party through the first two districts. Once the party enters the third district they are joined by a retinue of Goldclaws, Aureus's elite Fulgen dragonkin guard all clad in golden armor, to guide them the rest of the way.

The city itself is a huge circular metropolis, divided into three major concentric rings. The Outer Ring is the only one where Valernians have permanent residence and where most of them spend the rest of their lives. A select few of them make it to the Middle Ring, where common draconic life takes place and dragon liaisons meet with outstanding Valernians who have earned the honor and right to conduct temporary business within its walls. Finally, the Center Ring is the city's upper district and is located around the Golden Palace at its very heart. This is where only the most accomplished dragonkin dignitaries and influential dragons reside, regularly meeting with their azhurma to advise on and direct the destinies of the hundreds of thousands citizens under their charge, all according to Aureus's wise and absolute rule.

While the Golden City by itself is a breathtaking spectacle, every building in the upper district is a work of art. They all have golden decorations and roofs, but the Golden Palace at the center of the city is the tallest and grandest of all. It is a beacon of light, reflecting the sun with its curved walls and intricately decorated facade. Just outside of it is a great fountain with a life-size sculpture of Aureus himself made of pure gold; it is so life-like that it looks about ready to take flight on its own.

The party reaches the palace's doorway accompanied by their Goldclaw escort. Just outside the door awaits **Fannax**, a dragonkin general with silver scales, known for her hatred of Valernians. She glares at the party as they arrive at the massive entrance.

The gate opens as they approach, revealing a great circular hall surrounded by statues, with an expansive mural depicting Aureus's biggest triumphs. The door closes behind the party, leaving them in complete darkness. Read the next paragraph as the door closes.

You arrive at the Golden Palace and enter its colossal golden gate, through which you enter a large circular atrium; as the gates close, the room is left completely dark.

Suddenly a ray of golden light blinds you. As you are able to open your eyes again, in the center of the atrium you see Aureus, with his scales of gold and silver shimmering from some unknown light, illuminating everything with his presence. He starts his speech, his voice echoing throughout the chamber.

"Steelclaws, your latest achievements have proven your worth, surprising even my ancient self. Your… hmm… limitations as Valernians do not diminish the role you'll play in the construction of our golden utopia. I've chosen a pivotal and privileged role for you, one that might see my radiant guidance expand to those who have yet to benefit from it.

"March into the Titan Wastes, and find a parchment that will direct you to your final destination and the object of my desire… This endeavor shall not be easy. Another… azhurma might find your activities unpleasant, and he's not one known for being tolerant… Disguise your relation to me to the best of your abilities. I'm trusting you with this noble purpose. Fulfill it and earn a place as full citizens of this privileged society."

When Aureus finishes speaking, he gestures at Palan and asks him if he or any of the Steelclaws have any questions. The azhurma will be direct and blunt, his answers concise and to the point. He avoids saying what the object is or where the search for it shall take them, but he believes that they can complete the mission. If pressed, he gives the party some hints of where they are headed:

"It is a desert… a barren waste, deadly to your kind. You shall find no water except by digging very deep. You shall endure unforseen calamities, natural or otherwise, and you may even encounter stormwurms, giant pests that devour any moisture they can find, and call on what you refer to as 'lightning' wherever they settle."

Palan Ethen

Aureus underlines the fact that they are on their own. Any imprudent question will be met by a paralyzing gaze and a chilling "Anything else?" by Aureus. When the dragon feels he has answered enough, he will signal them to leave.

Preparing for the Journey

The party will be escorted by Goldclaws to the edge of the Center Ring. After that, Palan will lead them back to the Steelclaw Headquarters, where they are to receive their final instructions on this task. The first is to remove all Steelclaws insignia from their equipment.

The party will wait there until they receive further instructions. They have been told not to talk to anyone or walk around the city proper. After a while, Fannax bursts through the doors with her two royal guards, who start clearing the room and the adjacent corridors to make sure they are alone. Fannax is a female Fulgen dragonkin. These dragonkin walk upright in their hind legs, similar to a human, but using their tails for balance. Even female dragonkin like Fannax are taller than most Valernians, and with her armor on, she looks as tough as the toughest Valernian. She is built for battle.

The two guards briefly exit the room and return carrying a simple wooden chest, which they place on the table. Then they leave and close the door behind them. Fannax takes out two scrolls and says:

"Soft-blooded, I am here to relay His Radiant Majesty's instructions. Although it baffles me that he chose such pathetic creatures to carry out his wishes, I will complete the task that was given to me." She unties the first scroll, laying it flat on the table, and continues.

"You will need to venture east through the mountains for two days and then go south. Once there, you should find traces of a Magnifex dragonkin expedition. Our spies tell us they have the parchment that we need you to collect first. Your orders are to follow the directions in the parchment to wherever they may lead you, and if you were to fail, make sure the parchment is lost with you."

Fannax gestures to the chest on the table. *"We have prepared some supplies to aid your weak bodies through the desert. There is enough here for one week; after that, your survival is up to you."*

Then, Fannax unbinds the second scroll and places it in front of Palan, urging him to sign it. *"I hope you die fast, so that Aureus can reconsider and award the task to more worthy hands."*

Palan lets the party know that they must leave as soon as daylight is gone. He instructs everyone to split up the supplies and to be ready to depart when night arrives on Drakha, in a couple of Rhaavan days.

Treasure

The party must split or share the supplies offered to them as they wish. They are given ten *+2 arrows*, five *+2 crossbow bolts*, a *bag of holding*, one dungeoneer's pack, three explorer's packs and one scholar's pack. They are also given a map of the Titan Wastes including the path through the mountains, one spyglass, and the following consumables:

- 4 flasks of alchemist's fire
- 3 potions of greater healing
- 2 potions of superior healing
- 1 potion of supreme healing
- 4 weeks of rations

Either (a) 500 gp worth of diamond dust, enough for a spellcaster to cast *greater restoration* up to ten times, or (b) 5 potions of *greater restoration* if the party has no one to cast the *greater restoration* spell.

Va'ra greataxe

Departure

The characters gather outside their headquarters at the start of the long night. When they are ready to leave, read the following out loud:

> As you reach the last ring of the marvelous Golden City, you witness a crowd gathering around a wooden structure. It is a set of gallows, surrounded by hundreds of cheering dragonkin. Two guards make their way through the mob, escorting a chained Valernian—a Tyverian vampyr.
>
> The three make their way up the steps and on to the platform. There, a dragonkin executioner stands with a **Va'ra** greataxe. They place the criminal on the block, and he's quickly dispatched. The crimson crystal axe glows as the Valernian's life escapes from its headless body, and the cheers from the crowd grow louder.
>
> Palan breaks the silence and whispers, almost to himself: *"Light above, I'd forgotten about this. I knew the lad, a good partner in sewer duty. Heard he bumped shoulders with a dragonkin, got whipped for it and hit back. His mistake was winning the scuffle. Easy to forget we're one slip-up away from death, even in their damned Golden City."* He sighs. *"What's the use in lamenting?"* This quest could really make a difference.

If asked further, Palan explains that, while Aureus is fair in most things, there are always some rules for Valernians here that are very unfair. Still, on all the Red Moon, this is the best place to be; the only place where they stand a chance to live out a full life, even if the conditions are far from favorable. If pushed more, he tells the adventurers that if he could go back to Valerna he would not look back.

Roleplaying Palan Ethen

Palan Ethen was born on Ysval, trained as part of the elite griffon riders. At the age of twenty-two he fought against the mighty dragons that raided Valerna, but he was defeated and captured by a Fulgen dragon and carried back to Drakha. There, he quickly realized that he got the best outcome possible. Speaking with other Valernians in the Golden City, he quickly learned that most of the others that were taken as gifts for the azhurma had likely already been devoured.

That was twenty-nine years ago. Palan has braved Drakha and its dangers for more than a full cycle, more than most Valernians. His best years are behind him, but he more than makes up for it with boldness and strategic awareness. When in combat he fights like a man half his age.

Palan is very orderly and will pull rank if he needs to. In this first part of the adventure, Palan should come off as thankful that the Golden City exists,knowing full well that if it didn't, all of the Valernians who serve in the Steelclaws would have been slaughtered long ago. He hopes for the success of any Valernians on the Red Moon so that they can survive and maybe, one day, thrive here. After the adventurers find that there might be a way back to Valerna, he shifts his view and tells the adventurers he would give everything to go back.

When speaking, Palan is straightforward and bold; he doesn't care for small talk. He does, however, add in some light-hearted jokes and smiles often as he speaks. He knows the effectiveness of a stern command, but he also knows that a smile can sometimes be a lot more effective. Even if he didn't, he can't really control his smile. He has a way of finding the light in even the darkest moments.

Palan is very knowledgeable of dragon society and structure, especially inside the Golden City. He knows that only a handful of Valernians have seen Aureus up close, so he understands that something important is happening. If questioned he offers the following information:

- Aureus built the Golden City, the only known place on Drakha where a Valernian has any kind of rights.
- Fulgen dragons are among the few that see Valernians' worth beyond that of a plate of fresh Vaala.
- He misses Ysval, whale stews, his brother, and his younger sister. Still, living in the Golden City is not so bad; it lets him make a difference for anyone else the dragons bring. The way he sees it, the more of the dragons' trust he earns, the more people he can save.
- He considers himself more Drakhan than Valernian now, at least when total time served is taken into account. Nevertheless, he still feels that with one mistake he may end up on the gallows, so he carefully toes the lines set for him by the dragons.

THE INKLING

The adventurers leave the Golden City behind and climb down to where the mountains stop and the desert starts. It takes them four days to cross the mountains and enter the Titan Wastes. It is still dark, as night on Drakha lasts for 10 Rhaavan days. Read the following text to the adventurers:

> The way down the mountains is harsh. From time to time you see Fulgen dragonkin at a distance guarding you or checking your progress. Palan keeps reminding you that this is the easy part of the journey.
>
> You arrive at the foot of the mountains, the natural border between Aureus's territory and that of one of his most fearsome neighbors, Baastherox, the Mightiest. All have heard rumors of his legendary strength.
>
> The air dries your mouth and throat; the change in temperature and humidity is evident. It is still night as you march into the Titan Wastes.

From this point on, you should take note of what day it is. Since day and night work differently on Drakha (see the "Day/Night Cycle" section presented near the start of this book), you should keep track of what stage of the Drakhan month it is to manage time-related events and tasks.

The party spends the first day traveling. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or above finds the caravan trail of the expedition they should be following and can inform Palan about it. Failing that, allow them a DC 21 Wisdom (Survival) check instead. If no character finds the trail, Palan manages to do it, but it's at the cost of an extra day of travel.

After finding the trail, Palan will insist on pushing forward until they find the caravan. If the adventurers choose to follow his orders and march day and night in pursuit, it only takes two days to get close to the expedition, but every character (including Palan) must roll a DC 19 Constitution saving throw for each day spent tracking the expedition caravan. For each failed save, the adventurers increase their exhaustion level by 1.

If the party insists on resting along the way, they need a DC 22 Wisdom (Survival) check at the start of every day to see if they are able to stay on the caravan's trail with their careful approach. Each day that the party fails on this roll adds an extra half a day to finding the expedition's exact location.

After resolving and narrating what happened in this part of the journey depending on the party's choices and rolls, during the evening of the last day of travel, before the party sets up camp, Palan lets them know they are now close behind the caravan.

The Scouting Party

Once the adventurers are actually tailing the expedition, Palan sets up a quick camp and lets the party take a short rest. He starts planning an attack before dawn. As Palan is finishing setting up camp, every character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher notices a strange silhouette. If any character offers to stand guard or look around they can make a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the silhouette. If one or more of the player characters notice the silhouette, read the following to them:

> You spot a shadow moving on a dune nearby, it seems to move away quickly as you try to get a better look. You notice Palan looking in the same direction, quickly checking that his weapons are in place.

If no one notices, Palan certainly has, but he remains unsure. His instincts tell him to take a better look. In this case, read the following aloud:

> Palan gets up and starts to move. He leaves with a simple: *"Rest up, I'll come back. Need to check on something…"*

At this point, any character can choose to follow Palan, as he does not order the adventurers to stay back. But he does leave quickly, and he will wait for no one. If no characters follow Palan, skip to the "Finding Palan" section below.

If any characters follow Palan, they find five **Magnifex dragonkin** with half their normal hit points lurking nearby, huddled together and talking amongst themselves. These dragonkin are injured because they found a nasty stormwurm, which attacked them while they were searching for water. A passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 20 is enough to notice the wounds on their scales.

> You move up the dunes to the north and hear slithering noises from below. In the interdunes, you see five figures with snake-like tails and a draconic upper body, their hissing voices carry across the sand.

Palan instructs any who decided to follow him to attack at once and to not let anyone escape. If any dragonkin escapes, the caravan will be aware of the party's presence, and the party will not be able to take it by surprise.

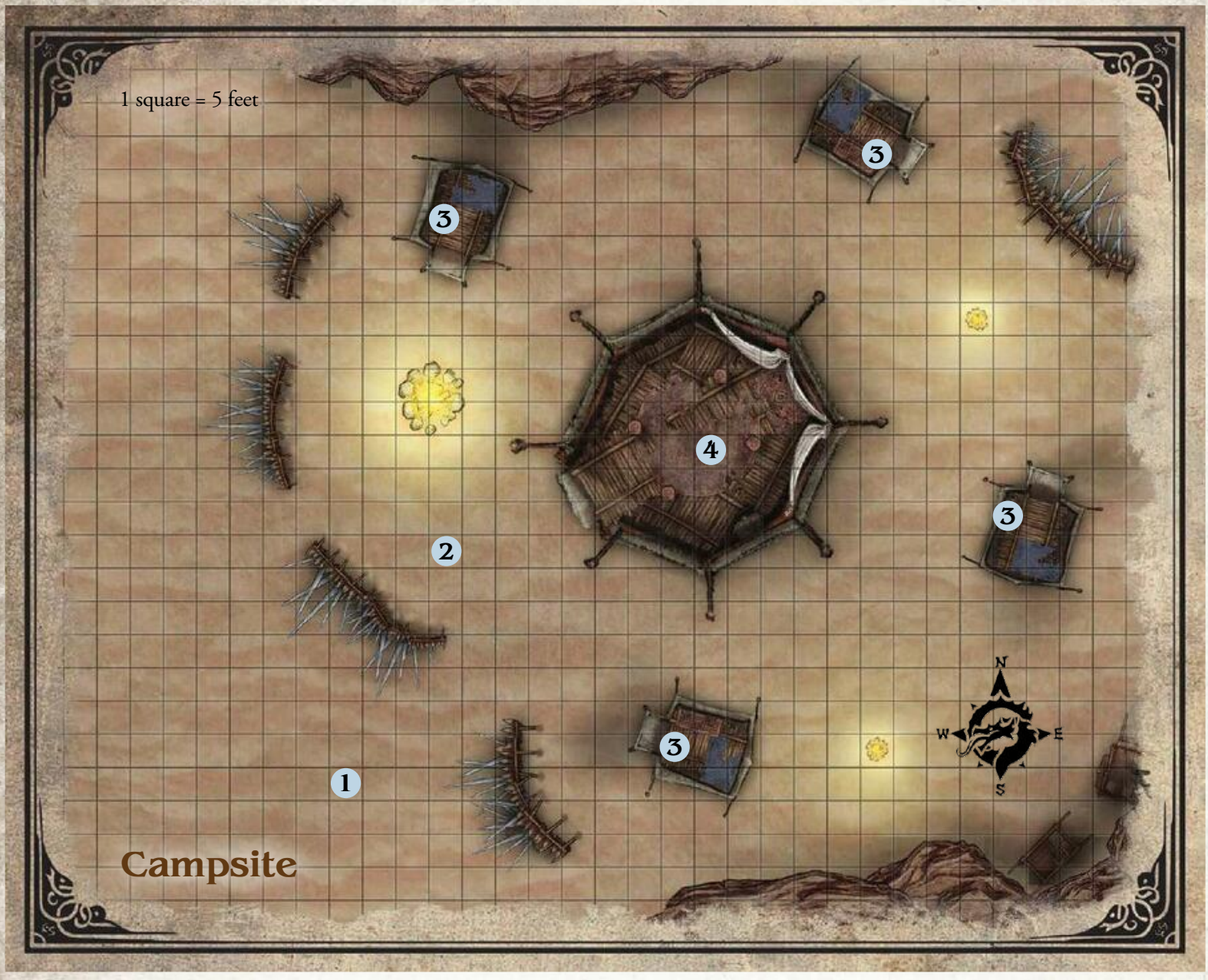
If the characters do not move silently, they will be spotted immediately, and a fight ensues. Any characters that succeed at approaching stealthily will be able to surprise the dragonkin for the first round of combat. Either way, once the dragonkin are aware of the party's presence, three will charge while two of them try to escape.

After the fight, Palan tells the party that they must attack the caravan immediately because the rest of the Magnifex might notice that the scouts have not returned and may prepare for an attack. This means that the adventurers will have to fight at their current exhaustion levels. Palan leaves the decision up to them, telling them that he is willing to wait if they think they need to rest.

Finding Palan

If no one from the party follows Palan when he goes to investigate, he will take on the fight alone. He manages to slay four dragonkin but falls to the fifth and is left unconscious on the sand. The party will find him there whenever they head out from camp. He is seriously wounded (currently at 25% of his maximum hit points, rounded down) and will need healing.

The fifth Magnifex dragonkin has escaped and will alert the rest of the caravan. There will be no chance for the party to take the caravan by surprise, as they will be ready and waiting for an attack.



MAP 2.1 : CAMPSITE

Expedition Campsite

When the party finally catches up to the expedition, the state in which they find the camp will depend on whether they were able to completely eliminate the scouting party in the previous encounter.

1. The Perimeter

This is the area the party arrives from. As they approach, they'll find the remnants of the caravans carts, devoid of any useful supplies. Read the following text box:

> You find your way to the expedition's campsite. The area outside the camp is dotted with badly battered carts, with several sets of dragonkin tracks leading from them toward the tents. There are three campfires, one large and two smaller ones, as well as five domed tents made from bone and poorly-tanned leather, still showing some gore and blood stains, with the largest tent at the center. There are nine palisades lined with spikes of bone blocking portions of the camp's access points.
>
> The whole arrangement creates a crude yet effective defensive perimeter for the campsite.

If the adventurers managed to defeat the entire previous scouting party and are assaulting the caravan without resting, then there are five **Magnifex dragonkin** in this area guarding the perimeter and the remainder of the creatures in the camp are all resting, distributed amongst the tents as described in the sections below.

If that is the case, read the following out loud:

> The camp is silent and the fires are still burning, but the dragonkin seem to have retreated to their tents to rest for the night. There are only five guards outside the camp, slithering circles along its perimeter. Palan orders you to take out the guards as quickly as possible so you can take the rest of the expedition by surprise.

If the party can take out the five guards in the first 2 rounds of combat, they can make their way into the camp unnoticed. If they take longer or make any loud noises, the rest of the dragonkin in the camp are roused and will join the fight 2 rounds after that.

If the party failed to defeat all of the scouts in the previous encounter, however, and the camp is aware of their impending attack, read the following boxed text to the players instead:

> As soon as you approach the camp, it is clear that the dragonkin are ready for an attack. They have gathered into three small squads and are standing behind the spiked fences they set up to defend the camp.
>
> Displeased, Palan lets out a heavy sigh. "If we win this, we do that much to teach 'em not to take Valernians lightly. So fight hard. And don't die."

In this scenario, the five guards here have retreated to behind the palisades in area 2 and are reinforced by all of the dragonkin in the tents described below.

PALISADES AND TRAPS

The palisades can be jumped over by making a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check, any character that fails takes 2d8 piercing damage. If the check fails by 10 or more, then after the damage the character does not land inside the camp and is placed just outside, adjacent to the palisades.

Between each of the palisades is a pitfall trap. Automatically noticing the trap requires a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 20 or higher. Any character actively looking for traps can find all of the pitfalls with a single DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check.

If a character steps in any space in the gap between two adjacent palisades, they must roll a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw. Failing that save results in the character taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and 1d8 piercing damage from the stakes at the bottom as they plummet 20 feet into the pit. A success means that they manage to jump across the gap to the other side. After a trap has been triggered, that trap is open for everyone to see.

DEVELOPMENTS

After the adventurers clear out the camp and find the parchment, this area is also where Fannax attacks Palan.

2. Camp

> The tents of bone and sewn skin make the camp look imposing. The tent at the center is quite large, and there are four smaller tents scattered inside the campsite.

This area is the camp proper. If the camp has been warned about the attack, this area holds all of the camp's dragonkin together, ready to defend from behind the palisades.

3. Small Tents

> The inside of the tent is simple and functional. You find a small rug and a vase with water inside, but there is nothing else of note.

These tents each hold a single **Magnifex dragonkin.** Unless the characters declare that they are moving stealthily and succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check as they enter the tent, the dragonkin wakes up. If the dragonkin is awakened, it hisses loudly, alerting the rest of the camp, and attacks immediately.

4. Main Tent

> The Main tent is quite large, supported by large wooden columns. Inside are many rugs, with decorations that are bizarre and eye catching, not always in the best way. There is a chest at the back of the room with a small altar nearby.

The main tent holds one **Magnifex acidbrewer** and two **Magnifex songmasters**. Both dragonkin wake up when anyone enters the tent unless the characters declare they are moving stealthily and they succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check as they enter. If any of them wake up, they hiss loudly, alerting the rest of the camp, and attack immediately.

TREASURE

The Magnifex acidbrewer has a simple key on him that is used to open the chest in the main tent. Inside the chest, the party will find six food rations, a beautifully decorated ***silver canteen***, a one-use item that will completely remove all exhaustion levels once consumed, a felt bag containing two diamonds and five emeralds, and a piece of parchment.

If the party has no one that can cast ***greater restoration***, they also find 2 ***potions of greater restoration***.

Inevitable Betrayal

The parchment sheet found in the camp's chest was inscribed by the Coatl dragonkin Mzeebal. While torn, it shows a simple map of the desert with three locations marked on it. As they find the parchment, read the following text out loud to the players:

> As soon as the chest is opened, Palan quickly grabs the parchment, ignoring everything else. He sits down on a nearby stone and starts reading, moving his mouth as he does so.
>
> After finishing, he turns to you all and says, *"I heard that Aureus was looking for a way to break the curse, to create a bridge from Drakha to Valerna… Didn't right believe it until now. We like to dream of a way back home, one that doesn't require riding on dragonback, I mean. I'll say, I'm sure our reward will be nice, but… this could give Aureus a free path to Valerna… or allow us to go back home…"*
>
> As if punctuating his sentence, a spear tears through the roof of the tent. Palan instinctively draws his maul as he sees it. *"Harpooner's eyes, fellows! That's a Golden City weapon. We're betrayed!"*

Any adventurers that exit the tent will find Fannax and her five **Fulgen guards** outside the camp in area 1. She decided to follow them and let them do the dirty work of securing the parchment without complicating things with Fulgen involvement, only to take it from them, locate the prized item, and return with it to Aureus herself.

To begin the next scene, read the following to your players:

> You see Fannax just outside the camp, a red-tinted glass spear in her hand. She is accompanied by five Goldclaws, who look confused when you come out of the tent.
>
> One of them speaks in guttural Draconic. *"They are alive Captain! Our orders are clear. We must only ensure that they continue on their path."*
>
> Fannax, visibly flustered, angrily points her Va'ra spear at Palan and speaks. *"I have heard rumors of Ysvalian honor, Captain. I challenge you to single combat. After you die, I will only take the parchment and let the others live. I promise this shall be, as per my azhurma's law."*
>
> Then she looks back at the dragonkin guards and declares clearly and loudly, *"If you dare come between me and this weak womb-born, I will kill all of you first and take my chances in exile."*
>
> Palan steps forward, looking down at his feet and sighs. *"I accept your challenge, lizard. It's your death."*

At this point, the characters must choose whether they are going to try to interfere or not.

If they interfere, one of the Fulgen dragonkin guards throws a large clay vase at them, as centrally as possible. As soon as it hits the ground, it explodes. Each character within a 60-foot radius of its point of impact must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw. Anyone who fails the save takes 45 (8d10) fire damage and becomes blinded for 5 (1d4 + 3) rounds (enough for the duel to end). Success halves the damage and negates the blinded condition but still blurs the vision, causing those affected to make all of their attack rolls with disadvantage for 5 (1d4 + 3) rounds unless they have blindsight.

After tossing the blinding powder, the guards warn the adventurers that this duel is a lawful challenge and that any further interference will be met with force. If any of the party continue to interfere, the guards enter the combat, focusing on those attempting to meddle in the one-on-one combat between Palan and Fannax.

Regardless of any attempt to interfere, Palan and Fannax start their combat. She will focus every one of her attacks on Palan, even if the characters step in, striking with

all her might. She is blinded by rage against him because, in Aureus' eyes, this Valernian is worth something more than the Vaala he contains.

During this encounter Palan keeps his vow to uphold the challenge and reminds the characters that it's his honor that is on the line, so he is unwilling to be teleported, moved or have any other effects targeting him that would otherwise remove him from battle.

If the party somehow manages to save Palan—which should be highly unlikely for them—play him as permanently weakened from the **Va'ra wounds**, perhaps inflicting a couple of levels of exhaustion that don't seem to go away, so that his presence on the party's side doesn't disrupt the rest of the adventure. For the remainder of the adventure, he will be unable to have his hit points restored above 40 or to recover to less than 2 levels of exhaustion.

If the adventurers stand by and let the fight continue, or if Palan dies, read them the following:

> As Palan and Fannax clash in combat, you notice the dragonkin sneer at Palan when she finds they are evenly matched. After a series of thrusts, dashes, and parries, Palan manages to gain the upper hand with a downward slash that deeply cuts into Fannax's shoulder.
>
> Unfortunately, Fannax maintains her focus and thrusts her spear through Palan's chest. You notice Palan's essence leaving his body as the spear's crimson crystal starts glowing.
>
> You see movement among the dragonkin. Taking advantage of Fannax's wounds, they charge at her, quickly overpowering her and binding her hands and feet in chains. She starts to pass out from her wound.
>
> One of the dragonkin takes a step toward you and speaks. *"We are taking Fannax back to the Golden City to be judged for her disobedience. You will continue on your quest. Remember that it was Aureus, not Fannax, who bestowed this task upon you. Complete your quest, Steelclaws, and witness as Aureus stays true to his word; he always has and forever will."*
>
> The dragonkin turn around, now carrying an unconscious Fannax, and start on their way back to the Golden City.

The adventurers can follow the dragonkin after the encounter, if they wish, to either question Fannax or avenge Palan, but she is still blinded with rage, telling the Valernians how little she thinks of them and wishing that Baastherox kills them slowly. She offers little else.

If they decide to fight the five Fulgen guards, the fight happens in an open area. Fannax will not join in as she is bound in chains. The dragonkin will fight in perfect order. They will focus all attacks on one character, and strike even after the character falls unconscious, until they are dead. Then, they will move on to the next adventurer using the same strategy. If the party is victorious, they can do with Fannax as they please.

They can choose to go to Palan instead, retrieving the piece of parchment and watching as their captain's essence fades into the crystal on Fannax's spear. The dragonkin leave with their prisoner in haste.

Now that they have the parchment, the characters can see a clear route on it with three numbered, distinct locations marked. However, the parchment is incomplete, with what appears to be a route to a fourth location torn from it.

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 18th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

Va'ra wounds

THE CAVE OF DEFEAT

Show the players the parchment handout or an image of it and explain the various annotations on it.

> The piece of parchment is old and torn, and it depicts a rough map of the Ashen Fractures. The map focuses on the several regions in Baastherox's domain, all the way to the borders with Aureus's Gilded Lands to the north and Rawraxxa's Shrilling Sands to the south.
>
> There is a muddy and halting inscription written in Draconic at the bottom: *"Clear-- with this --end --Curse of Kad--os-- if Baastherox can be per--uaded--"* The rest of the sentence has been erased, or torn from the parchment.

The map has three marked locations. The closest one depicts two simple hills with a cave entrance and is marked with the Draconic word for "scar." The second location is a deep canyon; on it is the word for "worship." Finally, the third location is one even Valernians have heard of, the Titan Skull, marked with the word for "death." This is said to be the place where one of the strongest dragons ever to exist waits for any challengers.

The closest point on the map, "scar," is four to five Rhaavan days away. The party could choose to travel to the mapped locations in any order they want, and they can even decide to go directly to the final encounter from this point. If the party chooses to travel to the "worship" location, skip to the "Mandate of Strength" section. It takes eight days of travel to get there. If they choose to move toward the "death" location, skip to the "The Great Death" section. It

takes twelve days of travel. Otherwise, continue with this section to bring the adventurers to the "scar" location.

When the party begins their trip, read them the following:

> As you prepare to leave, you notice the sky getting darker, and from time to time, claps of thunder rattle the air and pierce your ears.
>
> You notice that unlike other storms, this one has no precipitation, only darkness, and the only light it brings is that of brief flashes breaking through the darkness from lighting as it strikes across the red desert.

Navigation

Make note of the time required for the party to reach their destination, halving it if the adventurers travel more hours than normal and exert themselves.

Traveling through the desert is hard. At the start of each new travel day in the Ashen Fractures, the party must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check to avoid becoming lost. Failure on this check means that they add one additional day to their travel time.

The party can gain advantage on this check if they move deliberately slowly, adding half a day to their travel time. By the same token, the party has disadvantage on this check if they move too fast or for longer than normal in a day.

Count only full days of travel when rolling for combat and survival encounters below.

Random Encounters

At the start of every day of travel, except for the day before the party arrives at their destination, roll once on both the Ashen Fractures Combat Encounters and Ashen Fractures Survival Encounters tables, then run the appropriate encounter(s) as dictated by the results, allowing a short rest between them if required. You may reroll if the result is an encounter the party has already faced.

All of the creatures in the combat encounter table can be found in appendix A, and a detailed description of each survival encounter is listed in the Ashen Fractures Hazards section at the end of this adventure.

The encounters can take place during either Drakhan daytime or nighttime, depending on which time of day the party decided to leave the Golden City, in whatever order you determine.

Ashen Fractures Combat Encounters

1D12	ENCOUNTER
1–8	Nothing
9	A raid of 1d6 Magnifex dragonkin on the party's camp
10	A raid of 1d8 Magnifex dragonkin and 1 Magnifex acidbrewer on the road
11	1 sandbeetle swarm
12	2 stormwurm larvae

Ashen Fractures Survival Encounters

1D12	ENCOUNTER
1–2	Cave oasis; the party may rest and lose 1 exhaustion level
3–5	Extreme heat
6–7	Quicksand
8	Sulphur explosions
9	Sandstorm
10	Earthquake
11	Lightning storm
12	Roll or choose twice

Exhaustion

At the end of each day spent travelling, each character must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion.

A character has disadvantage on this saving throw if they are wearing medium or heavy armor. Also, if the party is traveling at a fast pace, they all have disadvantage on this save. If the party is traveling at a deliberately slower pace, they all have advantage on this save. You can award advantage or disadvantage to individual saving throws if the party is creative in the ways they chose to brave the desert.

Characters who fail this saving throw by 10 or more gain two levels of exhaustion. Should an adventurer reach level 6 exhaustion because of this, they stay at level 5 exhaustion instead.

Terror from Beneath

When the adventurers are on their last day of travel, they get attacked by a **stormwurm**. Read the following description when you are ready to run the encounter as the party either declares they are leaving or they are calling it a day.

You have traveled several days through the harsh climate, enduring the Titan Wastes. As you draw ever closer to the location marked on the map, you can see small rocky hills rising in the distance.

You are making good time, even as you trudge your way through the desert, when suddenly the sky darkens, and a single bolt of lightning strikes disturbingly close to you. It's destructive force crystallizes the sand into a glass-like structure in the shape of a basin with spiked edges.

The sand beneath your feet starts to move, creating a swirl in the desert floor, and begins to pull you toward something barely discernible at the center. From the center of the swirl, two pink, slimy tendrils shoot upward!

Have the party roll initiative. The encounter begins with each character making a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw. Those who fail become restrained by the flowing sand and sink into it up to their knees. At the start of their first turn in combat, these restrained characters are moved 40 feet toward the hole in the sand, slowing just at the edge of the hole. At the start of their second turn, these characters can try to escape the flowing sand by using their action to roll a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If they fail or otherwise don't attempt to escape, then at the end of that turn they fall into the hole, which is 60 feet deep. Any adventurer that doesn't become restrained by the flowing sand or fall into the hole must keep making the DC 23 Dexterity saving throws against the flowing sand at the start of each of their turns until they fall in or leave the area.

The stormwurm will use its turns to try to grapple a character, prioritizing those who managed to stay free from

MAP 2.2: STORMWURM POOL

the shifting sand. As soon as it has a character grappled, it will descend into the cavern with them. If it fails on the first turn, keep the combat running outside the cave until the stormwurm manages to capture a character and retreat inside its cave.

5. Stormwurm pool

Ideally, the stormwurm abducting an adventurer will push the characters to go into the cave to save their companion. However, if they decide they won't, continue combat with the stormwurm attacking the character it pulled into the cave, while the rest of the adventurers take actions above.

Read this text out loud once the first character falls into or otherwise enters the cave:

> You find yourself in a deep dark cave. The only light is coming from the opening on the cavern's ceiling. There still is sand coming down, but the flow seems to have slowed down significantly. There is a deep pool of water at the center of the cave and many tunnels heading in different directions.

The pool and its surroundings is where most of the battle should take place. The pool is 10 feet under the main cave level. The walls are rocky and have plenty of tunnels heading in different directions.

There is a passage underwater that leads to the hidden cave in area 6. Have any character that ends up inside the pool roll a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice an entrance about 20 feet under the surface. The underwater tunnel to reach the hidden cave is 45 feet long.

DEVELOPMENTS

When it is close to being killed, the stormwurm will try to escape. It will head through one of the many tunnels around the pool. The party can give chase for 2 rounds and attack normally, but after that the stormwurm will dig directly down, causing boulders to drop onto the tunnel after it, making it impossible for the party to follow.

After the stormwurm is dead or has escaped, the cave is safe, and the temperature in it is much better than out on the sand. If the characters rest here, they recover two levels of exhaustion and do not have to roll for any random encounters.

Whenever the party is ready to leave, let them know that they safely reach their destination. See the "The Scar" section below.

TREASURE

There is treasure inside the stormwurm. If a character goes through its entrails they find one *+2 ranged weapon* of whatever type is appropriate for any character in the party and three **Va'ra crystals.**

6. Hidden Cave

> The dark tunnel leads to a small pool in a separate cave. This cave is very small and humid. You spot a stone chest near some dragonkin bones.

This cave only has the chest, which has no lock and opens easily.

TREASURE

Inside the chest are *3 potions* of greater restoration, one ring of protection, one suit of *+2 armor* of whatever type can be worn by a character in the party, one dragonslayer short sword, and three *supreme healing potions*.

If you feel you can't decide on your own which armor or weapons to include as treasure in this encounter, make the weapon a *+2 sling*, and the armor a set of *+3 studded leather*. But ideally, look at the party's current equipment and give them something slightly better or something suited to complement their current style of play.

The Scar

The party arrives in a region full of small hills made of sharp stones. As they reach "The Scar," the adventurers find piles of bones from both dragons and dragonkin. Befitting its name, the entrance to the cave is a large gash that looks like it was sliced into the hill's face.

As they enter, read the following paragraph:

> The cave is cool compared to the outside, illuminated by a natural skylight at the top. The floor is rough, like badly polished stone, and a layer of bones covers most of it. The walls have carvings that are clearly divided into three sections.

Ossified Shard Artifacts

The cave is enormous, and one of the walls has a mural etched into it with a very sharp object.

The first section depicts two giant dragons clashing in pitched battle, one towering in size over the other. The middle section depicts the larger dragon beating the smaller one, standing over it. The final section has a larger etching of the smaller dragon; some of the lines are filled with shiny metal, representing scars on the dragon's body.

Underneath the final section is a short sentence written in Draconic, it reads: "My arrogance was my defeat… Kadmos spared me. I bear these scars proudly, for they remind me what true power feels like."

The final section accurately shows where the scars are located on the dragon's body. If a character inspects it, and spends over a minute looking at the mural in general or tries to copy the image with parchment or paper, make a note to give that character an advantage when searching for the scars on Baastherox's body.

If the adventurers search the bones, they find the remains of another Valernian. The man's skin has dried out, and it looks like he has been dead for a while yet preserved by the desert sands. The corpse has simple, now useless armor and the clothing he wore when alive. His skeletal hand still holds a roll of parchment in it. Most of it is unreadable except for the last part, which reads:

> *"…death, everything is death around here. The ground is like an oven, and the heat boils us slowly like a stew… Did Aureus really think this was possible? Or was he trying to get rid of us?"*

Treasure

The metal inside the cracks of the mural is platinum worth a total of 7,000 gp. It is soft, so it can be remove with any sharp object.

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 19th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

MANDATE OF STRENGTH

After the party presumably rests at the cave, they will be ready to travel to the second location on the parchment map, marked "worship." This one is even deeper into the desert, four days' travel from the Cave of Defeat. The farther they go, the harsher the conditions are.

Storms and explosions are more frequent, and even the air feels more dense. Carcasses and bones become more frequent sights.

Navigation

At the start of each new travel day, the party must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check to avoid becoming lost. Failure on this check means that they add one additional day to their travel time.

The party can gain advantage on this check if they move deliberately slowly, adding half a day to their travel time. By the same token, the party has disadvantage on this check if they move too fast or for longer than normal in a day.

Count only full days of travel when rolling for combat and survival encounters below.

Random Encounters

At the start of every day of travel, except for the day before the party arrives at their destination, roll once on both the Titan Wastes Combat Encounters and Titan Wastes Survival Encounters tables, then run the appropriate encounter(s) as dictated by the results, allowing a short rest between them if required. You may reroll if the result is an encounter the party has already faced.

All of the creatures in the combat encounter table can be found in appendix A, and a detailed description of each survival encounter is listed in the Ashen Fractures Hazards section at the end of this adventure.

The encounters can take place at any time throughout the day and in whatever order you determine.

Titan Wastes Combat Encounters

1D12	ENCOUNTER
1–9	Nothing
10–11	1 **sandbeetle swarm**
12	1 **Adult Exor dragon**, wounded (only 283 hit points remaining and unable to use its frightful presence ability)

Titan Wastes Survival Encounters

1D12	ENCOUNTER
1	Cave oasis; the party may rest and lose one Exhaustion level.
2–8	Nothing
9	Extreme heat
10	Earthquake
11	Sulfur explosion
12	Lightning storm

Exhaustion

At the end of each day spent travelling, each character must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion.

A character has disadvantage on this saving throw if they are wearing medium or heavy armor. Also, if the party is traveling at a fast pace, they all have disadvantage on this save. If the party is traveling at a deliberately slower pace, they all have advantage on this save. You can award advantage or disadvantage to individual saving throws if the party is creative in the ways they chose to brave the desert.

Characters who fail this saving throw by 10 or more gain two levels of exhaustion. Should an adventurer reach level 6 exhaustion because of this, they stay at level 5 exhaustion instead.

The Cult of Might

After the appropriate number of days of travel, the party arrives at a 300-foot crevice, at the bottom of which the second cave marked on their map is located. The sides of the crevice are incredibly smooth, worn down by both wind and sand. The climb down is dangerous because the wind tends to rush up the wall, making it more treacherous.

Have each character roll two DC 20 Strength (Athletics) checks, the first check at 150 feet down, when the first gust rushes by, and the second check at 50 feet from the bottom, when another gust rushes through the ravine.

Failing either check means that the character loses their hold and falls. Allow them to roll a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw. Success means they only take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and manage to hold on to the rope or wall part way down from where they fell.

Characters who are descending with the use of either the fly or feather fall spells need to instead roll one DC 22 Strength save halfway down the crevice to resist the wind and not get thrown into the side. Failing this check will result in them taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage after crashing into the wall.

When the adventurers reach the bottom of the ravine, read the following paragraph to them:

> Once you reach the bottom of the crevice, you walk for a hundred feet and find an entrance in one of the walls. The stone is smoothed and has clearly been worked on.
>
> Loud chanting can be heard coming from the inside, and you immediately recognize it as Draconic. The chant is rhythmic and repetitive: *"Vada! Bazhera! Ivjakut ume zhe! Aasthrut ume zhe!" It can be translated as "Arise! Overcome! Become worthy! Become mighty!"*

7. Cave Entrance

As the characters cross the threshold into the cave, they can detect a simple trap with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 19. A character searching for traps or the character in front if they enter the cave carefully can make a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check to detect it.

The trap is a simple trip wire that, if triggered, drops some large rocks behind them, sealing them inside the cave and alerting the dragonkin in area 8.

If the characters activate the trap, each character in the entrance makes a DC 22 Dexterity save, taking 28 (8d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Characters who were outside can decide to jump in as the rocks fall, to end up inside the cave. If they are stuck outside, it takes two successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) checks to clear enough rocks to enter.

DEVELOPMENTS

> Inside the cave a large group of some twenty dragonkin, all unarmored and with their weapons sheathed, are chanting, *"Aasthrut ume zhe,"* around a circular arena made of solid stone.

If the characters triggered the trap, all of the dragonkin in area 8 will be aware of the intruders and attack.

8. Cult of Might Arena

A cult of dragonkin that worships Baastherox is holding a fight between two of its members in an improvised fighting pit. These are dragonkin from all the broods, and upon closer inspection, the characters will notice that some have been maimed and all are covered in scars. The two in the pit are savagely fighting.

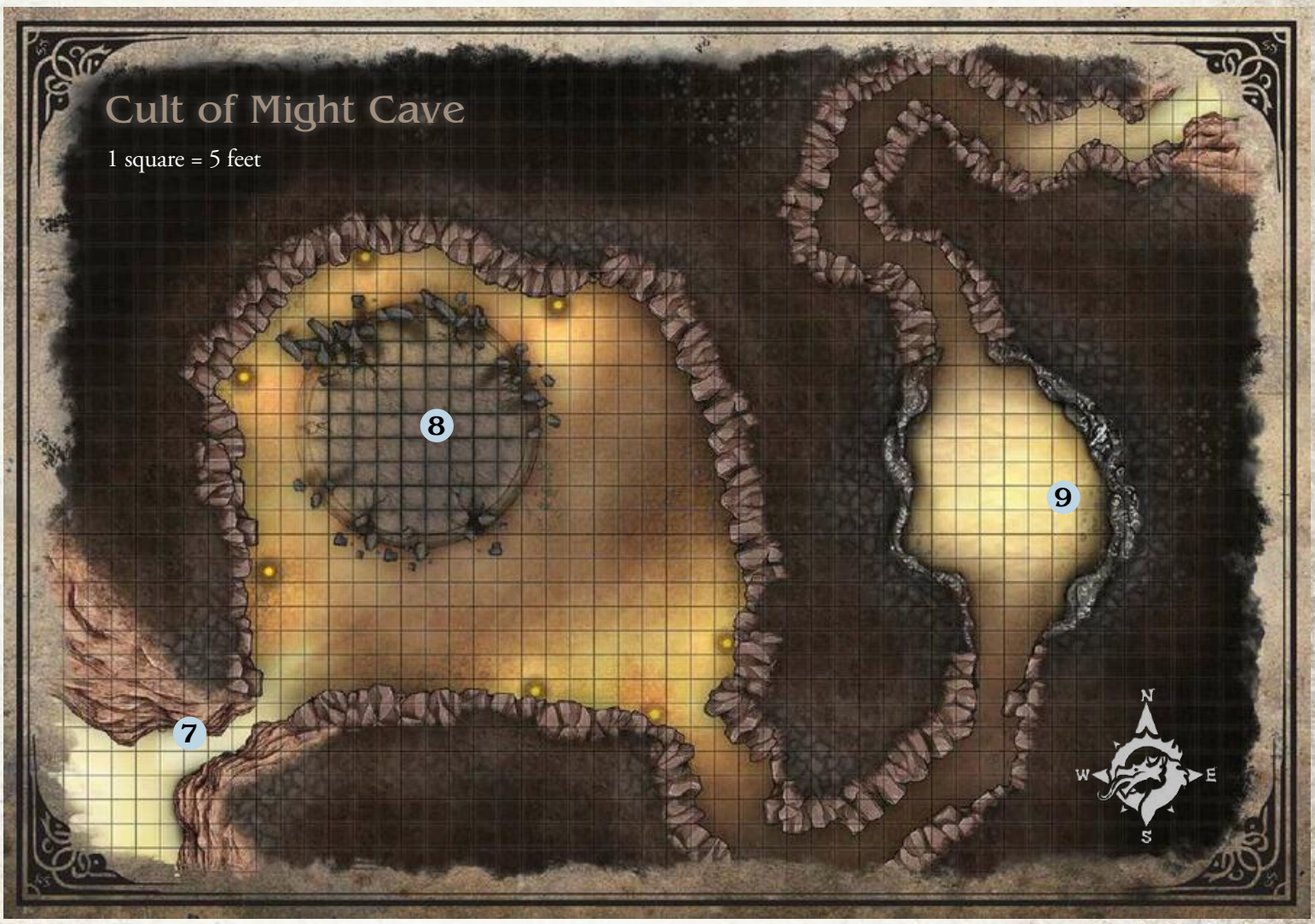
There are twenty-one **Might Cultist dragonkin** plus **Ryellus**, Champion of the Mighty, inside the cave. If the party fails a DC 20 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, or if they triggered the trap at the entrance, they are attacked by groups of five Cult dragonkin at a time.

Ryellus only enters the fray if the characters attack by surprise, in which case all of the dragonkin attack simultaneously.

If the adventurers beat two waves of dragonkin, Ryellus will challenge them to fight him, promising to let them through if they beat him. If they accept, the other dragonkin will stop to watch the battle. Ryellus will focus his attacks on low-defense characters until they are unconscious before moving on to the next. At half his health, he will call for a stop to the fight. If the characters keep attacking, the rest of the dragonkin join in and fight to the death.

If the adventurers beat Ryellus fair and square and spare him, read the next box to the players:

> Ryellus looks at you and smiles, muttering "worthy" under his breath. He then commands the dragonkin to stand down.
>
> He announces proudly, *"We have met worthy foes in the pit. They will be granted passage to face the final challenge before they have the honor of facing the Mightiest."* The rest of the dragonkin chant in unison: "Ivjakut" or "Worthy."



MAP 2.3: CULT OF MIGHT CAVE

ROLEPLAYING RYELLUS

The Fulgen dragonkin speaks little, but he speaks of honor and in general has a single purpose: to challenge Baastherox and either prove himself or be killed. He knows that Kadmos forgave Baastherox, and even though he knows he could probably never beat the Mightiest, maybe he could prove himself like Baastherox did to the Primordial Dragon.

What Ryellus knows

We have a mural in the next cave: a depiction of Baastherox's pride, a shard from Kadmos's claw.

Longago, the Mightiest challenged Kadmos, and managed to give the Primordial a honorable fight before being spared for his bravery.

Baastherox keeps this Shard beneath his bone plinth. It is a monument to those who challenged him.

Many suns ago, Mzeebal, a Coatl kin, set out to try and retrieve the Shard. I suspect he failed at this. But he made maps and clues.

He came through here and passed my test, so I listened. He told of a cave where runes could empower the Shard, of a sacrifice. I know no more of this. He was vague, as all his kind are.

MZEEBAL'S HISTORY

Mzeebal was a reputed dragonkin sorcerer who studied Kadmos for several decades. It was through his investigations that he discovered that it was Baastherox who had battled—and was defeated by—Kadmos, before the Primordial vanished.

However, and this is the part that most intrigued him, a shard of one of the Primordial's claws was lodged in Baastherox's body. Mzeebal believed, as does Aureus, that this Shard could be an ingredient in a spell that could potentially open the Eye of Kadmos.

Mzeebal obtained this knowledge through years of research and investigation all across Drakha, roaming from lair to lair and region to region. This aroused rumors, which eventually reached many interested parties, including both Aureus and Kuxcoatl.

Mzeebal was taken prisoner by mercenaries hired by Kuxcoatl, who were taking him back to the azhurma, but he escaped from them and sought refuge in this crevice where he discovered the "Shrine to the Mightiest." As he made his way to Baastherox's lair, he built a shelter to continue his research and repeatedly requested that the dragon yield Kadmos's Shard to prove his theory was correct.

Baastehrox grew weary of this and put an end to Mzeebal's life during his last attempt at convincing him. The dragonkin sage died inside the Titan Skull, leaving only the map and a few clues of his final journey. How the map ever made it out of Baastherox's domain remains a mystery.

Ryellus

9. The Chamber of Reflection

This chamber is formed by natural stone arcs. The red rock walls have tracts written on them filled with platinum, which make the cave look like a giant diary.

This chamber was the temporary resting place of Baastherox millennia ago, where he pondered his life after surviving his encounter with Kadmos. If any character inspects the walls, they find many quotes similar in tone and subject matter, indicating that this part of the cave is actually a shrine to a particular school of thought.

If the party shows interest in reading the carvings on the walls, read them the following quotes:

- *"I will search for a worthy challenge, one that reminds me of that fateful day when my strength was found lacking."*
- *"Respect the challenge. Never take advantage. Take defeat with honor."*
- *"Combat is pure, and those who fight will be cleansed through it."*
- *"The valiant weak should be protected so they can become stronger braves."*
- *"Honor the dead."*
- *"Strike at your enemies with nothing but honor."*
- *"Those who slay the weak deserve to be taught the meaning of real strength."*

Inside the shrine, the adventurers find another mural carved into the stone by Baastherox. Etched on the wall is a depiction of the Shard, part of a gigantic claw, filled with platinum that can be removed fairly easily with a sharp tool, and underneath it is a text in Draconic which reads:

"My heirloom from the battle, a proof of my fateful transformation. Great Kadmos didn't deliver the final strike to finish me off but respected the duel, as do I. There is no greater honor, and this piece will forever be a memento of the day when I was bested."

There is also a hidden chest mostly buried in the room, inside of which are some shavings from the Shard. It can be found with a DC 27 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Alternatively, if Ryellus brings the characters here after losing to them, he digs up the chest and gives them the shavings, telling them that, while they do not contain the powers of the shard itself, they can be used to enhance a weapon or a few spells. He had thought of using them himself in his eventual encounter with Baastherox, but the party's fight with him proved to him that he still needs further training.

As they are saying their farewells, a great roar is heard at a distance, followed by thunder echoing in the chamber. One repeated word from the cultists resounds above the din in the cavern: "ivjakut," or "worthy."

TREASURE

The treasure contains shavings of the Shard. A DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that a weapon or a spellcasting focus can fuse with the bone shavings, and it would be strengthened against any creature that was created by Kadmos. See the "Ossified Shard Artifacts" section under "Baastherox Exploits" for the effects of this on later fighting Baastherox.

There are enough shavings to treat up to two weapons or spellcasting focus in this manner. Each treatment takes one hour.

If the player characters pry the platinum filling inside the engraving of the runes carved in the walls out, it is worth 10,000 gp and weighs 20 pounds.

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 20th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

THE GREAT DEATH

The group arrives at the bottom of a canyon with walls 500 feet high. They can march along the canyon bottom or choose to climb its walls. Make it clear for the party that it looks safer to stay inside the canyon, as it seems to somewhat protect them from the environmental dangers. It will also lead them in the general direction they need to go, as they can tell from the map on the parchment.

If the party decides to climb out of the canyon, it is easy to ascend, requiring no ability check. However, you should roll once on the Great Death Survival Encounters table in the next section as they crest the top of the canyon. As wind passes over the canyon it creates a roaring sound.

It will take two days for the adventurers to traverse the canyon. After exiting or passing the end of the canyon, they arrive in the tract of desert surrounding the Titan Skull. It will take the party another two days to reach the Titan Skull.

This stretch of desert is filled with skeletons and carcasses scattered all over. It is the battlefield where, for more than two millennia, Baastherox has defended his title as the Mightiest. Countless dragons, dragonkin, and other creatures native to Drakha have fallen here, and the landscape is a testament to that.

"The Great Death" remains true to its name. Countless skeletons, shells, and carcasses, both fresh and old, litter the red sands. This expanse is an eternal battlefield, where creatures have come to die for millennia, and the undeniable proof of Baastherox's unbested might.

At a distance, you can see a colossal skull with an ever-present storm circling above it, constantly casting lighting strikes near it.

Navigation

The Titan Skull can be seen from miles away, even in the worst conditions. There is no need to roll for the party to find their way to Baastherox's Lair.

Random Encounters

For each day of travel in the canyon, roll twice on the Canyon Combat Encounters table . If two encounters are rolled on the same day you can combine them or run them separately.

For each day of travel in the desert beyond the canyon, roll three times on the Canyon Survival Encounters table.

All of the creatures in the combat encounter table can be found in appendix A, and a detailed description of each survival encounter is listed in the Ashen Fractures Hazards section at the end of this adventure.

The encounters can take place at any time throughout the day and in whatever order you determine.

Canyon Combat Encounters

1D12	ENCOUNTER
1–4	Nothing
5–10	3d6 + 2 **khar'gura**
11–12	1 **stormwurm** 1d4 – 1 **young stormwurm** 1d6 **stormwurm larvae**

Canyon Survival Encounters

1D12	ENCOUNTER
1–6	Extreme heat
7–9	Sulfur explosion
10–11	Lightning storm
12	Roll or pick twice

Exhaustion

At the end of each day spent travelling, each character must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion.

A character has disadvantage on this saving throw if they are wearing medium or heavy armor. Also, if the party is traveling at a fast pace, they all have disadvantage on this save. If the party is traveling at a deliberately slower pace, they all have advantage on this save. You can award advantage or disadvantage to individual saving throws if the party is creative in the ways they chose to brave the desert.

Characters who fail this saving throw by 10 or more gain two levels of exhaustion. Should an adventurer reach level 6 exhaustion because of this, they stay at level 5 exhaustion instead.

The Titan Skull

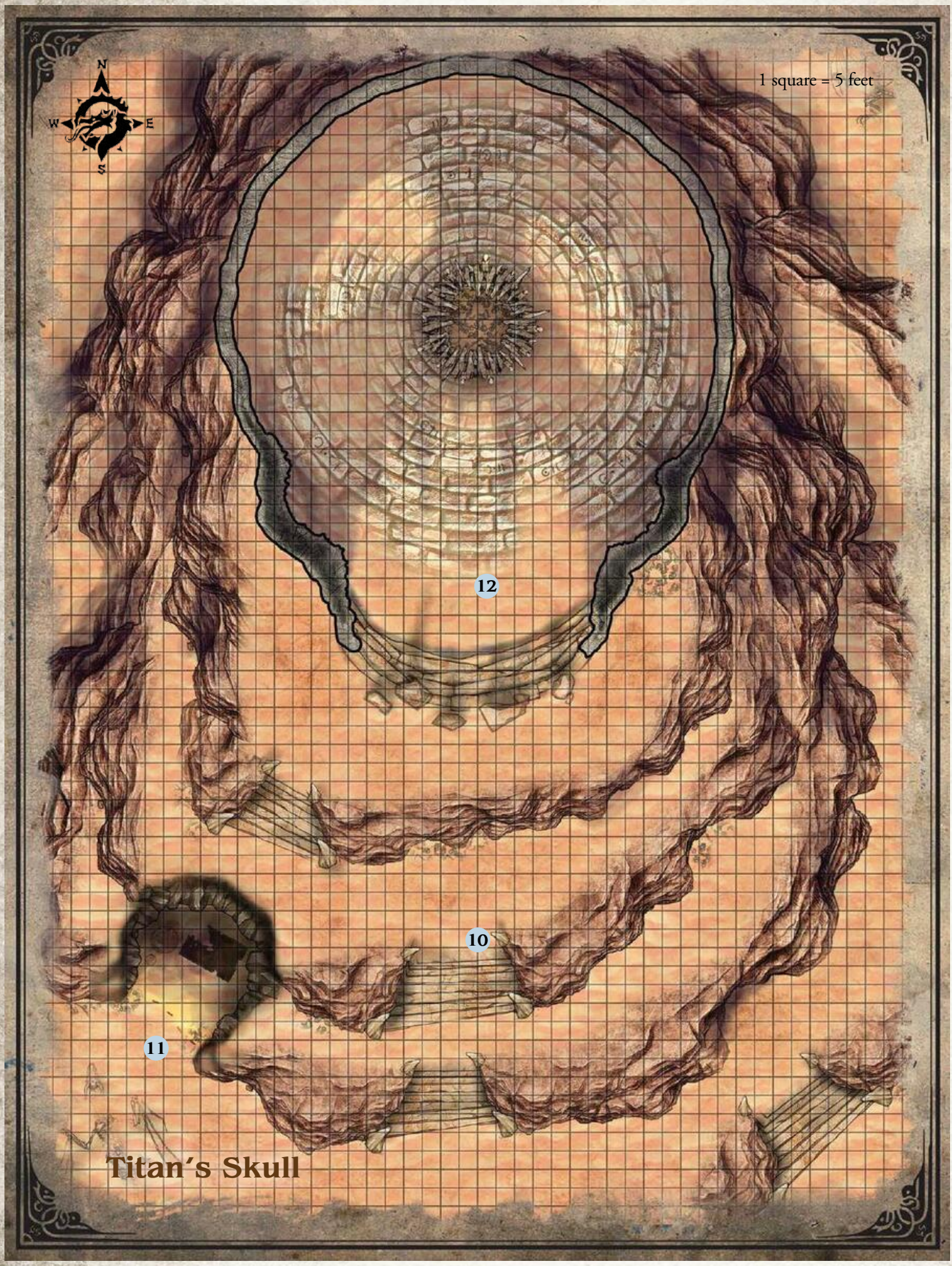
The party finally arrives at the Titan Skull, which Baastherox claimed as his lair after his only known defeat. This place is where he would await all challengers, deciding that he would no longer venture out in search of foes and instead let them come to him, should they prove capable of surviving the trek and, thus, prove themselves worthy of fighting him.

In front of you is the Titan Skull. It bears some general similarities to a human skull, yet the eye cavities are larger, and its overall proportions are stranger and much larger in size. Something about the gargantuan cranium gives off an aura of alienness.

It has jagged teeth, and its lower mandible is half buried under the sand, marking the main entrance to the lair itself.

There are massed storm clouds surrounding the general area around the skull, yet no rain ever falls from them, only lightning. Curiously enough, these never directly strike the skull.

As the party arrives near the Titan Skull, they find it surrounded by bones and carcasses. In some places, the sand is not even visible under the remains, making it a veritable field of bones. Even the staircases between each plateau are made out of bones



MAP 2.4: TITAN'S SKULL

10. Bone Stairs

The Titan Skull is atop a leveled hill. On the side of each level, cut into the hill, are staircases made of bones, varying in size; some look very old and some quite recent. On the first level, you see a cave dug into the hillside to the west of the second set of stairs.

As the party reaches the hill, lighting strikes near them, but never hits them unless they descend or retreat.

If any character that goes up the Titan Skull turns back, they are struck by lightning. They must make a DC 20 Constitution check, taking 21 (6d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. This lightning strikes them again each round in which they retreat away from the Titan Skull over the next minute. This effect ends if Baastherox is slain.

11. Mzeebal's Cave

You enter a small cave in the side of the mountain. There is a makeshift cot and a small table with parchment inkwells, and some empty vials and bottles. The cave walls have Draconic writing on them.

On the table is a torn piece of parchment. There is also a hidden compartment behind a loose stone near the north wall. The party can find it by making a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Most of the runes carved on the inside of Mzeebals' cave are protection runes that can be activated to hide the cave by succeeding on a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If the runes are activated, the party may rest here, with no harm coming to them for two days. After that, Baastherox will strike the cave with lightning, disabling the protective effect, and command them to enter his lair.

TREASURE

The parchment on the desk completes the one the party found at the Magnifex campsite. This piece has the rest of the map, leading to a fourth cave, marked as "essence." Near the cave are some notes of where to place the Shard inside a pool and how to make the appropriate sacrifice to activate it. Next to the indication, the word "Vaala" is circled, the energy that all living beings from Valerna have.

The treasure inside the hidden compartment includes a **Va'ra crystal**, three *greater restoration potions,* and three *potions of supreme healing.*

12. The Titan Skull

The being this skull belonged to was probably as big as the city of Ysval. Its remains hint at what the Red Moon was like before Kadmos, a time long forgotten. Inside, some steps take you into a circular arena, with a hard floor covered by a layer of sand.

Baastherox has crafted his lair to be a perfect fighting pit. At its center is a bone plinth, and on top of it is Baastherox, looking directly at you.

As you approach the lair's core, Baastherox rises in his colossal glory. This is no ordinary dragon, not even an ordinary great wyrm. This is an ancestral, nearly immortal entity, one that has been annoyed by your kind countless times and not challenged once.

Thunder cracks outside the lair. Baastherox steps toward you, silently accepting your challenge.

This room is a perfect combat environment, completely flat so that movement is not impeded. The room is well lit if it is daytime, and remains lightly obscured during the night.

The Primordial Shard is the centerpiece of the bone plinth in the middle of the arena. After the fight, it will be clear to see, since it has a different tone and texture from all the surrounding bones.

Once the players are ready to face **Baastherox**, proceed with the fight as detailed below, using the additional combat rules detailed at the beginning of this book.

Va'ra Crystals

The Fight with Baastherox

The battle against Baastherox begins when the player characters enter the skull that serves as his lair, and the dragon stares down the challengers as he descends from atop his bone plinth. This is the first phase of the fight.

First Phase

The battle begins as soon as a character attacks Baastherox. If no character does, Baastherox initiates by attacking the intruders one minute after they enter the cave.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The area is well lit with natural light. Small drakes flutter in the distance, indifferent to the battle.

7 (1d10 + 2) small drakes (12 AC; hp 10) scurry around the area. The drakes do not attack the player characters; they are either hidden or moving around the perimeter close to the walls.

Baastherox's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

During this phase, Baastherox refrains from using his special actions and only uses his breath weapons if the player characters make him mad or prove themselves a challenge.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- One of Baastherox's body parts is broken.
- The characters have opened one of Baastherox's major scars.
- Two or more of Baastherox's body parts have half or fewer of their maximum hit points remaining.

When one of the above conditions is met, Baastherox starts generating a storm around him. The light inside of the skull begins to dim.

Second Phase

Baastherox has sized up the player characters as worthy enemies and begins bringing his full fury down on them.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> A mighty thunderclap explodes outside. The walls of the skull vibrate, and small cracks begin to form in the bone.
>
> The wounds and scars on Baastherox's body release steam as he roars menacingly. As if summoned by his wrath, storm clouds start to gather inside the cave as well. The lights dim. The hour darkens.

Under the new lighting conditions, all ranged attack rolls and spell attack rolls with a target beyond 90 feet from the attacker or caster are made with disadvantage.

5 (2d4) small drakes (12 AC; hp 10) remain in the area, as per the previous phase of combat.

During Baastherox's upkeep, lightning strikes a random character for 11 (2d10) lightning damage. A successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage.

Baastherox's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

During this phase, Baastherox refrains from using his special actions.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Three or more of Baastherox's body parts are broken, and three or more of his remaining body parts have half or fewer of their maximum hit points remaining.
- The characters have opened all three of Baastherox's major scars.
- The characters have opened two or more of Baastherox's major scars and three or more of his minor scars.

When one of the above conditions is met, Baastherox's storm increases in strength, and the lair becomes engulfed in darkness.

Final Phase

Baastherox has now reached the peak of his wrath. His storm clouds become a full blown thunderstorm.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The top of the Titan Skull shatters, completely opening the arena to the storm outside, joining it with clouds inside. Baastherox's eyes turn pure white. Where once there was a sharp-minded dragon, now only a being of pure rage and primal power remains.
>
> The steam emerging from the wounds is now venting with force, and you can feel the heat from the dragon throughout the area.
>
> His movements seem more erratic but mightier than before. The sky turns completely dark. When lightning strikes it is blinding and powerful.

The arena is now completely dark, and absent other sources of light, everything becomes heavily obscured. All of the small drakes have fled.

During Baastherox's upkeep, lightning strikes two random characters for 11 (2d10) lightning damage. A successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage.

Baastherox's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 5

During this phase, Baastherox uses all of his attacks and abilities. Any creature that starts their turn mounted on one of Baastherox's body parts takes 9 (2d8) fire damage, with no saving throw available.

PHASE END

The encounter ends when Baastherox is killed. This requires fulfilling one of the following conditions:

- Five or more of Baastherox's nine body parts are broken, and his remaining body parts have half or fewer of their maximum hit points remaining.
- The characters have opened all of Baastherox's scars.

Baastherox will view the party as honorable opponents if at least one of the characters observed all of the following practices during the fight:

- Did not kill any of the drakes around the Titan Skull
- Did not attack Baastherox from above
- Forfeited advantage when attacking at least once or never had advantage during the encounter
- Did not use insults or tricks, including illusions and mind-affecting spells

If he sees the adventurers as honorable opponents, then read this text out loud as he dies:

> Baastherox finally lies shattered and defeated, his body torn and destroyed. There should be no way that he is able to move, yet he does. The massive dragon stands up and approaches you.
>
> As you prepare to face him again, he speaks, *"I have found one, at long last, one as mighty as Kadmos. You shall now carry on the title of the Mightiest, and it is now up to you to endure the weight of what it represents. You will be hunted, but as long as you remain the Mightiest, you shall prevail."*
>
> With his dying breath, he names a Draconic rune. The rune engraves itself on your chest, burning the flesh and leaving a mark, one which seems impossible to remove.
>
> Baastherox collapses, all life abandoning his body, leaving a massive carcass inside his lair to forever rest along the countless others that died here during his millenary rule as the Mightiest.

Those honorable characters who gain this rune should feel empowered in subtle yet undeniable ways. There's now great power surging through them, and this will have future repercussions.

Otherwise, if none of the characters followed all of the honorable practices above, then read this to the players as the dragon is killed:

> Baastherox struggles to keep himself up, a stubborn attempt at continuing the fight. The rage in his eyes is fading, being replaced by something that looks like peace, like contentment. The low panting slowly fades away as the dragon falls to a side.
>
> He rises again. In his death throes, Baastherox crawls atop the bone plinth in the center of his lair, so that his remains may now become part of the monument to his many victories.
>
> As the Great Wyrm falls, a new darkness descends on his lair, yet this time it's not the darkness of storms and chaos but the utter quiet of death. And so the creature that fought a Primordial to a standstill dies in complete, oppressive silence.

Conclusion

The final outcome of this adventure is deliberately left up to the characters, as they have two options. They can use the Shard themselves to teleport to Valerna or return the Shard to Aureus, as requested.

Use the Shard

If the characters wish to use the Shard, they must travel to the cave indicated on Mzeebal's map. The storms are less constant now, and they face overall nice weather. Since the party has already overcome the most harsh conditions of this landscape, feel free to allow them to complete this part of the journey without random encounters or the dangers of exhaustion.

Once there, they must perform the ritual, which requires a sacrifice. If they found the Va'ra crystals in the stormwurm's entrails in area 5 or the one in Mzeebal's cave in area 11, one of those can be used to activate the Shard once inside the cave. If they took the spear that wounded Palan, its Va'ra crystal can also be used to open the portal. Otherwise, one of the characters will need to sacrifice themselves to provide the Vaala to activate the Shard.

This will teleport the remaining party members to their homeworld, where they are greeted by a vivid and lush land of green, near a rushing waterfall and chirping birds. The stark contrast to the prevailing environment of Drakha brings them a deep sense of relief.

Return the Shard to Aureus

If they return to the Golden City with the Shard, they will be hailed as heroes and granted high status (for non-draconians, at least) and citizenship. The characters are the first Valernians to achieve such status.

Aureus will hold a public audience to present them to the city, during which, with a great speech, he will congratulate them and bring Fannax before them. Her fate will now rest on the adventurers. Aureus tells them they can choose to either execute her themselves, let her rot in prison, or sentence her to exile. Of course, the party can offer other alternatives.

BAASTHEROX THE MIGHTIEST

Mighty Baastherox, the strongest of all azhurma, lives in the Skull of the Titan, reflecting on his isolation and the loneliness of supremacy.

Fighting Baastherox is a test of patience, strength, and strategy. He is an offense-focused dragon, who will start the fight with physical attacks and then proceed to use his storm powers to destroy the opposition. Nevertheless, Bastherox is not indestructible. He has several old wounds on his body which allow the characters to inflict more damage.

Baastherox Exploits

The following exploits can be used to take advantage of Baastherox during the battle if the characters discover them.

Worthy Challenger

If a character wants to present themselves as a worthy opponent to Baastherox in an attempt to draw his attention, then they can, as an action, attempt a DC 20 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, Performance, or Persuasion) check.

If the check is successful, Baastherox spends the rest of his turn targeting that character with melee attacks, and won't use any more special abilities or breath weapons until his next upkeep.

Protective Instinct

Baastherox will go out of his way to protect the small drakes around his lair. If he witnesses the killing of one of them, he will focus all his future attacks on the killer, and only on the killer, until his attention is drawn to a new target.

Ossified Shard Artifacts

A spell or weapon attack using a weapon or a spellcasting focus that has been treated with shavings from the shard of Kadmos, as described in the "Cult of Strength" section, ignores Baastherox's damage reduction and deals double its listed base damage to him.

Scars from Kadmos

Baastherox has permanent scars from his battle with Kadmos. The scar tissue is softer than his scales and can be opened if targeted directly. The descriptions of Baastherox's body parts, on next page, include the number and type of scars on each body part.

To detect a scar on Baastherox's body, a character must perform the Search action against the scar's specific find DC as listed in the corresponding body part. A character mounted on one of Baastherox's body parts can perform the Search action to find scars on that specific body part as a bonus action.

Each scar has its own AC and hit points. If a scar is opened by reducing it to 0 hit points, all future damage against that body part is increased as detailed below.

Major Scars. AC 24; hp 40. These scars are easier to spot, but Baastherox is very aware of them and defends them against attacks. If a major scar is reduced to 0 hit points, all subsequent hits targeting that body part deal double damage and ignore Baastherox's damage reduction.

Minor Scars. AC 22; hp 45. These scars are harder for Baastherox to protect because they are smaller. If a minor scar is reduced to 0 hit points, all subsequent hits targeting that body part ignore Baastherox's damage reduction.

Superficial Scars. AC 20; hp 50. These scars are very small, and Baastherox does not know they exist. If a superficial scar is reduced to 0 hit points, all subsequent hits targeting that body part ignore half of Baastherox's damage reduction.

BAASTHEROX

Gargantuan dragon, neutral

Armor Class see "Baastherox's Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Baastherox's Body Parts"
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	19 (+4)	30 (+10)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +19, Dex +13, Con +19
Skills Intimidation +19, Athletics +19, History +12
Damage Reduction 10
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, and lightning
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened, and stunned
Senses darkvision 300 ft., blindsight 20 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Draconic, Common
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. Baastherox has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Baastherox fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.
Magic Weapons. Baastherox's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Upkeep Actions

During Baastherox's upkeep, he replenishes his action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and he may take any of the following actions.

Focus (0 Actions). During his upkeep, Baastherox can choose to focus on either Offense or Defense until his next upkeep.

Offense. Baastherox gains a +10 bonus to his melee damage rolls, and suffers a –2 penalty to the AC of all his body parts until his next upkeep.

Defense. Baastherox gains a +5 bonus to the AC of all of his body parts until his next upkeep.

Shake (1 Action). Baastherox can shake all of his body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Baastherox's body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they're holding onto in order to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and is knocked prone.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Baastherox can heal one body part that has not yet been reduced to 0 hit points. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum. Alternatively, Baastherox may use this ability to fully restore the hit points of a scar that has not been reduced to 0 hit points.

Melee Actions

Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 32 (4d10 + 10) slashing damage. Any creature mounted on Baastherox's claws must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the claw's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Maul (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target that Baastherox successfully attacked with his bite this round. *Hit:* 32 (5d8 + 10) piercing damage, and the creature is grappled (escape DC 27). If Baastherox's head suffers at least 30 damage during a single round, any creature currently grappled by it is freed.

Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 20 ft., up to two targets 5 ft. apart. *Hit:* 33 (4d10 + 10) piercing damage plus 23 (4d10) slashing damage. Any creature mounted on Baastherox's head must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Tail Smash (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d6 +10) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) piercing damage. The area in a 10-foot radius around the target becomes difficult terrain, and all creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 27 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. Any creature mounted on Baastherox's tail must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Wing Flap (2 Actions). Each creature in a 20-foot radius around Baastherox must succeed on a DC 27 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 40 feet and take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage. Baastherox can then move up to his flying speed in any direction. Any creature mounted on Baastherox's wings must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the wings' shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Full Rage (5 Actions). Baastherox makes three claw attacks, one bite attack, and one tail smash attack on the same round. Each attack targets the enemy closest to the relevant body part. Any player mounted on Baastherox must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they are mounted on or fall from the dragon. Baastherox cannot use full rage again until after his next upkeep.

Breath Weapons

Dragonfire (2 Actions). Baastherox breathes fire in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Lightning Bolt (3 Actions). Baastherox emits lightning in a line 100 feet long and 10 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half of that on a success.

Ball Lightning (4 Actions). Baastherox expels a concentrated ball of lightning that explodes at any spot within 100 feet into a sphere with a 30-foot radius. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Baastherox must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to be able to use this breath weapon again.

Storm Sphere (5 Actions). Baastherox creates a massive shockwave in a sphere with a 100-foot radius centered on himself. Each other creature in the area of effect must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 110 (20d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Baastherox must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to be able to use this breath weapon again.

Special Actions

Thunderstorm (2 Actions). Baastherox summons a thunderstorm that causes lightning to strike everyone in a cylinder centered on him, with a radius of 20 feet and a height of 100 feet. Each other creature in the area of effect must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) lightning damage plus 9 (2d8) sonic damage and becoming deafened on a failed save. A successful save halves the damage and negates the deafened condition.

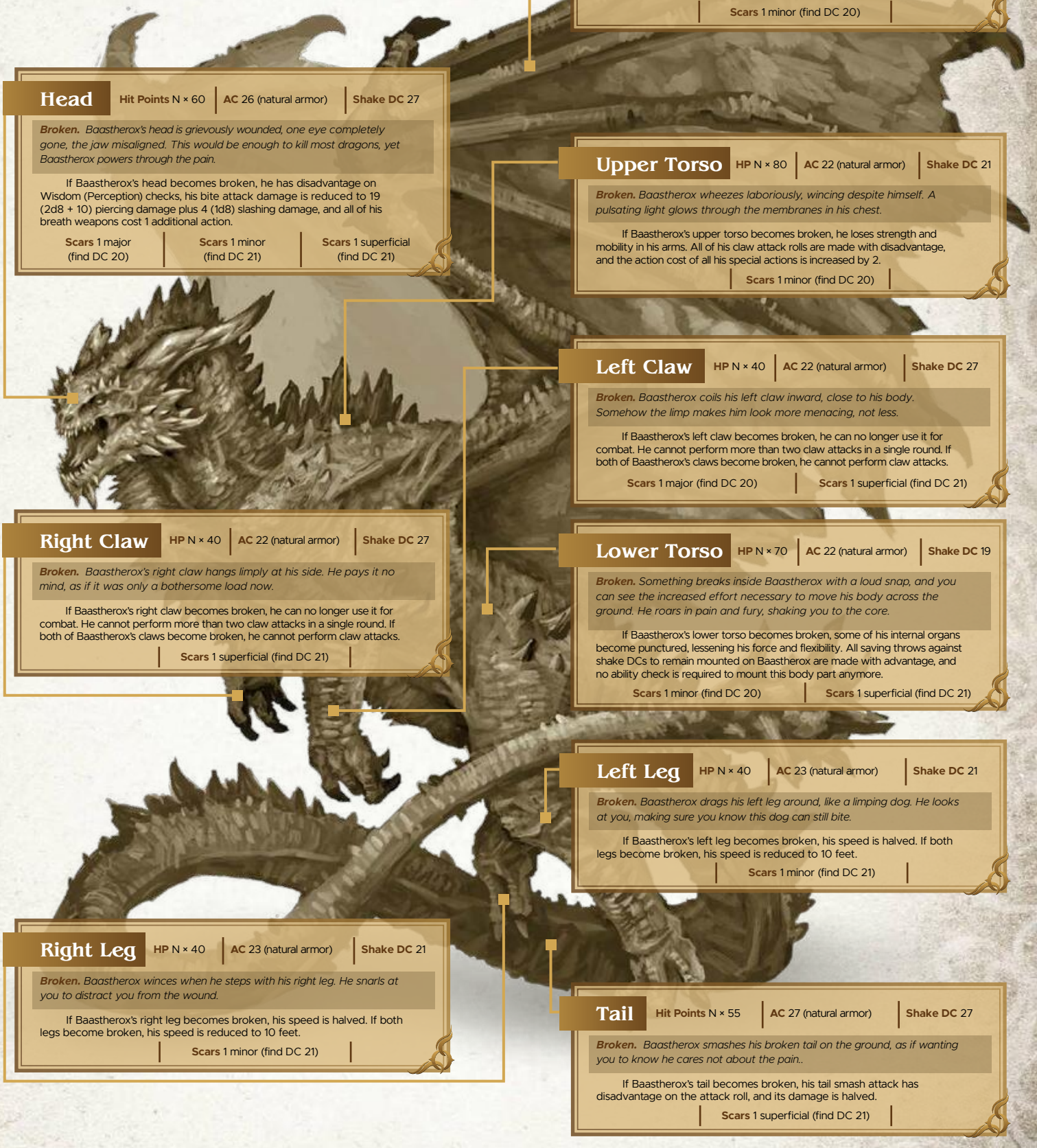
Hurricane (3 Actions). Baastherox summons three separate cylindrical hurricanes in any three spots within 100 feet of him. Each hurricane has a radius of 5 feet and a height of 60 feet. Each creature in the area of effect of any of these hurricanes must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone and take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage. These hurricanes remain until the end of Baastherox's next round, during which he may move any of them up to 60 feet by spending 1 action.

Lighting Storm (4 Actions). Baastherox summons a great cloud that strikes lightning down on up to five targets. Each target must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (5d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Ultimate Storm (5 Actions). Baastherox manifests a storm within a 200-foot radius of himself. Each other creature in the area of effect must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) lightning damage, plus 17 (5d6) sonic damage, plus 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage, and becoming permanently deafened on a failed save. A successful save halves the damage and negates the deafened condition. During any of his subsequent upkeeps, Baastherox can maintain the storm and repeat this effect by spending only three actions.

BAASTHEROX'S BODY PARTS

Baastherox has many hidden scars from his prior battle with the Primordial dragon Kadmos. Finding and damaging these scars can make Baastherox more vulnerable, as specified under "Scars from Kadmos" in the "Baastherox Exploits" section above.



Wings

HP N × 45 | **AC** 21 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21 (grounded) or 27 (flying)

Broken. *Baastherox painfully folds his wings, but even this goes wrong, as one of his wings refuses to bend and droops to one side. He looks at you with cold fury.*

If Baastherox's wings become broken, he loses his flying speed, and he cannot use his Wing Flap any longer.

If airborne, Baastherox immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Baastherox's body must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 77 (14d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Baastherox. If the save is successful, the creature only takes 7 (2d6) falling damage and no additional damage.

Scars 1 minor (find DC 20)

Head

Hit Points N × 60 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 27

Broken. *Baastherox's head is grievously wounded, one eye completely gone, the jaw misaligned. This would be enough to kill most dragons, yet Baastherox powers through the pain.*

If Baastherox's head becomes broken, he has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, his bite attack damage is reduced to 19 (2d8 + 10) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) slashing damage, and all of his breath weapons cost 1 additional action.

Scars 1 major (find DC 20) | **Scars** 1 minor (find DC 21) | **Scars** 1 superficial (find DC 21)

Upper Torso

HP N × 80 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21

Broken. *Baastherox wheezes laboriously, wincing despite himself. A pulsating light glows through the membranes in his chest.*

If Baastherox's upper torso becomes broken, he loses strength and mobility in his arms. All of his claw attack rolls are made with disadvantage, and the action cost of all his special actions is increased by 2.

Scars 1 minor (find DC 20)

Left Claw

HP N × 40 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 27

Broken. *Baastherox coils his left claw inward, close to his body. Somehow the limp makes him look more menacing, not less.*

If Baastherox's left claw becomes broken, he can no longer use it for combat. He cannot perform more than two claw attacks in a single round. If both of Baastherox's claws become broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Scars 1 major (find DC 20) | **Scars** 1 superficial (find DC 21)

Right Claw

HP N × 40 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 27

Broken. *Baastherox's right claw hangs limply at his side. He pays it no mind, as if it was only a bothersome load now.*

If Baastherox's right claw becomes broken, he can no longer use it for combat. He cannot perform more than two claw attacks in a single round. If both of Baastherox's claws become broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Scars 1 superficial (find DC 21)

Lower Torso

HP N × 70 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 19

Broken. *Something breaks inside Baastherox with a loud snap, and you can see the increased effort necessary to move his body across the ground. He roars in pain and fury, shaking you to the core.*

If Baastherox's lower torso becomes broken, some of his internal organs become punctured, lessening his force and flexibility. All saving throws against shake DCs to remain mounted on Baastherox are made with advantage, and no ability check is required to mount this body part anymore.

Scars 1 minor (find DC 20) | **Scars** 1 superficial (find DC 21)

Left Leg

HP N × 40 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21

Broken. *Baastherox drags his left leg around, like a limping dog. He looks at you, making sure you know this dog can still bite.*

If Baastherox's left leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Scars 1 minor (find DC 21)

Right Leg

HP N × 40 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21

Broken. *Baastherox winces when he steps with his right leg. He snarls at you to distract you from the wound.*

If Baastherox's right leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Scars 1 minor (find DC 21)

Tail

Hit Points N × 55 | **AC** 27 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 27

Broken. *Baastherox smashes his broken tail on the ground, as if wanting you to know he cares not about the pain..*

If Baastherox's tail becomes broken, his tail smash attack has disadvantage on the attack roll, and its damage is halved.

Scars 1 superficial (find DC 21)

ASHEN FRACTURES HAZARDS

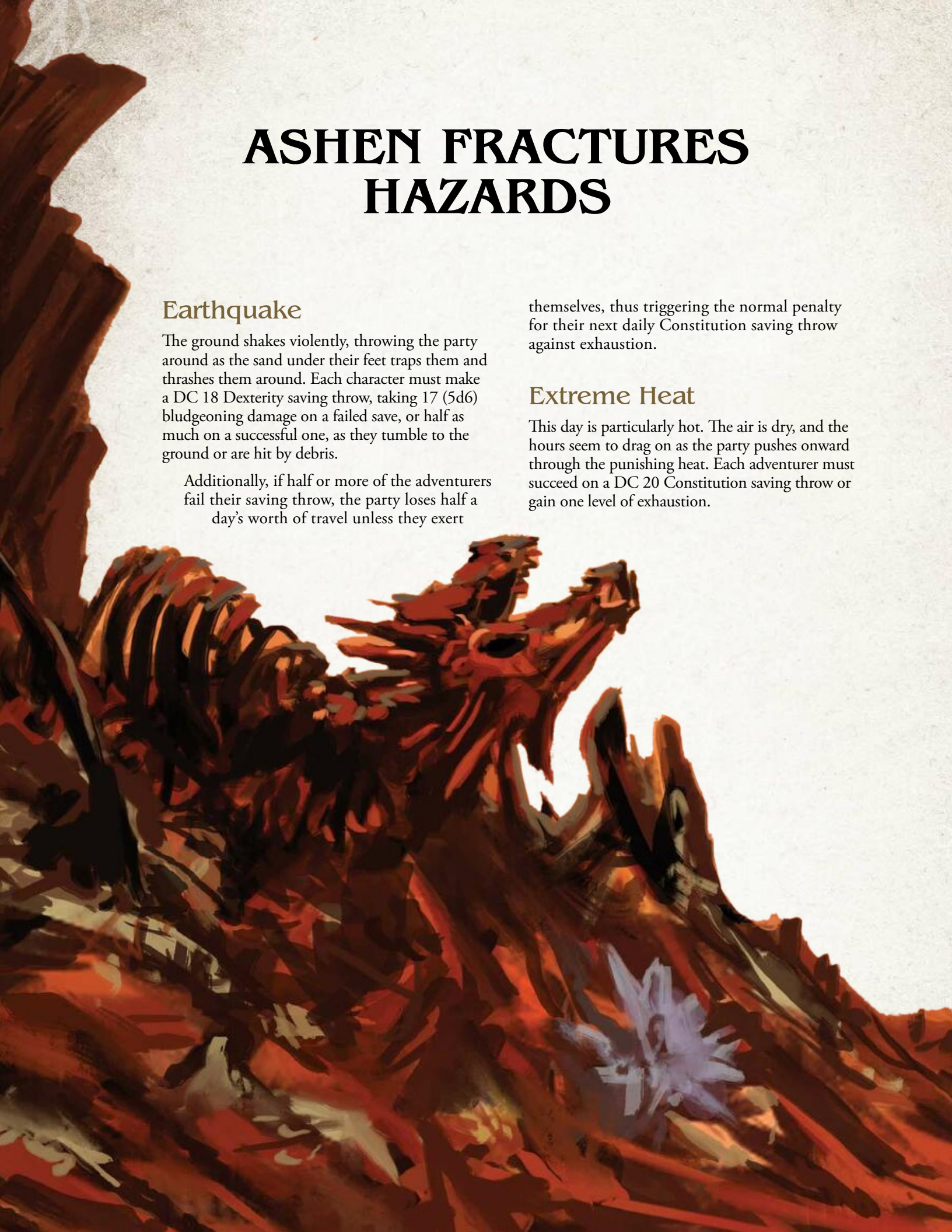
Earthquake

The ground shakes violently, throwing the party around as the sand under their feet traps them and thrashes them around. Each character must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one, as they tumble to the ground or are hit by debris.

Additionally, if half or more of the adventurers fail their saving throw, the party loses half a day's worth of travel unless they exert themselves, thus triggering the normal penalty for their next daily Constitution saving throw against exhaustion.

Extreme Heat

This day is particularly hot. The air is dry, and the hours seem to drag on as the party pushes onward through the punishing heat. Each adventurer must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.



Lightning Storm

The air itself shakes. Loud noises and bright lights cover the desert. Massive lightning strikes approach the party.

Each character is struck by 1d4 -1 lightning bolts. Roll individually for each character. For each bolt, the target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Quicksand

The sand under the party's feet suddenly seems to turn into a liquid, trying to suck them down.

Each character makes a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw. If more than half of the party fails this save, their journey is delayed for half a day, unless they exert themselves to make up for the lost time and, thus, trigger the normal penalty for their next daily Constitution saving throw against exhaustion.

Sandstorm

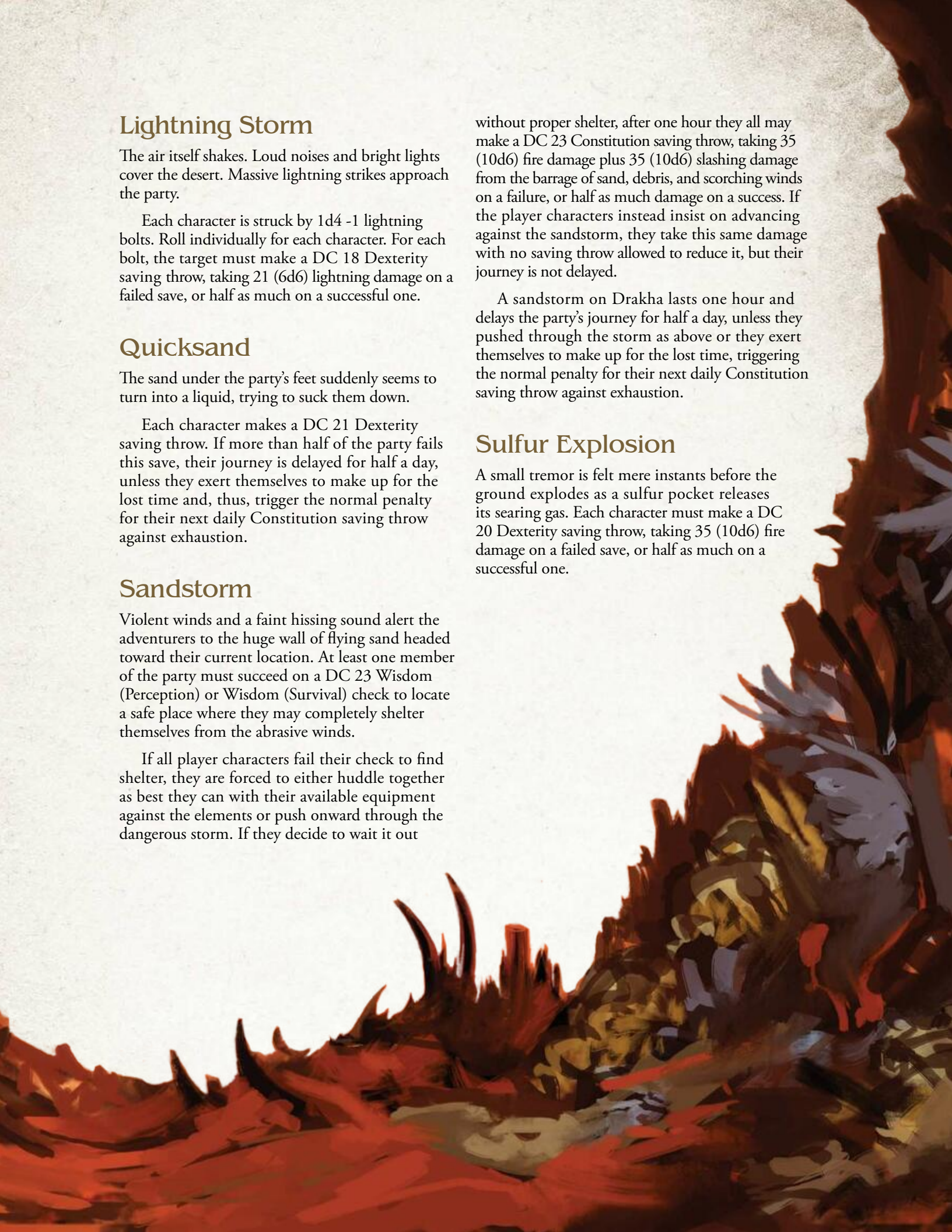
Violent winds and a faint hissing sound alert the adventurers to the huge wall of flying sand headed toward their current location. At least one member of the party must succeed on a DC 23 Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check to locate a safe place where they may completely shelter themselves from the abrasive winds.

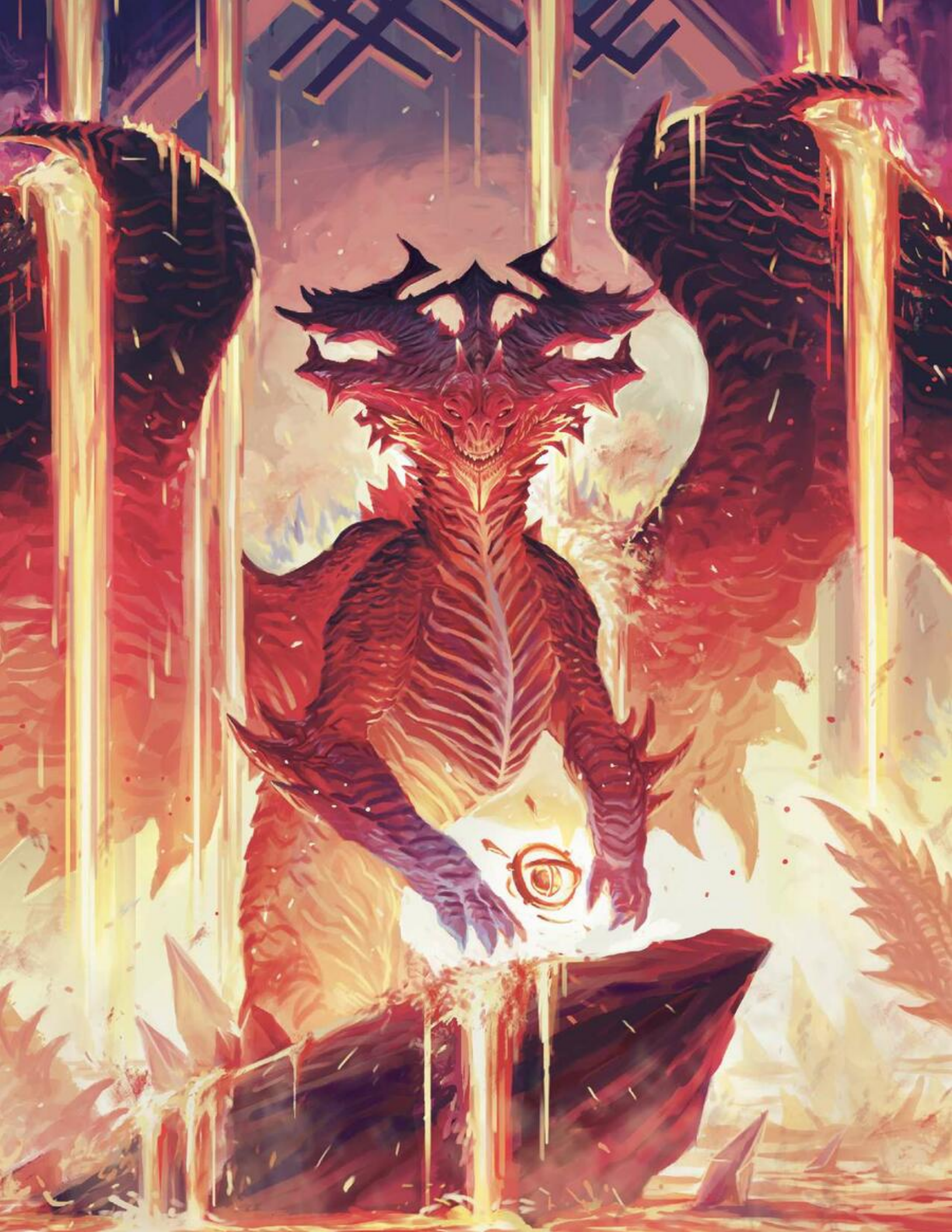
If all player characters fail their check to find shelter, they are forced to either huddle together as best they can with their available equipment against the elements or push onward through the dangerous storm. If they decide to wait it out without proper shelter, after one hour they all may make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) fire damage plus 35 (10d6) slashing damage from the barrage of sand, debris, and scorching winds on a failure, or half as much damage on a success. If the player characters instead insist on advancing against the sandstorm, they take this same damage with no saving throw allowed to reduce it, but their journey is not delayed.

A sandstorm on Drakha lasts one hour and delays the party's journey for half a day, unless they pushed through the storm as above or they exert themselves to make up for the lost time, triggering the normal penalty for their next daily Constitution saving throw against exhaustion.

Sulfur Explosion

A small tremor is felt mere instants before the ground explodes as a sulfur pocket releases its searing gas. Each character must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.





SECRETS OF THE FORGE'S CORE

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

'The Forge's core? I'll show you the Forge's core. It is here!'
And Dehrilya bared her right claw, which glowed by the kiln's flames.
'And here!' she roared as she stabbed her own chest, tearing a smoldering gash with the clang of metal on metal."

—Excerpt from the Records of Khazza Lagawi, Book XIII

A huge volcano stands at the center of the Obsidian Plains, site of the Flawless Forge where Dehrilya, the Mastersmith azhurma, toils at and perfects her craft.

But in the Great Vault at the core of Dehrilya's volcano lies a dark resource, a mineral used to create Va'ra weapons, deadly to Valernians and other non-dragons. The adventurers must embark on a high-stakes mission with a single purpose: find the Va'ra motherlode and destroy it.

INTRODUCTION

The Scalebreakers, a nomadic group of Valernian humans and others that escaped their dragon captors on Drakha, seek to cripple the rulers of the Red Moon by denying them Va'ra, the life-depleting mineral they use to arm their dragonkin subjects. However, their source of Va'ra has been found to be none other than Nurazhirme, the great volcano that houses Dehrilya's Flawless Forge, the power center of Brood Ehrlya.

Storming a volcano and infiltrating an azhurma's lair is a suicide mission by any standard. But the Scalebreakers are desperate, and the player characters have a strong reputation…

Welcome to "Secrets of the Forge's Core," a Dragonbond adventure and part of the *Great Wyrms of Drakha* adventure series. While this adventure assumes the characters are captured Valernians on the Red Moon of Drakha, the background can be altered to adapt the story into an ongoing campaign.

Running the Adventure

"Secrets of the Forge's Core" is an epic adventure meant for three to five player characters that will start at 17th level. During the course of the adventure, the player characters will advance to 20th level with the use of milestones before engaging in the final battle against the dragon azhurma Dehrilya. The adventure is set on Drakha, the Red Moon, a world ruled by dragons and their kin. For more details on this setting, consult the "Drakha, the Red Moon" section at the start of this book.

The "Adventure Background" section below tells you everything you need to know to understand this adventure's immediate setting. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run, giving you a broad sense of the events involved and how they should unfold throughout the adventure.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.

The Obsidian Plains

Dehrilya's barren domain, the Obsidian Plains, persists in a state of desolation with red, green, black, and gold vitreous regions, some of them with patches of their surface—thousands of square miles-wide—highly polished and eroded by the hot winds caused by the exhalations of the immense volcano standing in the middle of this territory: Nurazhirme.

The plains, particularly the area surrounding Dehrilya's volcano, have no plants or living beings other than distant, silent caravans of Ehrlya dragonkin and their aloof dragon masters flying just above the horizon.

Yet frequent gusts of warm wind across the expanse whistle and chime as they rush through the cracks in the glass-like ground, which displays the faceted, darker image of the firmament above, making the Obsidian Planes one of the most beautiful, if barren, landscapes on all of Drakha.

Nurazhirme

Dehrilya's volcano Nurazhirme is one of the most forbidding formations in an already inhospitable world. Besides the unbearable heat, it is plagued with deadly magma pools, sudden vapor sprays, and the constant tremors caused by the work at Dehrilya's Flawless Forge. The entire volcano is bent to Dehrilya's power, and only those that can match such power will reach, let alone survive, her presence.

Special Rules

Inside Nurazhirme, all cold damage is halved before any resistances are applied, without exception. A source of cold damage that allows for a saving throw to lessen or avoid the damage has its damage fully negated upon success on the save.

TRUEFIRE

The mightiest of Ehrlya dragons can use truefire attacks. Truefire damage is a more powerful form of fire damage. When being dealt truefire damage, a creature's fire immunity is treated as truefire resistance, and fire resistance offers no protection against truefire damage.

MAGIC

Additionally, magic on Drakha works in mysterious ways. While not completely unpredictable, most of its effects undergo major alterations or don't work at all. Within the Ehrlya's Kiln found inside the volcano, certain spells may have unanticipated complications when cast.

- *Fly, levitation,* and other spells allowing the caster to travel off or over the ground, are useless inside Nurazhirme. No creature without wings or other means of natural flight can lift off the ground other than by simply jumping or climbing. However, a resourceful individual might attempt to either glide or swoop, using something that allows them to take advantage of the thermal drafts inside the volcano, hoping they make it to the area that they intended to reach in the first place.
- *Protection from energy (fire)* and any other magic or effect that grants resistance to or protection from fire or heat work in the usual way… until they do not. The Flawless Forge has an enchantment used to "tame" or "sublimate" fire-resistant materials so that they can be bent into whatever shape the Ehrlya smith, glassworker, or jeweler is looking for. Any fire protection effect ends after 1 minute inside the volcano. If a spell providing such an effect is cast on a target within the volcano, the caster cannot maintain concentration for more than 1 minute, regardless of the original spell's duration.
- Transmutation spells are aided by Dehrilya's magic. Any transmutation spell cast inside Nurazhirme is treated as though it was cast using a spell slot one level higher. Also, transmutation spells that change inanimate matter, such as *stone shape* and *move earth,* require no verbal or material components to cast.

Adventure Background

Ultimate craftsmanship is the stuff of legends. When highly skilled artists put their talent to the test, their efforts beget great wonders. Even in a world of alien, brutal beauty like Drakha, there are singular treasures, and incredible masterpieces, for its inhabitants to behold and marvel at. And what dragons find most elating is raw, unmitigated power contained in objects of legendary beauty.

Of all the mastercrafters among dragonkind, none can even begin to rival the unparalleled skills of the Ehrlya brood artists, impelled to excellence by the example and constant work of their azhurma Dehrilya, the Forge Queen. And of all the products of the dragons' crafting, nothing is deadlier to Valernians than Va'ra crystals. With them, dragons create terrible weapons that can suck the lifeforce of a Valernian straight out of their wounds.

The Scalebreakers

Thus named for bringing down a single dragon, the Scalebreakers are a nomadic group of Valernians that managed to slip their dragon captors and take refuge in Drakha's open wastes. Currently a refugee caravan two score strong, the Scalebreakers welcome anyone that has managed to escape the dragons and is willing to fight to remain free.

The Scalebreakers learned of a massive Va'ra yield inside Nurazhirme, the great volcano of the Ehrlya brood and, perhaps, the source of all Va'ra crystals on the Red Moon.

The Scalebreakers saw this as their opportunity to rid Drakha of these nightmarish weapons and sent some of their best and brightest to sabotage the great vein of Va'ra at the heart of the Ehrlya's Flawless Forge. Only one scout returned, half-mad and half-dead.

Far from giving up, the leaders of the Scalebreakers sought adventurers of great mettle and prestige who were known to have stood up to deadly odds and prevailed. Perhaps these great heroes would succeed where others failed.

Adventure Overview

The party begins the adventure at the Scalebreakers' camp, where they are offered dragonslayer weapons and other rewards in return for making their way into the Flawless Forge and destroying, or otherwise sabotaging, the Va'ra source for the Ehrlya's deadly weapons.

With the fate of the Valernian survivors in their hands, and the promise of anything they can take from the Ehrlya's vaults as additional payment, the adventurers prepare themselves to descend into the Flawless Forge, traverse its many levels, locate where the Ehrlya keep the Va'ra motherlode, and find a way to destroy it.

The Commons Run

After a brief prologue, where the adventurers are hopefully convinced by the Scalebreakers to attempt the mission, and a couple of nights traversing the beautiful and surreal landscape of the Obsidian Plains, the party reaches one of the side entrances to the volcano's interior. Once the party enters the crater proper, they can climb down into the entry level of The Commons region.

From there, the route they must take is quite straightforward: downward, by whatever means they can muster, whether by crawling between pipes, through long corridors, or down abandoned service chutes, until they reach the level's exit door and the key to open it.

Tempers Blazing

The party stealthily moves through a network of rooms with an elaborate piping system, which they can use to hide if they measure the cycle of fluctuations in magma, water, and steam correctly. Otherwise, they may have to face a few young dragons.

The adventurers make their way through the Lower Forges, where a handful of heavily adorned constructs are making long rounds down the spiraling corridors.

Riffle Resplendence, Dwimmer Darkness

The last levels of the Kiln have flowing rivers of magma, a large multi-legged automaton, and fewer rooms. Behind those closed doors are busy forges where older, more accomplished dragons, and their dragonkin assistants, work incessantly on the creation of beautifully ornate, incomprehensible apparatuses.

At the end, the adventurers encounter an unlocked door that leads into a pitch dark room, but not everything is what it seems here.

To Bring a Mountain Down

The final part of the adventure sees the party sabotaging the Va'ra vein and finally entering Dehrilya's Great Vault and her Flawless Forge. After dealing with the Va'ra drakes, dragon-like constructs guarding the area, the party must face the Mistress of the Forge herself.

Adventure Hooks

The adventure assumes the player characters are elite members of the Scalebreakers or experienced heroes summoned by the Scalebreakers to help them in their plan.

Should the player characters come from a previous campaign, you can begin the adventure by telling them how their characters arrived on an alien moon. Perhaps they came through a portal in one of their previous adventurers or even via a small mishap, or they were sent by someone who knew they "were needed" here.

After spending a couple of days in the barren, strange landscape of Drakha and getting acquainted with its alien ecosystem (see the "Drakha, The Red Moon" section at the start of this book), the party finds a couple of dead humans—their bodies beyond all healing or restoration, drained of their very life force. Then, they find a refugee camp in the cracks within the slopes of a small mountain overlooking a vast obsidian landscape.

The refugees receive them with open arms and tell them how the dead bodies they saw are the victims of Va'ra crystals, the weapon that dragons use to rob mortals of their Vaala or lifeforce. Then, these refugees introduce themselves as the Scalebreakers rebel group and tell the adventurers that they have a proposal for them…

THE COMMONS RUN

Whether the adventurers arrived to Drakha or the Obsidian Plains on their own, were summoned by the Scalebreakers, or are a part of the Scalebreaker party returning from exploration, the adventure begins as the party arrives at the hidden camp of the Scalebreaker nomads.

The player characters find the Scalebreakers camping along the outskirts of a low, lonely mountain overlooking the breathtaking expanse known as the Obsidian Plains, with a high column of smoke and ash rising beyond it from the mouth of Nurazhirme, the colossal volcano at the center of the vitreous landscape.

After welcoming you and offering you lukewarm water and some chewy meat the source of which you'd rather not ask, the Scalebreakers summon you to Marksman's Vantage, the spot where their leaders have set up camp and oversee both their followers and any potential threats or targets as they approach.

From there, you can see not only the improvised camp on the rocky rise, but also the vast, breathtaking Obsidian plains extending beyond. As you take in the sights, a muscular, amber-skinned orc and a smiling, shaggy pint halfling approach to greet you.

The player characters are introduced to two of the Scalebreaker leaders: Kynnatera, a tall and muscular obakkar orc so powerfully built that she was surely a matron back on her homeworld, and Ignatz, a rag-clothed pint halfling with a concerned look that belies his warm smile.

After greeting the party, Ignatz looks toward the volcano in the distance. "All of you know surviving here, in this thousand-times-damned place, is just stubbornly staying our executions. Yet death, if it came swift, would be preferable to what these vile creatures do to our peoples."

Ignatz turns and points toward the plume of smoke on the horizon. "We need you to go there, right into the Ehrlya brood territory, and destroy a vein of Va'ra crystals under the volcano. We've discovered that most Va'ra crystals come from there. I know what the wyrms use Va'ra for. I was a slave there once. We sent our scouts, but only Nyv made it back.

"We left some path markers, some signs to follow once inside, carved on the walls and pipes, so you can find your way into the Lower Forges and break into the Great Vault. Else, Dehrilya and her brood will continue to churn out their Va'ra implements to harvest our lifeforce. To help your mission, and as down payment, you can have these, the weapons of true slayers of wyrms."

Ignatz shows the party two curved short swords made of a strange stone, with wicked notches along their edges.

These weapons are *dragonslayer swords,* taken from a couple of rebellious dragonkin that crossed the Scalebreakers' path some time ago. If this down payment is not enough to entice the adventurers, Ignatz emphasizes the thousand legends told about the otherworldly treasures waiting inside the crafter brood's vaults.

The Scalebreakers

A group of roughly forty Valernian escapees, the Scalebreakers are a ragtag band of survivors who once managed to kill a dragon — hence their nickname — and have been on the run ever since. From that fateful day on, the Scalebreakers have constantly roamed Drakha, well aware that there shall be no respite for them, even when all of the original founders are long dead. This band never grows too big nor stays in one place for long, occasionally joined by Valernians who have managed to escape their dragon captors and survive the dangers of the Drakhan wastelands long enough to stumble into the band's path.

While there are many legends surrounding this group, few of them remain true, and several of those that are were the result of happenstance and sheer luck, imposing a heavy toll in casualties from impromptu battles and desperate raids against the caravans or patrols of dragonkin from all broods.

Ignatz

If the party asks about what they can expect to find inside the volcano, Ignatz tells them that Nyv, the only survivor from the previous attempt to sabotage the Va'ra lode, reported strange contraptions, golems and devices wandering through the long, hot corridors. Despite being the band's best and brightest, Nyv's twelve-scout squad could not go beyond the first two levels of the Kiln, the Ehrlya's fortress-realm inside the volcano, before their casualties were so numerous they were forced to retreat, and even then only Nyv made it out of the volcano and back across the Obsidian Plains.

Once the adventurers have accepted the mission, Kynnatera gives them the Scalebreakers' greatest treasures, other than the *two dragonslayer swords*: their last five arrows of *dragon slaying* and enough *universal solvent* for three uses. This is how important the mission is for them.

Then, Ignatz kneels down and, using his finger, starts to draw a symbol in the dust on the floor, roughly evoking a dragon's head split in half. He tells the adventurers to remember it well and to look for it inside the volcano. It's his signal for the correct path into the Ehrlya's Great Vault, and the scouts may have placed it at other locations inside the Kiln.

The party may eat from the communal pot and take a long or short rest in the Scalebreaker camp before heading out.

The Obsidian Plains

The Obsidian Plains are an eerily beautiful, desolate expanse of ashen-colored rock and wide tracts of highly polished, glass-like surfaces that reflect the night sky above. The thirteen-hour long trip through this landscape is uneventful, other than the unusual duration of the night cycle. This adventure takes place during a 240-hour night on the Red Moon, and the skies remain dark throughout.

Ignatz mentioned a side entrance a few hundred feet up the slope of the volcano. Reaching it is straightforward enough, requiring only a short walk and a jump over a 10-foot wide gap above a deep ravine with a lava stream at the bottom. Magical means such as *jump* or *flight* function normally, as the adventurers are still outside the volcano. However, this will likely be the last time any form of magical flight or levitation works as intended for the party.

The entrance, which the adventurers may recognize by Ignatz' split-dragonhead mark on it, leads into a noticeably slanted vent, which heads downward for a couple hundred yards before dropping fifteen feet onto a metal pipe, half-embedded into the volcanic wall. The pipe is wide enough for the party to stand on it one abreast, but its polished surface is decidedly slippery, causing any creature suddenly landing on it or walking at a normal speed to make a DC 25 Dexterity saving throw or lose their footing, falling a further 20 feet to the ground, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

After climbing down off of the pipe, the party finds themselves in the Main Hallway of the Kiln's first level, area 1.

Kynnatera

The Kiln: Level 1

The Kiln is the fortress that the Ehrlya have carved out inside the Nurazhirme volcano, a mammoth labyrinth of tunnels, caverns, pipes, mines, and forges where the dragons practice their traditional craft: creating the most powerful, useful, and beautiful metallic objects on Drakha.

1. Main Hallway

This wide passage spirals along the crater's interior walls, all the way down to the lowest level where the Great Vault is located. This is the Kiln's "road and sidewalk," where most of the Ehrlya brood's public interactions and regular activities take place, and is usually busy with dragonkin and construct traffic as they go in, out, and about the various closed sections spread across each of the six levels leading to the Great Vault.

> The Main Hallway is lined with numerous beautiful fixtures and filigree ornaments. Highly embellished pipes can be seen protruding from the raw rock walls or resting on pylons exquisitely crafted from metal, rock, and crystals, fit for any noble's or chieftain's collection back in your world.

Still, the Hallway's most striking feature is the views from its many balconies, which hang over the huge crater's interior. The center of the volcano is vertically segmented with a series of multi-layered, intricately woven sieves, each with one huge semicircular opening at their center which dragons use to fly between levels or out of the volcano's main chimney.

TRAVERSING THE MAIN HALLWAY

Whenever an adventurer enters or leaves the Main Hallway, they need to make a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid detection from wandering dragonkin.

Since this area is a causeway suspended over a network of magma tunnels, the adventurers may improve their chances to hide by hanging off of the outer ledge of the causeway. To do so, they must first make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. After succeeding or failing on this save, the adventurers can make the DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid detection with advantage.

If they are detected, the dragonkin will dart to the closest metal pipe or fixture and begin to tap it. This will send the alarm to any dragonkin toiling nearby, who can call on further reinforcements using the same method, thus potentially overwhelming the party. The adventurers will have to face one **Ehrlya dragonkin** at first, who uses their first turn to sound the alarm. If the party fails to stop them from doing so, three **Ehrlya dragonkin** arrive after 1 minute, another five **Ehrlya dragonkin** arrive after another minute, and another ten **Ehrlya dragonkin** arrive each minute until the party is killed or they manage to escape or hide from the dragonkin.

2. Nursery

Most rooms on the first level are used as nurseries. Each of these chambers contains about fifteen dragon eggs spread around several pools of magma which serve as nests. The chamber is guarded by three **nursery automatons,** which regularly operate heat vents and turn the eggs around so that they maintain an even interior temperature throughout.

> You come across a well-maintained, clean, and warm cave, where about a dozen eggs the size of a backpack nest in several special, cloth-lined containers. Seemingly oblivious to you, what look like three lizards with metallic scales walk up and down the nests, checking on the eggs and the heat vents that keep their temperature.

The automatons remain oblivious to the party as long as they do not upset the eggs or cause a major disturbance, in which case they attack immediately.

3. Hatchery

These chambers are similar to the nurseries in area 2 but smaller, with several dozen much smaller eggs carelessly distributed across the floor and no automatons tending them. These are reserved for dragonkin hatching.

> You enter what seems to be a warehouse, with scores of reptilian eggs the size of your head placed haphazardly across two or three mats on the floor. There seem to be small passages at the back of the room.

The back doors and the narrow corridors they lead to are used for dragonkin to move between the hatcheries without cluttering the hallway and may serve as a hiding place if the party is detected in area 1.

4. Maintenance Door

> At the end of the Main Hallway, you come across a narrow, richly engraved and inlaid door with no visible handle or means of opening. However, the Scalebreakers' sign is carved on a pipe right beside this entrance.

As the party examines the door, a clicking sound comes from behind them. It is an approaching **zaadren,** a maintenance servitor construct. The adventurers need to succeed on a DC 24 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid detection from the zaadren. If the check fails, the zaadren immediately sounds an alarm, summoning three **Ehrlya dragonkin** that arrive in 1 minute.

Meanwhile, the zaadren will try to flee from the party as it shouts the alarm, but it joins the attack when the Ehrlya dragonkin arrive.

If the party succeeds at hiding from the zaadren, they witness how the automaton touches the door with a lancet that protrudes out from under its beak. The door silently opens, and the contraption scuttles its way inside to area 5.

The door mechanism is activated by the lancet, which is really a runed key the constructs use to open both the inter-level gateways and the floodgates laid across the piping systems all across the Kiln. Once the door opens, it remains open for two rounds before closing. The only way to open the door is through the use of a zaadren lancet as the adventurers just witnessed.

After ten minutes, another zaadren arrives and repeats the process. By observing the process and timing, the party may slip through the doorway after the automaton as the door completes its cycle unattended. This requires a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics or Stealth) check, made with disadvantage if the party tries it without having witnessed at least two zaadren activating the door mechanism.

If the party attacks the zaadren, which causes it to sound the alarm as described above, they may try to use its lancet as an improvised tool to open the door themselves. This requires a DC 24 Intelligence check made with disadvantage, and if the creature attempting it has proficiency with thieves' tools, then the lancet counts as thieves' tools for the purposes of adding their proficiency bonus to the check.

5. Zaadren Maintenance

This is a side chamber off of the previous room, containing five dormant zaadren constructs.

> As the door clangs shut behind you, you find yourselves inside a small chamber, its walls and ceiling filled with open, baroque piping of all sizes, branching off in all directions. There are several clumps of metal in one corner.After a second glance, you realize that these are automatons, similar to the one you just saw. They seem to be sleeping or dead.

The chamber is covered with open pipes that run out of, into, and across the walls, emitting the occasional spray of warm, noxious-smelling steam.

The temperature of the pipes is higher than that of the room, and the pipes get increasingly hotter the further down they go. Any player character trying to climb into them to travel downward must first succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) fire damage for each minute spent inside the pipe, and then the party must make a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check after one hour. If the check fails, the pipes have led them back to this room, but if it succeeds, they lead the party to the piping in area 6.

The only other exit from this room is a hidden hatch in the floor, requiring a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to find. If the hatch is opened, however, the five zaadren constructs lying inactive in the room begin reactivating, with a bluish glow coming from their joints and a noticeable increase in temperature. The party must fight or escape them. The hatch leads twelve feet down onto a set of broad, horizontal piping above area 6.

Zaadren

MAP 3.1: THE KILN: LEVEL 1

The Kiln: Level 2

The second level of the Kiln is where dragon hatchlings begin their life proper, assigned to Entry Crafters, the tutor caste among the Ehrlya, as apprentices. While not as talented as the older dragons, Entry Crafters have all mastered the rudimentary skills needed to forge machines and magic items and have a knack for passing their knowledge down.

6. The Common Area

This is a wide common chamber that dozens of wyrmling apprentices and their artisan instructors use to move about between workshops.

> You land on the piping running across the ceiling of the level below. From your vantage point, you can see dragons, dragonkin, and animated constructs coming and going about their business. They couldn't see you unless they saw through the pipes or chose to fly all the way up to the ceiling.

The adventurers arrive through the chamber's roof onto the pipes that run across the ceiling, hidden from the dragons and constructs swarming the chamber. They may continue to traverse the area while hidden by using the pipes to move across the chamber, which requires no Dexterity (Stealth) check unless the party moves too fast or are explicitly noisy or careless. In that case, they should make a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check or attract the attention of four **Ehrlya dragonkin elite**, as the dragons wouldn't bother worrying themselves over such small pests.

Otherwise, the party may safely use the piping to move around above the dragons' heads unnoticed.

7. Igneous Halls

> This seems to be a communal forge, where several smaller dragons work at separate anvils under the tutelage of larger ones. The steam of the chamber makes it hard to see and harder to breathe, but in the piping along the ceiling you're relatively protected from it.

These chambers are communal forges, large enough for several dragons to work at the same time. In each such chamber there is one **young Ehrlya dragon** with two (1d4) **Ehrlya dragon wyrmlings.**

The dragons don't notice the adventurers unless they climb down from the pipes. If the party chooses to show themselves, they must fight the dragons in the chamber. The half-worked metal pieces around the forge are worth a total of 17,000 gp.

8. Great Smelters

These chambers are huge smelting forges, where the majority of the wyrmlings' design attempts are turned into heaps of molten slag and then left to cool, to be reassigned and worked on again by the developing artisans.

> There are nearly a dozen dragonkin handling discarded metalworks here. They wade through molten metal as if it was harmless river water and grab white-hot pieces with their naked claws without even a sizzling sound.

There are ten (3d6) **Ehrlya dragonkin** in each of these chambers at any given time. They ignore the party if the adventurers don't reveal themselves. Otherwise, half of them attack as the other half run to get reinforcements. If allowed to sound the alarm, they return 1 minute later along with one **young Ehrlya dragon.**

9. Disposal Room

> This large cave seems like some kind of junkyard, where a small group of dragonkin poke and thrust at a large mound of melting slag, throwing clumps of it through chutes at the back of the cavern.
>
> One of the chutes in the back cavern has the mark of the Scalebreakers. It was drawn hastily and is half-erased by heat and wear, but it's still clearly noticeable.

This cavern at the end of the main hallway is where dragonkin apprentices take the debris, scraps and refuse from the great smelters, which is piled into lumps of rock and rolled into chutes that slide downward, out of the chamber. Without access to the Main Hallway, these waste disposal tubes are the only exit from this level for the party.

If the adventurers are still using the ceiling pipes to move around, they need to climb down using the wall piping to enter the chamber.

To reach one of the waste chutes unnoticed, the party must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the check fails, they draw the attention of four **Ehrlya dragonkin** currently working in the garbage room.

10. Waste Chute

As opposed to the semi-irregular cave rock of the chambers in this level, these wide passages are massive, smooth stone cylinders slanted downward.

Read the following as the adventurers stand at the entrance of the chamber:

> The stone walls of this huge, cylindrical chamber are adorned with a strange patterned grid, with double-lined metallic rails sunk into the stone. The grid covers the interior of the chute, all the way to the hole in the ground you see near the far wall.

If the adventurers enter this chamber, they find the floor a bit slippery because of its concave nature and the metallic fixtures on it.

There is a hole in the ground at the end of the chamber, and an elaborate contraption mounted on the far wall, with what seems to be a set of pulleys.

When the adventurers are halfway down the chute, the contraption starts whirring, and soon the party sees a huge chunk of igneous rock, still glowing with heat, enter the chute behind them and start to slowly slide downward.

If the party tries to outrace the rolling ball of magma, however, they hear a short, sudden pang, similar to when a bowstring is released, followed by a loud, metallic grinding sound as a grid of razor-sharp steel cables is extended across

MAP 3.2: THE KILN: LEVEL 2

the passage, widening and stretching with mechanical rhythm as it waits for the rock to pass through.

The adventurers need to succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw to run or leap through the cutting grid, taking 35 (10d6) slashing damage on a failure. Resistance to slashing damage does not work against such sharp and well-crafted blades.

There are two more cutting grids after the first one, waiting for the stone to cross them and be diced into ever-smaller chunks. The player characters must successfully save against all three cutting grids in a row to outrace the rolling fireball above them.

The rock can enter and move through occupied spaces. Any creature that does not run through the cutting grid is instead crushed by the burning ball of rock, taking 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage plus 5 (1d10) fire damage and falling prone. A successful DC 22 Dexterity saving throw negates the prone condition and halves the bludgeoning damage.

When the rock crosses the first cutting grid, it becomes a small landslide of burning chunks. A creature caught in its path is subject to the effects described above but suffering only 33 (6d10) bludgeoning damage, subject to the same saving throw which halves the damage on a failed save. After the second grid, the rock is a harmless wave of hot gravel, which deals no damage, but can still force a character to succeed on the above saving throw or fall prone.

Once the party has reached the bottom of the chute, they see the hole on the ground also has strange-looking rails leading straight down to a glowing-red furnace on the level below. If the adventurers climb down the rails, they reach area 11 on the third level.

Rewards

After leaving the second level, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

TEMPERS BLAZING

The party has passed the first two levels of the Nurazhirme volcano and have now managed to infiltrate past the outskirts of the Kiln, stretching into the fiery walls of the volcano's crater proper.

The Kiln: Level 3

Many busy dragonkin and constructs come and go down the corridors and into the forge rooms, and the piping system is far more elaborate in this region, as there are magma pourers that feed the smelters underneath, water-refrigeration conduits that cool down the magma tubes, and steam collectors which direct the scalding vapors into a huge, barrel-like container where it condenses and turns into cold water. All of these pipes are wide enough to allow humanoid creatures to either move along or climb into two abreast.

Dragonkin are everywhere, busily mining and dislodging huge chunks of rock, or retrieving them from the thick rivers of magma, fishing them out as the constant flow carries them along the canals and higher vents. At certain points, there are huge sieves, much like the ones separating the various levels inside the Forge, but these only serve to thin out the magma, making its streams flow faster and smoother until it reaches a point where it runs much like water, exiting the volcano through several ducts carved into the walls. Most automatons here are designed to serve as forge assistants, while the dragonkin work hard at separating any loads of useful, precious materials from the dross in the smelters.

11. Main Hallway

This mammoth chamber, the seemingly endless cavern that connects all tunnels and passages in the volcano's third level, is where Ehrlya wyrmlings and young roam around during the brief breaks in their daily toil to become renowned artisans, looking for a distraction from their incessant tasks and chores.

At first sight, this cave seems endless. The ceiling is so far away that it's hidden at first glance, and the floor is nothing but a set of bridges over a seemingly bottomless chasm which emanates a vague red glow.

Huge pipes and sieves gushing steam and magma jut out of the walls in every direction, and dozens of dragons of all sizes fly about the chamber.

Every time the adventurers enter or leave this chamber, they must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check or attract the attention of one **young Ehrlya dragon.**

12. First Forges

This large cavern is the hottest you've visited so far. It's filled with massive slabs of hardened metal that work as anvils, hanging chains, and metalcraft contraptions which seem to fit draconic anatomy. Complex channel networks lead the forge's magma, water, and steam outside the chambers as the Ehrlya smiths perform their craft, oblivious to everything but the work itself.

Ehrlya Dragonkin

Each of these chambers has a canal leading out of it, through which dross, sludge, and refuse flow down into area 13.

For every minute that the adventurers remain in one of these chambers, they must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check or draw the attention of two **Ehrlya dragon wyrmlings** and three (1d6) **Ehrlya dragonkin assistants.**

13. Separation Chambers

Every forge on the third level has at least one of these cistern-like rooms attached. They are 100-foot long canals, filled with a bluish gelatinous substance in which metal scraps of various shapes slowly float toward a chute in the far wall.

This small chamber, coming out of the main forge, seems to be a water canal, only it doesn't carry water but a strange bluish gel, in which several discarded metal pieces float toward a grate leading, apparently, deeper down into the complex.

With a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check an adventurer can notice that some of these metal objects seem to drift toward one another, as if attracted by an invisible force.

Again, these chutes are the only exit from this level for the party. To reach the exit chute, the adventurers need to wade chest deep in the pool of slime, cutting their movement speed in half. Every round a character remains in the slime, they need to make a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw to avoid touching the strange metallic objects floating nearby. A character that is not carrying any metal objects whatsoever gains advantage on this save. Failing this save means one of the metal scraps attaches itself to the character. The first time that happens, read the following aloud:

With a faint crackling sound, the floating piece of metal drifts and clings to your thigh. It doesn't hurt, but you feel a slight electric tickling in the immediate area around the object.

Repeat the saving throw each round, attaching one additional metal piece to each character that fails their save.

At the start of each round, each attached metal piece deals 7 (2d6) lightning damage each to the character it clings to. Any character taking lightning damage while in contact with the slime canal must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or become restrained for 1 round.

As an action, a single attached electrical device may be removed with a successful DC 22 Strength check.

MAP 3.3: THE KILN: LEVEL 3

Also, a DC 22 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the gel is highly conductive, granting metallic objects their electrical charges. A sudden electrical blast can overload the charge. If any target inside the sludge takes any lightning damage from a source other than the charged metal scraps, the slime causes all other living creatures in contact with it to take the same damage. However, after that, all of the metal scraps dislodge from all creatures' bodies and drift away, no longer attaching to a creature that touches them.

Once the party reaches the chute, they can simply slide or climb down to the next level, reaching area 14.

The Kiln: Level 4

This level is where the more serious work is done by the Ehrlya dragons who have come out of adolescence and are now considered *nkaurth*, or young adults, with

enough expertise to start crafting their own projects and handling forges with little to no supervision by their elder instructors. These nkaurth are curious and rowdy dragons, bent on proving themselves to be tough and ingenious, knowing their first mating season is only a decade away.

It is at this age that the truly virtuous Ehrlya dragons understand that they can master their craft while also improving their physical attributes by augmenting their bodies as Dehrilya did. Dragons that focus only on one or the other will fall short of, and never unleash, their true potential. This truth is never revealed to students. Only those that figure it out have the true potential inside themselves. Those that focus on enhancing their own bodies will become good breeders, charged with the brood's future, while those that focus on their craft will become great smiths. Neither will achieve the rank of Mastersmith, however, as they will not grasp how deeply tied the Ehrlya brood is to their craft. For an Ehrlya dragon, creating and crafting must be just as important as living and breathing.

14. Furnace

> This immense, descending pit, covered in a mind-boggling network of pipes, tubes and railways, makes you sweaty and dizzy from both the height and the steam.

This pit connects to all chambers on the volcano's fourth level. The adventurers need no ability checks to descend through the piping, which has abundant ladders, walkways, and handholds, but their only progress can be downward.

If a character falls from the walls for any reason, they plummet to certain death, unless they are somehow rescued by their companions, as the bottom of the pit is a magma furnace hundreds of feet below.

As the party climbs down, they encounter a group of wandering dragons flying around the chute, looking for some fun and a bit of muscle-flexing outside of the forging chambers. A party of climbing intruders is just what they need.

The player characters must face five **young Ehrlya dragons.** All party members are considered restrained as the fight begins, as they are grabbing a ledge or a handhold for dear life, but they can attempt a DC 21 Strength (Athletics) check as an action to lose the restrained condition by climbing, skidding, or leaping onto a ledge, rail, or small walkway, which gives them sure footing. Their movement is still restricted to being along the wall, as there is nothing on which a creature can move beyond the wall. The dragons try to remain airborne during the entire encounter, but they can climb if prevented from flying.

Shortly after the encounter with the dragons, the party finds—at last—an open tunnel in the wall leading to area 15.

15. Venting Tunnel

> As you enter the side tunnel, you hear muffled booming, cracking, grinding, and grating coming from behind the doors lining the walls. There are huge adorned pipes coming out of one wall, going both up and down the wall and along the corridor.

If the party approaches the piping along the wall, they immediately notice the pipes are incredibly hot, as these are the main magma lines feeding the forges on this level and the ones above. This is an engineering marvel and the reason why lava is always running out of the volcano's many chimneys and side vents. The Ehrlya have managed to tap into the core and keep the magma coming up in a constant flow as they take out all the useful materials and remove the silica to thin it down. The lava, free of mineral solids, is so fluid that it streams down the sides of Nurazhirme in fiery rivers that quickly cool down and become a new layer of obsidian, drifting away to expand the Obsidian Plains.

The only way out seems to be the three doors at the end of the corridor, from where the horrid grinding noises came.

16. Magma Processing Chamber

> This is a monstrous cavern, with several pipes and chutes coming from openings on the walls to gutters in the ground where magma flows slowly but endlessly. A many limbed monstrosity, apparently made of animated piping, toils among the tubes, making it look like the chamber itself is a living thing.
>
> There is a single exit: a large metal door on the far wall.

Each of the three doors from 15 leads to one of these vast chambers. Tending to the endless canals of magma is a huge, specialized automaton with what seem to be ten metal arms, designed to crush the harder materials in the magma down to more manageable pieces before they reach the gutters below.

This **decapod** construct can detect moving objects and attacks as soon as the adventurers make their presence known.

Distracting the decapod from its duties is, in fact, more dangerous than the creature itself. As the magma flow continues unimpeded, it begins choking the drainage gutters, which causes the magma to slowly overflow the canals in the room. If the encounter lasts 5 rounds or more, magma begins spreading across the floor and heating the metal surface. From the fifth round onward, each adventurer must make a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw at the start of every round, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

After the battle ends, the magma begins dangerously flooding the chamber. Read the following aloud:

> The automaton stumbles backward, sizzling and sputtering, and a magma wave trips it and quickly engulfs its massive frame, as the flow of magma starts to clog the exits, making very loud and aggressive noises.

The party has 1 more minute to evacuate the chamber, either through where they entered, or through the opposite door leading to area 17, before magma floods it completely, breaking down the tubes and killing everything inside. They cannot stop the chamber's collapse, and they must keep making saving throws against the magma flood as long as they don't leave the chamber.

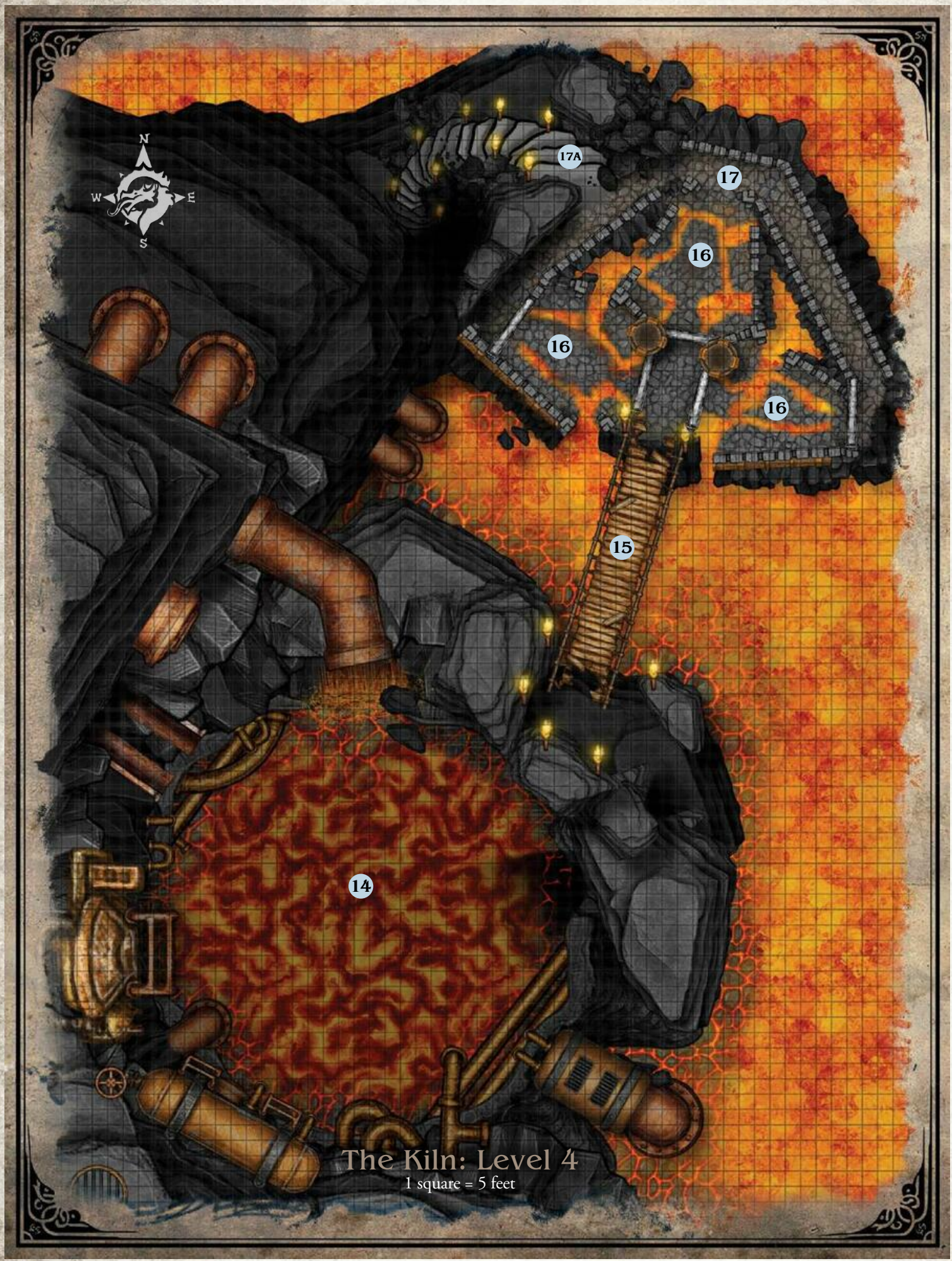
17. Catwalk

This walkway runs around all 16 chambers in this level, with a branch that heads toward a massive, dragon-sized tunnel with a spiraling staircase for dragonkin along its wall (marked as 17a on map 3.4: The Kiln: Level 4).

Rewards

After leaving the fourth level, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

Decapod



MAP 3.4: THE KILN: LEVEL 4

RIFFLE RESPLENDENCE, DWIMMER DARKNESS

The party begins the last portion of their descent into Nurazhirme, where they finally reach the lower levels and Dehrilya's lair: the Flawless Forge itself.

The Kiln: Level 5

This is where those dragons who have become master artisans reside and work. There are very few dragons, dragonkin, or constructs in the halls, as they spend most of their time inside the Ehrlya master forges.

18. Great Hall

> This enormous, imposing corridor is dark, save for the furnace-hot lamps set on the wall at regular intervals about 60 feet over your heads. Every sound makes an eerie echo in this massive, deserted passage, and warm air can be felt flowing in from every direction.

This vast hall connects all chambers on the fifth level.

19. Master Forge

This massive, active forge extends upward and downward as well as sideways. Its several platforms are filled with forge tools, canals, vents, hanging pieces of cooling metal, and dark, scarred Ehrlya dragons, who work on their gigantic anvil-slabs and kilns, assisted by a swarm of dragonkin, constructs, and even Valernian humanoids moving up and down the forge.

These forges are where advanced Ehrlya smiths perfect their craft. The constructs here all have delicate, beautiful forms that perfectly emulate those of dragonkin or wingless dragons, depending on their function, and are highly specialized to help with the crafting itself. The dragonkin and humanoids appointed to this level are tougher, more muscular, and enhanced with artifacts and harnesses to better handle smaller pieces or minute mechanisms, working as precision instruments, which the dragons command as they put together their creations, and requiring smaller tools to reach into the minuscule spaces and tricky corners of their works of art.

Every adventurer needs to succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity (Stealth) check each time they enter or leave these chambers, drawing the attention of one **adult Ehrlya dragon** and three (1d6) **Ehrlya dragonkin aides** on a failed check.

The bottom platform in each of these chambers leads to the captive pens in area 20.

20. Captive Pens

Each of the master forges in area 19 has a smaller, human-scale workshop, where Valernian captives work under the vigilant eyes of dragonkin supervisors.

This smaller workshop seems to be a scaled-down version of the larger one before it, where humanoids work the forges under the supervision of burly dragonkin.

The dragonkin do not seem to treat the Valernians cruelly but have them focused and working hard on their tasks. All of the captives here seem to be quite accomplished smiths or stonecutters, for they make it look easy to produce amazing displays of craftsmanship.

If the party reveals themselves while in one of these chambers, they must face eight **Ehrlya dragonkin aides.** The chambers are large, busy, and noisy enough that any disturbance here remains unnoticed by the dragons and dragonkin in area 19.

If the adventurers try to free the people in the workshop, the captives refuse, claiming that attempting to escape is much more dangerous than their forge work and that the Ehrlya treat their slaves reasonably well compared to other broods, which the captives would risk getting enslaved by.

21. Security Room

This small, circular room of smooth stone was clearly intended for dragonkin and humanoids, judging by the size of its entrances. It has no visible doors, just two open gates: the one you entered from and one across the room from you.

The party will likely enter this small room from the gate connecting it to area 18, and there is one other gate that leads to a ramp down to area 22. However, this room is actually a security checkpoint, intended to detect escaping humanoids.

When the party enters, both gates close, their edges disappearing into the masonry. Then, a bluish light orb glows in one of the walls, and some slabs from the floor start to shift and agitate, glowing with a faint, flickering light, until the floor resembles Drakha's night sky. The slabs then begin to actually levitate, their light increasing in intensity and their hum becoming a low buzzing sound as they start traveling around the room. These slabs fly and buzz around the party like a swarm of deadly stone bugs, glowing like fireflies and biting like small dragons.

At the start of every round that a creature remains inside the room, they take 10 (3d6) slashing damage and must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become Blinded for 1 minute from the strobing lights.

The buzzing slabs may be attacked and hit, but they will reassemble themselves one round after taking any damage.

The only way to permanently shutdown the trap is by disabling the blue orb on the wall. This requires either destroying the orb (AC 22; 30 hp) or using thieves' tools and succeeding on a DC 22 Intelligence check. If the orb is disabled, all flying slabs clatter back to the ground and become dormant again, and the trap will not reactivate if any creature enters this room again.

An adventurer may also find the hidden, sealed gates by succeeding on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check, and they can then be forced open with a successful DC 25 Strength check or, if they have thieves' tools to use, a Dexterity check.

Finally, the adventurers may trick the trap into believing they have left the room by falling prone, which stops the blue orb from sensing their presence and eventually causes it to both deactivate the flying slabs and reopen the gates. If the party doesn't come up with the idea on their own, you may allow them a DC 24 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check to notice that the flying slabs don't fly any lower than two feet.

MAP 3.5: THE KILN: LEVEL 5

The Kiln: Level 6

This is the lowest level of the Kiln, where the Mastersmith dragon artificers live and work with their dragonkin teams, along with fit, crafty, and resilient Valernians. There are a few drones throughout this level, but they are purely utilitarian and do not present any threat to intruders.

22. Main Causeway

The ramp down from area 21 leads the party here, which is a relatively small tunnel compared to the main passages from the other levels. In fact, this tunnel is used only for prisoner transport.

> The ramp leads you to a gloomy passage, with walls on one side and a railing on the other. From the railing, you peer over an abyss leading straight down into the volcano's molten core.

Small groups of unsupervised Valernian captives travel up and down this walkway at all times. The adventurers need no Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide, and the Valernians don't attack or flee if confronted. The prisoners don't want to be freed, however. Most of them have become loyal to the Ehrlya or, at least, content with their lot. It certainly beats being eaten or burned to a crisp trying to escape. They will not reveal the party's presence or raise an alarm either.

They simply warn the party away from the lower level, which holds Dehrilya's lair itself, and suggest they turn back before it's too late.

A successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check, however, makes the prisoners offer some of their rags so the party may disguise themselves as prisoners.

If told about the plan to sabotage the Va'ra lode, the Valernians shake their heads, certain that the adventurers will fail but unwilling to stand in their way.

23. Siphoning Room

From a window in the wall, you realize this small chamber is filled with strange appliances of polished bronze and patinated gears, handled by dragonkin who lead Valernians to touch the machines.

Valernians enter this chamber willingly, in groups of three or four, and grab small levers attached to these contraptions under the supervision of a team of Ehrlya dragonkin engineers, who watch how crackling energy travels from the machines to a series of coils and crystal ducts running along the walls and floor.

These machines siphon the life energy, or Vaala, of humanoid creatures, which the Ehrlya then use to power their runes and artifacts. However, the captives seem to do it gladly, as if they were coming for a medical examination, and leave as calmly as they came, if a bit weakened. Any non-dragon creature that grabs these levers for one full minute gains one level of exhaustion.

If the party comes disguised as prisoners, the dragonkin attendants assume they come to submit to the procedure and calmly wait for each of them to grab a lever and donate their Vaala as everyone else.

The dragonkin in the room are noncombatants, but if the adventurers arrive fully armed and armored or cause any kind of disturbance, the noise summons **6 Ehrlya dragonkin elite** to the area after 1 minute.

24. Sound Chamber

Though locked, this large chamber can be seen through a thick glass window running the length of its nearest wall. From there, you witness a group of Valernian workers with their heads covered in dense rags, using bizarrely shaped metal tuning forks the size of tridents to crack down big chunks of incredibly beautiful crystal and gemstones placed on metallic bases.

First, they strike the floor with the fork tip, and then they put one end of its shaft against one of the metallic bases, allowing the other end to vibrate freely. After a moment, the precious rocks crack and fall apart, only to be picked up by other Valernians and put on the flatbeds of transport automatons. Once a flatbed is full, the load is complete and the constructs exit the room through a door to the side.

A successful DC 22 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Perception) check allows the adventurers to notice that the windows of this chamber vibrate almost imperceptibly every time the fork shafts are put to the metal conduits and the precious crystals crack.

This means the forks must be producing a low-pitched noise, and the walls and windows must have been sound-proofed.

There are several of these strange-looking forked spears resting at the far end of the corridor (marked as 24a on map 3.6: The Kiln: Level 6), enough for each player character to take one if they so wish.

If the party tries to open the door to the room, the workers stop what they're doing and wave their heads and arms, trying to warn the adventurers off. The door can be picked using thieves' tools and a successful DC 22 Intelligence check. If the adventurers open the door, they each must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) sonic damage and become deafened for 1 minute from residual vibrations. Any adventurers that reasonably protect their ears before opening the door gain advantage on this save.

The workers are the same as other Valernians found on this level: sympathetic to the party but unwilling to oppose their Ehrlya masters. They will, however, confirm—rather loudly, as they all have damaged hearing—that the forks may be used to break down solid rock through sonic vibrations, but only if the adventurers ask. They don't object to the party taking a few forks with them. The ragged hoods of these Valernians are padded so as to grant advantage on saving throws against sound-based effects and resistance to sonic damage, but they are not willing to part with these unless attacked or threatened with a DC 22 Charisma (Intimidation) check.

25. Junk Deposit

> You come to a large, unattended room, filled with a veritable mountain of metal junk, rusted tools, and discarded trinkets.

This large room is one of this level's junkyards, where dragonkin and Valernians discard broken machinery, worn-out tools, and waste from their work. There are also huge grills and grates from decommissioned structures. A character with proficiency in mason's, smith's, or tinker's tools can attempt a DC 16 Intelligence check to discover that they come from large cages, the right size to hold a group of humanoid captives. The room contains no useful items.

26. Transport Cages

> In this corner at the end of the walkway, you find some empty cages, each one large enough for your entire party.

A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a *detect magic* or similar effect reveals that the cages are magical, enchanted to protect whoever is inside from all fire damage. Each cage fits six humanoid-sized creatures comfortably spaced.

27. The Sentinel Hall

The entrance to this great chamber is a truly massive metallic door, almost 40 feet tall, made of a shiny and polished red metal. Seemingly built for huge or larger dragons, the door, in fact, opens easily under the strength of any character. The mechanism on which the door is mounted makes it practically weightless.

> This room has almost pitch-black walls, and the reddish glow of the magma below the hallway barely reflects off of them.

As the last adventurer enters the chamber, the door slides closed and disappears into the walls, plunging the party into total darkness. Everything is heavily obscured in this darkness, and the range of darkvision, torches, and any other light sources is halved. There are no features or markings on either the walls or the ceiling for the party to find, and the walls are cold to the touch and incredibly smooth.

The constant sound of faint clicking and whirring comes from somewhere beyond the chamber, but it's impossible to pinpoint its source.

Read the following if the adventurers advance further into the room.

> This seems to be a winding, dark tunnel, leading left, now right, now ahead, then offering a choice between two or more paths, but it remains pitch dark, with constant whirring and clicks sounding in the distance.

The party has been trapped inside one of Dehrilya's greatest creations, the Sentinel Hall, a room-construct that creates an endless maze within itself by switching walls and ceilings to extend corridors or create smaller quarters, thus throwing any unauthorized being into confusion and preventing them from ever reaching the door leading down into the Great Vault.

The walls and ceilings are made of rakphrarr, a metal that is both very dense, making it almost impossible to dent after being struck, incredibly smooth to the touch, and highly reflective of sound. Operating as a huge, ever-shifting puzzle box, the colossal construct has a command node placed well outside the main body frame, extending hundreds of sprockets and arms that quietly furl and unfurl the wall and ceiling sections until the offending party stops moving and the controller dragonkin crews arrive to remove the prisoners, or their corpses.

Have the adventurers wander about inside the Sentinel Hall for a few minutes, describing how their blows against the wall seem to run across the whole surface and fade away in the distance, thus making it obvious they seem to have wandered into a preternaturally dark and huge labyrinthine structure with no way to get their bearings. The walls are too slick to climb and are resistant to any dent or mark, and the floor remains the same chiseled basaltic rock under their feet.

A successful DC 23 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check reveals that the adventurers are not advancing through an endless labyrinth, as it seems, and it is the walls which move around them, just out of sight, as soon as the party leaves an area.

If the party stops advancing, after 1 minute a second door opens on one wall and **eight Ehrlya dragonkin elite** arrive to finish them off. If the party defeats the dragonkin, they may leave by the door the dragonkin used to enter.

If the adventurers took some of the tuning forks from area 24, they may use them to strike the wall, which disrupts the mechanism. Soon enough the walls begin to resonate with a higher note and start vibrating until they detach, allowing faint rays of reddish light to briefly come through before the walls close again. If an adventurer insists on striking the walls with the tuning forks, the structure starts to rumble and bump violently. The control node is no longer able to keep it stabilized, and it starts to retract certain sections in an effort to avoid a catastrophic failure. As this happens, each adventurer must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or suffer 21 (6d6) sonic damage and become deafened until their next short rest.

As the shambling, clanking structure finishes clattering down, the party sees the control node—the geared contraption that was making the constant whirring noise—detach from the ceiling and loudly crash into the twisted, still vibrating segments of walls and articulated arms. Then, the adventurers hear the sound of roaring voices coming from a point higher in the level. Someone has noticed that they destroyed the machine.

Once the party exits the chamber, either because they destroyed it or because a dragonkin patrol came to fetch them, they find themselves in a precarious ledge over an abyss of magma. They may run downward along the ledges in the rock face, away from the railings and deeper into the volcano.

Rewards

After leaving the sixth level, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

MAP 3.6: THE KILN: LEVEL 6

TO BRING A MOUNTAIN DOWN

The player characters have finally reached the volcanic core of Dehrilya's domain, containing the Great Vault, with its finest Ehrlya masterpieces, and the Flawless Forge, the lair of the Forge Queen herself.

The Great Vault

As the party leaves the tunnels of the sixth level, they come to the core of the Nurazhirme volcano.

28. The Chasm

> As you escape from the trap room above, you run down the ledges of a seemingly endless volcanic wall, the abyss of the volcanic core spreading below you.
>
> It's easy enough to carefully climb down across the ledges and walkways half-built by the Ehrlya, but it's still a daunting descent.

About one hour's trek downward is a tunnel leading to area 29. Upon reaching it, each adventurer must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) fire damage and gain one level of exhaustion from suffering through the heat of the abyss as they made their way down.

However, if the party disabled the Sentinel Hall before descending, they hear the confused, booming voices of dragons barking orders and a few outraged shrills above them. Something is coming for them.

Any adventurers trying to escape or hide from what may be chasing them as they descend must each succeed at a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to run and leap down the chasm wall ledges without losing their footing. If a character fails this check, they must succeed at a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or fall to their death.

Any adventurer who is descending slowly and carefully doesn't need to make an ability check to move downward, but one **adult Ehrlya dragon** catches up to them, flying down the chasm to kill them.

During the fight with the dragon, the party is considered to be standing on a secure ledge, so they have sure footing and freedom of action during the battle. But they can still only move along the wall: up, down, or sideways. The dragon remains airborne during the entire encounter and climbs if prevented from flying.

29. The Va'ra Vein

This massive cavern is one of the many entrances to the party's ultimate goal: the vein of Va'ra crystals underneath the Kiln, near the magma core of the Nurazhirme.

Va'ra crystals extend beyond sight in every direction, covering the stone with their reddish glow and strange, pulsating energy.

No living things work the vein. Instead, peculiar whirling blades, coils, and tubes attached to the walls and ceiling cut the crystals, suck them in, and send them down several pipes along the cave walls, some leading up but most leading somewher further down.

Va'ra Drake

If a living non-dragon creature spends one minute or longer in this area, they must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion from standing near so much Va'ra. By the same token, resting in this area does not remove levels of exhaustion.

There is another unnatural construction in the cavern: a series of four metallic columns, placed at seemingly random points along the cave. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check reveals that the columns were built to

hold the cave ceiling and floor together. These columns are the only thing preventing the whole vein from collapsing, after millennia of extraction has weakened the bedrock. This is how one would destroy the Va'ra lode.

THE VA'RA DRAKES

> Without warning, three metallic dragons swoop into view, roaring and spewing clouds of crackling, dark, reddish energy.

During the fight, characters may position themselves between the Va'ra drakes' attacks and the columns, so as to lead the drakes into indirectly attacking the supports (see "Destroying the Columns" below).

DESTROYING THE COLUMNS

To weaken the columns holding the Va'ra vein in place, 30 damage must be dealt to each column. This doesn't actually destroy the column, but weakens it enough that it becomes unable to hold the cavern ceiling.

Each column has AC 23 and resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, fire, and cold damage, and they are immune to necrotic, radiant, poison, and psychic damage. Pouring one dose of universal solvent at the base of one of the columns counts as dealing 30 damage to it.

If the party has the tuning forks from area 24, they may strike the columns with them. Each successful hit with a tuning fork deals 21 (6d6) sonic damage to the column plus bludgeoning damage equal to the wielder's Strength modifier. If a column takes 30 or more points of sonic damage in this manner, all creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) sonic damage and become deafened until their next short rest.

If the player characters weaken at least three of the four columns, the Va'ra vein begins shaking, cracking, and crumbling… and the structure finally gives.

> With a loud noise like that of a metal-clad titan dying, the massive crystal vein begins crashing down into the fiery pit below. The ripped coils hiss and crackle with the freed Vaala energy leaking from them, and the loud shrills of bending metal, exploding crystals, and shattered stone are soon drowned out by a furious roar coming from below.
>
> The ground beneath your feet begins to tremble. Suddenly it caves in, and you plunge plunge into the blazing storm awaiting you.

Each player character takes 35 (10d6) bludgeoning damage plus 35 (10d6) fire damage. A successful DC 25 Dexterity saving throw halves all damage.

Any surviving adventurers find themselves in a new cavern and before a breathtaking sight.

30. The Exhibit Hall

This is where the best creations by the Ehrlya Mastersmiths are kept and displayed, including many of Dehrilya's most notable pieces and several of her earlier body enhancements and prostheses—gigantic metallic dragon arms and wings set in imposing displays.

A mix of museum and armory, the contents of this huge exhibition hall, which spirals to the center of the volcano's floor, both defies logic and exalts the creative genius of the draconic race and its most skilled artisans.

> As you recover from the shock of the fall, you are taken aback by the vision extending before your eyes: Hundreds, perhaps thousands of incredibly crafted objects of all sizes extend over a vast depressed valley with a huge hole at its center, under a sky covered in magma.

The party find themselves beneath an artificial bubble created by the Ehrlya to store their most valued treasures. From their vantage point, the adventurers can see archways, open-topped rooms, bizarrely shaped forums, and walls lined with niches akin to shelves all the way down to the base of great columns. There is no sound other than constant, subdued rumbling of the rock and magma engulfing the outside of the bubble. Amidst this ominous background noise, an eerie silence permeates the interior.

Most of the treasures on display here are too large or unwieldy for humanoid characters to take, but the adventurers can grab jewelry and crafted masterpieces worth a total of 70,000 gp if they wish.

With the Va'ra drakes defeated, no one guards this area. The party may even take a long rest here if they wish.

The only exit from here, at the bottom of the gallery, is a dark, wide, and stuffy tunnel, leading even further down into the volcano.

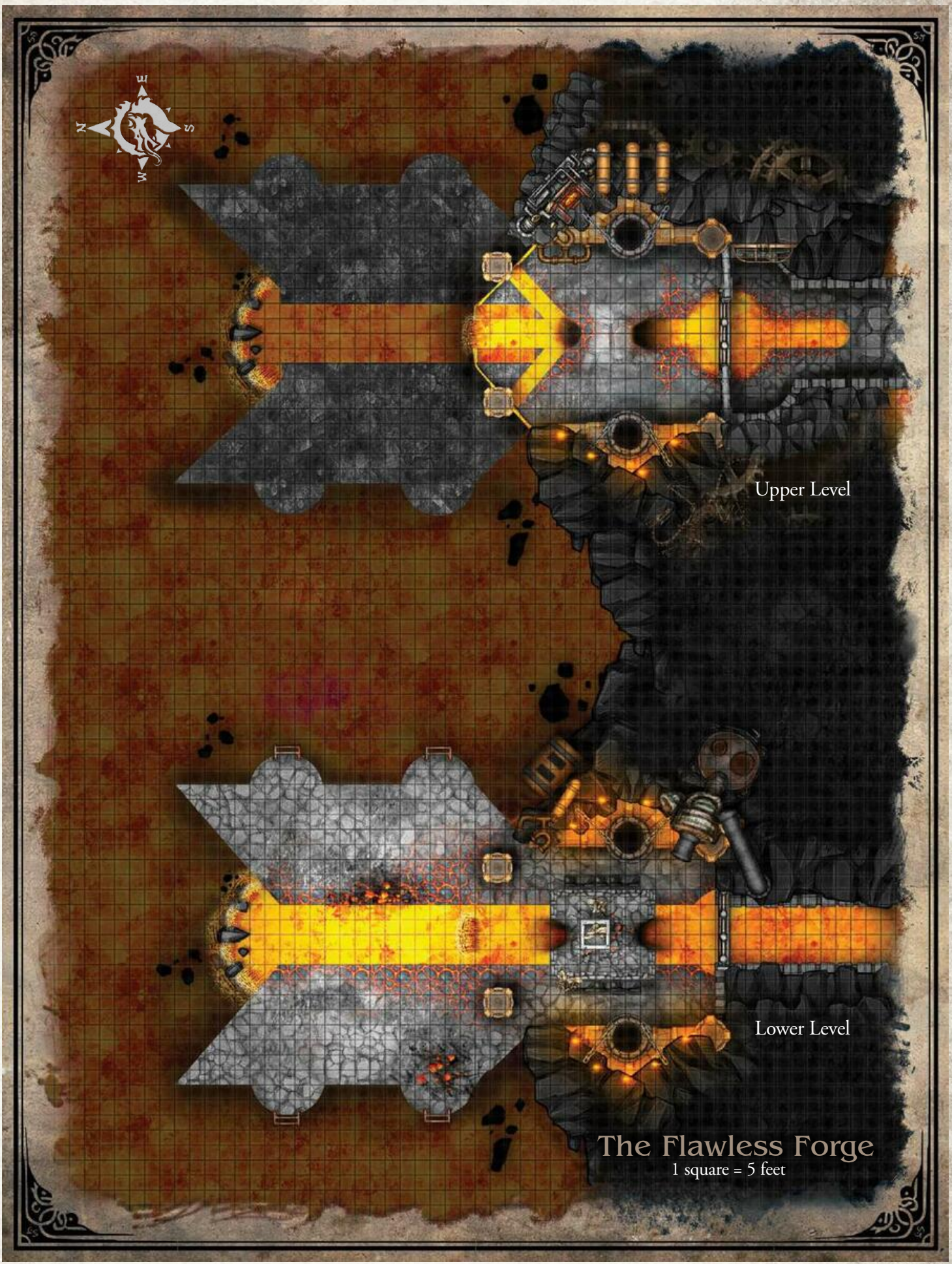
31. The Flawless Forge

This is Dehrilya's lair at the very core of Nurazhirme, a vast chamber underneath the crater's surface directly below the Great Vault's center. The raw Vaala harvested from the lifeforce of Valernian captives above imbues its tall protective walls with strange, fascinating lights as it pulsates down. A complicated system of different lenses and metal and crystal dissipators ensures the Vaala makes its way directly and unadulterated into the crucibles where the Forge Queen smelts all the materials she then bends and shapes into objects of magnificent invention and untold power.

MAP 3.7: THE GREAT VAULT

As the party approaches this area, they are overcome by noise, heat, smoke, and activity. Then, they reach a huge workshop amid a roaring inferno of magma streams, some still carrying the Va'ra crystals from the vein they shattered above.

> As you walk inside the forge, the scorching heat makes you sweat and the thick air clouds your eyes. The sounds of metalworking clink all around you, as dozens of smiths of draconian and humanoid appearance work tirelessly at their anvils and pits. But they all stop and look up as one sound drowns all other noise. *"WHAT IN THE VOID ARE YOU INTERLOPERS DOING HERE?!"*



MAP 3.8: THE FLAWLESS FORGE

The Fight with Dehrilya

As the player characters enter Dehrilya's workshop, the Forge Queen confronts them immediately, brooking no interruption to her work.

First Phase

The battle begins when the player characters break into Dehrilya's Forge.

> From behind the clouds of smoke and steam, a gargantuan dark silhouette slowly approaches and suddenly spreads its wings, making the vapors and ashen clouds part before it.
>
> Before you stands Dehrilya, the Forge Queen herself. And she does not look pleased.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The workshop is well lit with the red glow of hundreds of forges. All around you, you can see hanging chains, half-finished metal contraptions, and gigantic tools, larger than you, with unfathomable uses.

Dehrilya's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

Dehrilya's initial attacks are intended more to scare the player characters off than killing them outright, but she has little notion of restraint and no time for niceties. She likely opens the fight by unleashing her breath weapons on them.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- The player characters have caused two or more mishaps in the workshop (see the "Dehrilya Exploits" section).
- One of Dehrilya's body parts is broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, Dehrilya pulls a lever, and magma begins overflowing the forge.

Second Phase

Magma begins to flood the workshop's pits and inlets, and several slits and outlets open threateningly, ready to pour molten metal and magma onto trespassers.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The forge helpers scatter, wary of the magma and the battle but terrified of their mistress more than anything else.
>
> Magma from a dozen pipes and vents begins flooding the forge as Dehrilya roars in triumph, her dark silhouette even more threatening against the red glow.

The stifling heat has become such that every adventurer has to make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the start of this phase. Any character that fails the save gains one level of exhaustion.

Dehrilya's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

During this phase, at the start of each of Dehrilya's upkeeps, three random player characters must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) fire damage.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Three of Dehrilya's body parts are broken, and at least two other body parts are below their hit point maximum.
- Two of Dehrilya's body parts are broken, and the player characters have triggered at least three workshop mishaps.

When one of the above conditions is met, Dehrilya pulls a huge chain, and toxic gas begins to fill the area.

Final Phase

The Forge is now filled with toxic, ashen gas. Magma continues to flood the workshop's pits and inlets.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The forge is now filled with black smoke, with only the streams of magma and Dehrilya's glowing red eyes lighting the dusk. Even your lungs feel enveloped in darkness.

At the start of the phase, the heat and poisonous ash force every adventurer to make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw. Any characters that fail the save gain two levels of exhaustion and become poisoned for as long as they remain inside the Flawless Forge.

Additionally, the entire lair becomes lightly obscured for the remainder of the fight.

Dehrilya's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 6

During this phase, at the start of each of Dehrilya's upkeeps, three random player characters must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) fire damage.

PHASE END

The encounter ends when Dehrilya is defeated. This requires fulfilling one of the following conditions:

- Four or more of Dehrilya's body parts are broken, and the player characters have triggered at least five workshop mishaps.
- The player characters have triggered more than eight workshop mishaps.
- Five or more of Dehrilya's body parts are broken, and all of her remaining body parts are below their maximum hit points.

The party is amidst yet another cataclysm inside the volcano and are about to be consumed by an inferno of roaring magma and falling rocks.

A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a couple of enchanted cages, just like the ones in area 26, speeding by among the flotsam. The party may jump into one of these to have a safe exit.

Otherwise, the party's only way out is to use the debris—a large rock or piece of metal—as a barge to navigate the magma torrent as it leads them out of the volcano. In this case, each character needs to succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion and take 10 (3d6) fire damage from the heat.

Regardless of their method of escape, a few grueling hours later, the surviving adventurers lie down, battered but safe, in the Obsidian Plains, as a party of Scalebreaker scouts approaches them among the volcanic vapors.

Conclusion

Suddenly, the forge shakes. No, the whole mountain shakes, and huge torrents of magma begin flooding the workshop as massive chunks of rock fall on the forge walkways, crushing machinery and burying tools.

Dehrilya stumbles and falls, bellowing in fury and frustration, as a deluge of molten magma buries her flailing form. You have to run, NOW.

DEHRILYA, THE FORGE QUEEN

Dehrilya is a tough opponent, even by dragon standards. She is used to living in the impossible conditions of the forge's core, and she had to rebuild her own body when it failed her. No kind of pain makes her flinch; however, her creations are much more fragile, and smart adventurers may target them to break Dehrilya's cool.

Dehrilya's Lair

The player characters arrive from the southern entrances on the *Upper Level,* on map 3.8: The Flawless Forge. Dehrilya begins the fight standing at the *Lower Level,* towards the North part on the Flawless Forge map, which overlooks a bottomless chasm of volcanic magma.

Magma Zones

The map has magma rivers on both levels, they eventually cascade northward into the depths of the Volcano. Any creature that enters these areas must succeed on a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw or take 55 (10d10) truefire damage. If the save succeeds, the character manages to stop at the closest edge of the magma-filled area, taking only half damage.

Moving around the Forge

As the player characters enter the scene, Dehrilya challenges them and starts ordering her minions about. If the adventurers don't come down to face her during the first round, she uses her movement to fly to the *Upper Level.*

A large or smaller size character can move between levels by using the platform system on the wells on the East and West walls on both levels. The East platform only goes up, and the West platform only goes down; any character that ends their turn inside the well will start the next turn on the other level.

Alternatively, a character can fly or levitate the 60 feet between the levels or jump down from the *Upper* to the *Lower Level*, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall. A successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw halves that damage.

Dehrilya Exploits

The following exploits can be used to take advantage of Dehrilya during the battle, if the characters discover them.

Forge Creations

Dehrilya's lair is full of machines and artifacts she made herself, from weapons and tools to automatons and heavy machinery. Breaking these will distract Dehrilya, as she pores over her damaged work and instructs her workshop assistants to take care of repairs.

Any character can target Dehrilya's creations as an action during their turn. If Dehrilya's creations take more than 30 damage in a single round, she immediately loses 2 actions between worrying and barking orders all around, shouting things such as, "No, the hyper-steamed magma contraptor again!" Dehrilya cannot lose more than 2 actions per round from this exploit.

Smith's Curiosity

Dehrilya is a curious dragon, and interesting magic items distract her. A character that spends one action showing Dehrilya a rare or very rare magic item made mostly of metal (e.g., no potions, scrolls, or clothing) can attempt a DC 23 Charisma (any skill) check to distract her. If the check succeeds, Dehrilya loses 2 actions from her action pool. Dehrilya cannot lose more than 2 actions per round from this exploit.

Not All Gold Glitters

Dehrilya's lair is strewn with tools, pieces of metal, and other such objects that may look of little value but are important to Dehrilya, and their arrangement matters to her. If a character uses an action to move one of these objects around, Dehrilya focuses her attacks on that character for the remainder of that round.

Workshop Mishaps

Dehrilya's lair is a work in progress, constantly evolving and changing at the whims of the Forge Queen. Savvy player characters can use this to their advantage by manipulating some of Dehrilya's projects in progress.

A character may spend an action to mess with Dehrilya's workshop by causing cave-ins of unstable structures, bringing down gargantuan piles of tools or junk, activating magical wards, overturning magma cauldrons, overflowing magma shafts, and the like.

The character must succeed on a DC 15 Strength, Dexterity, or Intelligence check to cause a mishap, or make a DC 23 Charisma (any skill) check to lure Dehrilya into causing it herself.

If the check succeeds, Dehrilya takes 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage to one body part of the player character's choice, but the character takes 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) fire damage. However, the adventurer (only) may attempt a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw to negate the damage they receive. Any creature that takes damage from a workshop mishap, Dehrilya included, is restrained until Dehrilya's next upkeep.

DEHRILYA

Gargantuan dragon, neutral

Armor Class see "Dehrilya's Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Dehrilya's Body Parts"
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
28 (+9)	17 (+3)	28 (+9)	22 (+6)	22 (+6)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +18, Con +18, Int +15
Skills Arcana +15, History +15, Perception +15, Persuasion +11
Damage Reduction 9
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Damage Immunities fire
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, and frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 25
Languages Draconic, Common
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. Dehrilya has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the maze spell.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Dehrilya fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.
Magic Weapons. Dehrilya's weapon attacks are considered magical.

ACTIONS

Upkeep Actions

During Dehrilya's upkeep, she replenishes her action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and she may take any of the following actions.

Shake (1 Action). Dehrilya can shake all of her body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Dehrilya's body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they're holding onto in order to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 3d6 bludgeoning damage and becomes prone.

Focus (1 Action). Dehrilya choses two targets. These targets have disadvantage on their attack rolls against Dehrilya until her next upkeep.

Maintain Control (1 Action). Any currently active automaton from Dehrilya's Automaton special action continues to remain active and fight for her, at least until her next upkeep. If Dehrilya doesn't use this ability during her upkeep, all previously activated automatons become disabled and must be individually activated again with the use of the Automaton special action.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of her upkeeps, Dehrilya can heal one body part that has not been broken. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum.

Melee Actions

Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (4d8 + 9) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Dehrilya's claws must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the claw's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (4d8 + 9) piercing damage and 21 (6d6) truefire damage, plus any creature mounted on Dehrilya's head must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Tail Smash (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d6 + 9) bludgeoning damage and 10 (3d6) truefire damage, plus all creatures within 10 feet of the target, except for Dehrilya, must make a DC 26 Strength saving throw or fall prone. Any creature mounted on Dehrilya's tail must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action. If the save fails, the creature takes 7 (2d6) fire damage in addition to the damage from the fall.

Additionally, the area in a 10-foot radius around the target becomes difficult terrain for the rest of the encounter as molten magma pours from the ground, and any creature that moves through or starts their turn in this area takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Blazing Wings (2 Actions). All creatures within 20 ft. of Dehrilya must succeed on a DC 26 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 40 feet and take 10 (3d6) truefire damage and 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage. Dehrilya can then move up to her fly speed in any direction. Any creature mounted on Dehrilya's wings takes the truefire damage listed above, even if they succeed on the save, and, if they were not pushed back by failing the save, must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the wings' shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Molten Body (6 Actions). Dehrilya lets molten rock and metal course through her body and makes two claw attacks, one bite attack, and one tail smash attack, with each of these attacks dealing an additional 10 (3d6) truefire damage. Any creature mounted on one of Dehrilya's body parts takes 21 (6d6) truefire damage and must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against that body part's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action. Dehrilya must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps to be able to use this action again.

Breath Weapons

Fire from the Forge (2 Actions). Dehrilya breathes fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) truefire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a success.

Magma Spit (3 Actions). Dehrilya spits three small orbs of magma and pyroclastic material, targeting three points up to 100 feet away. Each creature within 30 feet of these points must make a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) truefire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Ash Cloud (4 Actions). Dehrilya spews a 60 ft. sphere of ash. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 26 Constitution saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success. Each target that fails the saving throw is also incapacitated for 1 round as the ashes fill their lungs. All objects in the area are lightly obscured until Dehrilya's next upkeep. Dehrilya must spend 1 action during her next upkeep to use this breath weapon again.

Magma Stream (5 Actions). A 90 ft. cone of streaming magma and molten material fills the area in front of Dehrilya. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) truefire damage and 36 (8d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success. In addition, each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 26 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. Dehrilya must spend 1 action during her next upkeep to use this breath weapon again.

Special Actions

Quick Armor (1 Action). As a reaction, Dehrilya increases the Armor Class and damage reduction of one of her body parts by 2 until her next upkeep.

Automaton (2 Actions). Dehrilya animates one of the automatons in her workshop to fight for her. The automaton acts on its own initiative, attacking Dehrilya's enemies to the best of its ability. To keep her automatons active beyond her next upkeep, Dehrilya must use the Maintain Control upkeep action.

Automaton

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50
Speed 30 ft.
Abilities Str 16 (+3), Dex 10 (+0), Con 10 (+0), Int 3 (–4), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 1 (–5)
Senses blindsight 60 ft.
Languages Understands draconic.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) bludgeoning damage and 6 (1d12) fire damage.

Forged Fangs (2 Actions). Dehrilya coats her fangs and claws with molten metal. All her claw and bite attacks deal an additional 14 (4d6) truefire damage until her next upkeep.

Forgemaster's Hand (5 Actions). Dehrilya chooses one enemy to take control of their enchanted equipment away from. One target creature within 30 feet of Dehrilya must make a DC 23 Charisma saving throw. If the save fails, the character's magical items begin emitting unbearable heat, dealing 27 (6d8) truefire damage to the character and losing their magical properties until Dehrilya's next upkeep. Dehrilya may maintain this effect by using the Maintain Control upkeep action.

The Forge Queen (6 Actions). Dehrilya unleashes her full power over her territory. The entire map begins to shift, with puddles of molten metal and magma forming in every crevice. Each creature other than Dehrilya must succeed on a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) truefire damage and become restrained for 1 minute. A successful save halves the damage and negates the restrained condition. Dehrilya must spend 1 action during her next upkeep to use this ability again.

DEHRILYA'S BODY PARTS

Wings

HP N × 50 | **AC** 28 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20 (grounded) or 26 (flying)

Broken. *Dehrilya's majestic wings are now charred and mangled, and all of her attempts to move them result only in a halting screech. "Gives... me a chance... to improve them... then," she spits, barely containing her fury.*

If Dehrilya's wings become broken, she loses her fly speed and cannot use her Blazing Wings any longer.

If airborne, Dehrilya immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Dehrilya's body must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 38 (7d10) fire damage and 38 (7d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Dehrilya. If the save is successful, the character only takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and no additional damage.

Head

Hit Points N × 50 | **AC** 28 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *Dehrilya scoffs as half of her face sags with dead flesh. "Been through worse," she spits as she presses the attack.*

If Dehrilya's head becomes broken, she has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, and her bite attack damage is halved. Truefire damage from her bite attack remains unaffected.

Upper Torso

HP N × 45 | **AC** 28 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *Dehrilya's armored chest looks like a mangled ruin of charred flesh and blackened bronze. She rasps and wheezes but keeps on fighting as if her body wasn't irreparably maimed.*

If Dehrilya's upper torso becomes broken, she suffers disadvantage on all of her claw attacks.

Lower Torso

HP N × 45 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *Dehrilya's body seems to crack with every step, her back making unnatural noises as she tries to walk. But she grits her teeth and charges on, scowling at you as if you had broken one of her things and not her spine.*

If Dehrilya's lower torso becomes broken, her speed and climb speed are both halved, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Right Claw

HP N × 20 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *Dehrilya's injured claw hangs limply to the side. She nods grimly. "For centuries I've considered making a prosthesis for that one."*

If Dehrilya's right claw becomes broken, she can no longer use it for combat. She can no longer make more than two claw attacks in a single turn. If both claws are broken, she cannot perform claw attacks.

Right Leg

HP N × 25 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *"ARGH! I keep forgetting to reinforce the scales there..."*

If Dehrilya's right leg becomes broken, her speed is halved. If both of her legs become broken, her speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Left Leg

HP N × 25 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *Dehrilya limps to get back at you, seemingly more annoyed than hurt.*

If Dehrilya's left leg becomes broken, her speed is halved. If both of her legs become broken, her speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Left Claw

HP N × 20 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *Dehrilya's mauled metallic left claw reveals softer, much paler scales below, as if the previous claw had been some kind of covering or artificial prosthesis. The dragon hisses in rage, "I'll build me another!"*

If Dehrilya's left claw becomes broken, she can no longer use it for combat. She can no longer make more than one claw attack in a single turn. If both claws are broken, she cannot perform claw attacks.

Tail

Hit Points N × 35 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 26

Broken. *The spikes on Dehrilya's tail sag and bend, and it drags like a dead weight. She sighs and turns to you, shaking her head in disapproval.*

If Dehrilya's tail becomes broken, she cannot use her Tail Smash any longer, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

THE HEARTS OF PERMUTATION

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

"Kuxcoatl's mastery of magic is supreme amongst the azhurma. He sends out dragons and minions to gather scrolls, items, ingredients... even test subjects. All this continuous effort, solely made to satisfy his own curiosity, for curiosity's sake? I don't buy that. Why gather all that power and not use it? He must have an agenda, a secret plan, something! I know the feathered dragons are an odd bunch, but there must be a method to their madness."

—Tezl, the Drifter

Deep in the Arcanum Wilds, the only jungle on Drakha, lies the Grand Laboratory, the lair of Kuxcoatl, He Who Ascended, the One Who Mastered Change… or as he prefers it, the Arcane of Power. In his Grand Laboratory, he carries out his many experiments and continues on his quest for knowledge… and power.

The adventurers awake in a strange chamber, remembering nothing of how they got there or what they ever did to be abducted in the first place. A strange rune glows with many colors over a rundown archway, the room's only exit. …Will they be able to escape?

INTRODUCTION

In this Dragonbond adventure, your player characters will become unwilling test subjects as they delve into the bizarre structures of the great Azhurma Kuxcoatl's lair and make their way through "The Hearts of Permutation."

The first thing you need to know is that the Grand Laboratory, which you and the characters in your group will soon visit, is legendary for its sheer concentration of magical items, arcane tomes, and its alarmingly vast collection of living creatures. This wondrous site, deep within the Arcanum Wilds, is the only place Kuxcoatl has deemed fit to carry out his various research projects, and the adventuring party has now become his latest object of interest.

The adventure begins with the player characters waking up utterly confused and unable to recall arriving at their current location. The last thing they all remember is being captured by Coatl dragons, and now they find themselves part of some wildly unfathomable experiment carried out by the Coatl brood and their azhurma. With all the adventurers suffering from mild amnesia, they must survive a series of bizarre tests if they want to escape Kuxcoatl's clutches.

Running the Adventure

"The Hearts of Permutation" is an epic adventure meant for three to five 17th-level player characters. During the course of the adventure, they will advance to 20th level using the milestones system before entering the final battle against Kuxcoatl, the Arcane of Power. You do not need to know everything about Drakha to properly run this adventure, as most of the locations, situations, NPCs, and creatures will be detailed so you have all the information you need to focus on.

If you need some specific details on how time and some magic work in this setting, the "Drakha, the Red Moon" section near the start of this book provides valuable information. The "Adventure Background" section below tells you everything you need to know to understand this adventure's immediate setting. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run, giving you a broad sense of the events involved and how they will unfold throughout the adventure. There are a few other important details to know concerning this adventure's plot listed below.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.

Coatl Dragons

Unlike other dragons, the bodies of the Coatl are covered with beautiful plumage, and they are the smallest in overall size among all of the broods.

This brood values knowledge above all else; they strive to keep lore and obtain knowledge with a calm demeanor. However, they can still go into a frenzy due to territorial behavior or when hunting, and while they settle most disputes amicably, they are fierce fighters, using their arcane might to overcome and subdue their enemies.

Most Coatl dragons build their own arcane studies and libraries where they pool knowledge and secrets. The greatest among these, of course, belongs to Kuxcoatl.

Coatl Dragonkin

Coatl dragonkin have the greatest autonomy when compared to the other dragonkin, as their masters are primarily focused on their own research. These dragonkin work mostly as assistants in their masters' experiments or as hunters searching for new specimens, ingredients, and prized information with which to impress their dragon masters.

The Arcanum Wilds

This is the Coatl brood's domain and the Red Moon's only known green region. Its trees are hybrids, brought from Valerna and bred until they adapted to the very deep water reserves on Drakha.

Numerous pyramid-like structures stand amid lush jungles and streams, but none are as magnificent as the Grand Laboratory, Kuxcoatl's imposing lair. It's a place that emanates magic and is filled with unknown dangers.

Adventure Background

The player characters are being held captive and have become subjects in the Coatl brood's most recent scientific experiments. Considering them interesting and unusual specimens, Kuxcoatl himself has selected the party for a particular test. The Great Wyrm has partially erased the adventurers' memories and plans to observe them as they go through a series of "highly transformative" trials devised to test both their established and developing abilities.

But a mighty Coatl dragon named Tonati, who has been scheming to bring about Kuxcoatl's downfall for many centuries, has decided that this is the perfect opportunity to defeat her azhurma. To this end, she plans to alter the experiment, allowing the test subjects to rediscover themselves, remember their captor, and ultimately pit them against him, in the hopes that they can destroy him on her behalf, with the promise of freedom if they succeed.

To this end, Tonati has left clues and items that inevitably lead the adventurers to confront the azhurma in his laboratory and, hopefully, defeat him, or at least severely weaken him. It will be at that precise moment that she plans to make her move, dispose of whoever survives, and take over the brood. What Tonati doesn't know is that she's also become an important piece in Kuxcoatl's larger experiment.

In terms of adventure hooks and character backgrounds, you can simply begin the adventure by explaining that the party was all transported from wherever they were to Drakha, even if your player characters come from a different universe or setting. They awake with foggy memories, which will become clearer throughout the adventure. If they are a party who has adventured together before, they don't quite remember their time together but retain a strong feeling of knowing each other.

Adventure Overview

"The Hearts of Permutation" is divided into four parts. "Strangers in a Room" serves as a prologue to the adventure. The player characters wake up in a room with no recent memories.

They remember their own names, classes, professions, and their skills, but their past before this moment is a jumble. No one in the party has any idea they're part of an experiment carried out by the Azhurma Kuxcoatl, who is intrigued by their psychology and wants to observe how they will behave under duress and extreme conditions.

The adventurers have to move through a series of chambers where they are expected to battle creatures, solve puzzles, and avoid traps. Tonati has placed clues and weapons to help the adventurers beat the gauntlet and defeat the Arcane of Power, but unbeknownst to Tonati, Kuxcoatl is well aware of her schemes and eagerly awaiting to observe even the altered experiment's results.

In "Stepping through the Endless Stars" is where the party's tests begin, intended to assess their tactical skill and reaction to stress. The first is a trip through a portal where the portal itself is a test, pitting the adventurers against deadly illusions and cosmic temptation in a voidscape of floating staircases.

Then, the portal leads them to the actual Arcanum Wilds, where they must defeat more guardians before entering a specially built pyramid, where Kuxcoatl has set up the main test.

"The Pyramid of Enlightenment" sees the player characters attempting a large, complex trial. It's made of six lesser trials which all have some tactical relationship both to each other and to the larger trial.

Stumbling in blindly could lead the characters to die not once but many times in an endless loop of deaths and rebirths. Conversely, a keen mind may discover the secret to making the ritual work for them. As the characters complete some of the trials, more of their memories will return.

After all trials are completed, "Illusion Unveiled" reveals Kuxcoatl as the mastermind that put the adventurers through these tests, and he also reveals Tonati, the rebellious dragon who tried to help them through the trials. In the end, thanks to Tonati, the characters are able to confront the Coatl azhurma and pay him back for erasing their memories and putting them through the gauntlet.

STRANGERS IN A ROOM

Your eyes open, and a bright, blinding light blurs your vision. A sharp pain stings inside your head as you stand up. As your vision clears, you notice others have also woken up and are standing around you. The ground feels cold and rocky. The walls are of a blue-gray polished stone. There's no discernible features on their surfaces, and the exquisite masonry displays no seams or flaws.

The adventurers find themselves inside a cell-like room. They remember their own names, classes, and abilities but little else. With the team is **Esha** (see appendix A), a beautiful black-haired woman. She has similarly fogged memories but knows she is an Ocelinn scholar and healer from the realm of Nahuac in Valerna.

Esha is a sleeper agent in the service of the dragon Tonati, planted in the experiment to make sure the party performs as expected and to help them reach the end of the tests. She has had her memories jumbled as well, so as to hide her involvement with Tonati from her own memory

and to protect her secret against Wisdom (Insight) checks or spells such as *detect thoughts* or *zone of truth*.

The adventurers wake up without weapons or equipment, wearing simple one-piece garments. They aren't quite sure what gear they used to own, but they remember enough to recognize the tools and weapons they may use if they see them.

You should allow the player characters to make short introductions based on their limited recollections—their names, profession, and vague notions of where they were born—and have some fun roleplaying their mild amnesia as they see fit.

Roleplaying Esha

Esha is both calculating and charismatic. She is cultured, shrewd, and agreeable in her interactions with the adventurers. She is a capable and well-trained healer, using her skills on the rest of the party, but she will always focus on keeping herself alive and well first. While she is not malevolent, she will not hesitate to put herself before the rest of the party.

Before being placed in the experiment, Esha was promised freedom if she led the party through it, and she will try her best to make sure they complete all of its tests and trials. After the party starts regaining their memories, she remembers how Tonati tampered with every experiment, but she will try to hide all of her dealings with the traitor dragon and will not provide any hints as to how to overcome the challenges unless both the party becomes stuck and she can make it seem as though the idea came to her naturally.

Esha presents herself as smart, caring, and understanding. She can act as either a discrete yet stern guide or a complicit companion, as the occasion demands.

1. First Puzzle Room

After the short introductions are done, the party can explore the room. There is a door in one wall made of the same rock as the walls, with no knob or handle. The door fits seamlessly into the wall, visible enough to require no ability check to find, but camouflaged enough to require someone actively looking to find it.

On the wall opposite the door there is a curious-looking mechanism. It is a panel showing a horizontal row of N + 1 vertical tumblers, where N is equal to the number of player characters. Each tumbler can be moved left or right from one to six steps, marked by audible clicks in the mechanism. For every click one of the tumblers is moved, each of the other tumblers moves left or right one click as well.

To open the door, all six tumblers must become aligned. Prior to the experiment's beginning, Tonati had each of the characters, including Esha, receive a mark on their neck with a number ranging from 1 to N +1 and one of the following symbols:

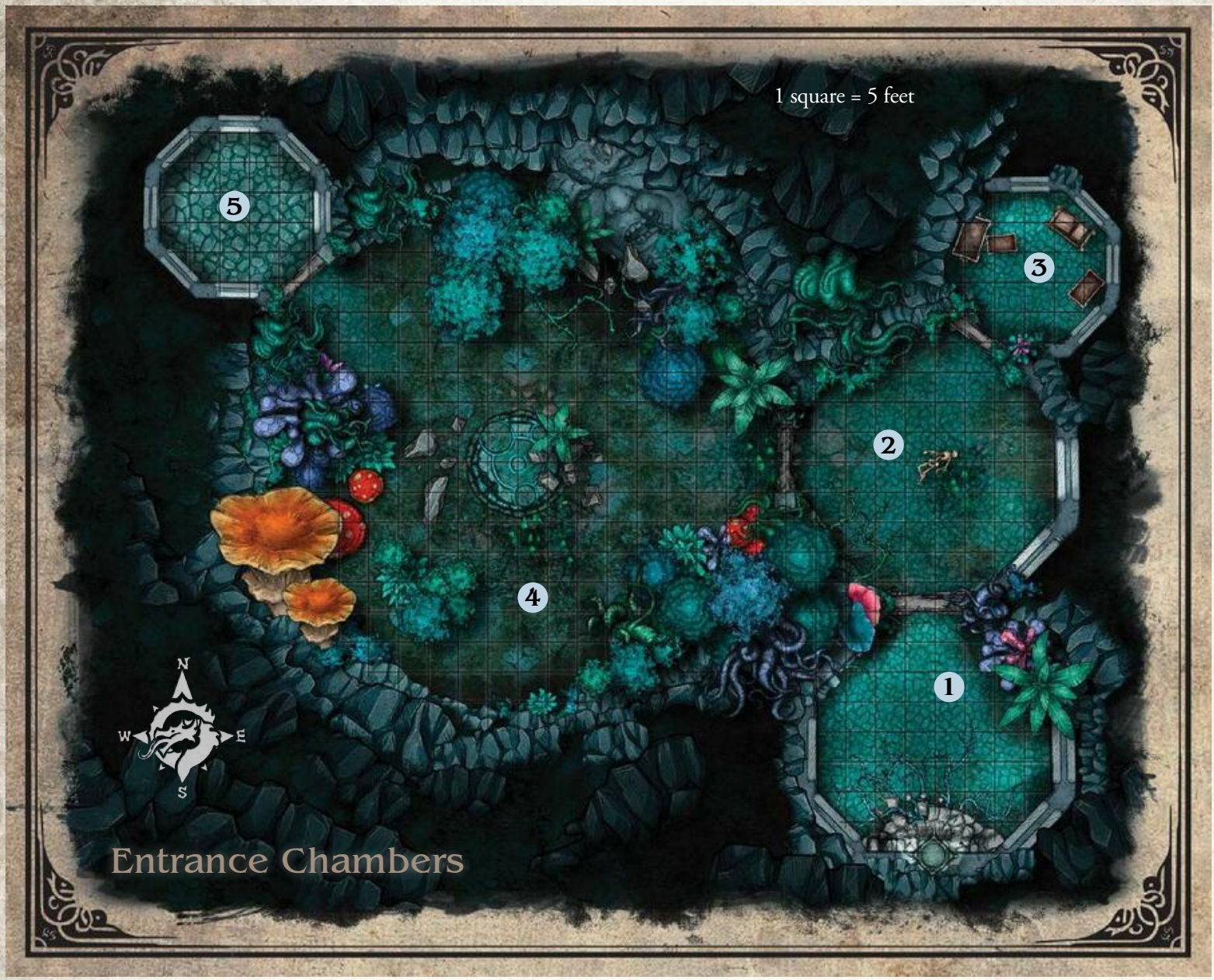
< > << >> <<< >>>

Choose or assign randomly which number and symbol are painted on which player character and Esha. Anyone with a passive Perception of 17 or higher will spot the marks automatically. Any Search action also automatically finds the marks on another's necks without an ability check.

The symbols indicate how many clicks left or right the tumbler with the corresponding number (counting from top to bottom) must be moved. Thus, for example, if a player character has the mark "4 >>," it means the fourth tumbler must be moved two clicks to the right.

If the characters move all of the tumblers as indicated by the instructions painted on them, the tumblers align, the mechanism opens, and the door slides down into the ground, opening the way to a new room. Once everyone in the party enters the next room, the door closes behind them.

Esha



MAP 4.1: ENTRANCE CHAMBERS

2. Chamber of Preparation

You enter a chamber similar to the previous one, with the same blue-grey stone walls and floors. The room has two doors, one to your left and one to your right. At the center of the room lies a body with simple clothing, its hand pointing to the door on the left. The door to the right, while made with the same stone as the rest of the impeccable masonry, looks rough and unfinished, as if it was made faster and sloppier.

This room is larger and darker than the first one. Both doors are closed; however, the door to the right is not locked. The door to the left will only unlock after the lever in Area 3 is activated.

The remains at the center of the room are that of a male human. A successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a note inside the hand pointing to the door on the left. The note reads:

Time passes, seasons fly / My skin once fresh and moist / Lies now cracked and dry / What you are we were / You future lies here not there / Only here can it set you free / For as you see me so shall you be.

3. Storage

As the characters open the door to the right, read them the next paragraph:

> This room is small, unfinished, and rough compared to the previous rooms. It looks more like a small storage space, with a few boxes scattered around. There is a simple lever at the back of the room.

There is one box in the room for every character present, including Esha, plus a larger box of visibly different make. A DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check confirms the larger box was placed in the room much later than the smaller boxes, almost as an afterthought.

Each of the smaller boxes contains one dagger, a necklace in the shape of a moon and dagger, and two days of trail rations. The larger box holds the player characters' original equipment, secretly placed there by Tonati at the bottom of the box there is a *trueshield* (see Appendix B for stats). A clever adventurer may notice that there is no gear for Esha in the larger box, but give them no clue if they don't.

The lever on the back wall of the room unlocks the other door in the previous chamber.

4. Altar of Breeze

Read the following text when the party opens the unlocked door to the left:

> This room is wide and well lit. The walls are of the same familiar blue-gray masonry but covered with vines and flowers of various types, which cling to the stonework. There are moss patches on the floor, and a fresh wind softly blows and caresses your faces.
>
> The air in the other rooms felt dense and trapped, but this room feels properly ventilated and almost like an open space with the plants, vines, and the mild breeze. Despite this, there is no other visible way out of this room than the way you came in.
>
> There is an altar of polished stone standing in the middle of the room. On top of it is a crystal slab with a strange rune carved on its hard surface. At the altar's foot, as if someone placed it recently, lies a perfectly carved obsidian sphere.

The obsidian sphere under the altar was placed by Tonati to help or influence the adventurers' actions during the unfolding experiment, and also to awaken her sleeper agent. As soon any member of the party comes or passes within 10 feet of the altar, read the following:

> As you approach the altar, the purplish hues in the spherical stone start to swirl, unleashing a pulse. You get vivid flashes of your past life, hints of who you were…

Feel free to expand on the visions the characters see, using elements from their back stories or events that played out during previous games.

After the visions of their memory, Esha clearly remembers how, when, and why she was placed in the test as Tonati's agent: to make sure the adventurers pass the tests and reach Kuxcoatl to fight him in the end. From this point on, Esha does her best to hide her link to Tonati from the other characters.

Detect magic and similar effects reveal that both the crystal slab and the obsidian sphere are magical but not their specific powers. A DC 27 Wisdom (Perception) check indicates that the crystal seems to match the altar's design style, while the sphere does not.

If any character touches the altar, or reaches out to grab the crystal slab or the sphere, the mild breeze becomes a gale, then a whirlwind, and it coalesces into three dragon-like elemental silhouettes.

Three **elemental drakes** appear, created to guard the room and its contents, and attack the adventurers until they are defeated. If any player character tries to grab the crystal or the sphere during the fight, they are automatically pushed back 10 feet by the strong winds

Elemental Drake

and must succeed on a DC 22 Strength saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and fall prone. The elemental drakes may use their reaction to make an attack against any character pushed back by the winds in this manner.

After the fight, the player characters notice that neither the sphere nor the crystal slab were affected or moved by the strong winds.

If the characters pick up the obsidian sphere, describe that it has become more cloudy and that touching it replays some of the memories they already regained when they approached the altar, it has the rough weight and size of an orb arcane focus.

Whoever takes the crystal slab feels a sudden chill running up their arm and has their ears ring for a few seconds, as a vision of a thundercloud plays before their eyes. Then the crystal shatters with no other effect.

Taking the crystal from the altar also engages a mechanism that opens a door hidden amidst the foliage. As the party makes their way out, whoever is carrying the obsidian sphere sees glowing runes in the arch over the exit. All of the runes represent the Draconic word "mire'ode" ("window") and figurative depictions of the word "khateth" ("to break"), yet each one is slightly different from the others. If no one picked up the sphere, the runes are not visible.

5. The Seven Windows

Read the following when the party exits the breeze room:

> You walk through a short corridor that ends in an octagonal cell. Each of the cell walls holds a window of differently tinted glass. While all windows open into the same jungle landscape, every window shows a different view, as if each wall of this room led to a different vantage point and elevation.
>
> Six of the windows, the ones to your left and right, show a pyramid-like structure, the same pyramid viewed from various points. The window directly opposite the door shows a hurricane above the jungle, with trees and foliage torn or uprooted by the violent winds. The weather remains calm, however, in the six other windows.

If anyone specifically inspects or approaches the window that shows the hurricane instead of the pyramid, read the following aloud:

> In the distance, amid the storm clouds, you can also make out a shadowy figure standing unaffected by the gusts, but you cannot pick out any details as to who or what it is.

There is no other exit from the room. The glass in all of the windows can easily be broken (AC 10; hp 10) or dislodged by succeeding on a DC 22 Strength check.

If the adventurers break or remove any of the six side windows, they see and feel nothing but thick, magical darkness beyond it. If they break or remove the window showing the hurricane, proceed to the "Developments" section below.

If at least one of the six side windows remains unbroken after the party spends one minute inside the room, one random side window among those still intact breaks on its own, and a **shatterling** emerges from it, a magical entity created by the Coatl's experiments. The creature attacks the player characters immediately.

At the start of every round after the first shatterling appears, another window that is still intact breaks, bringing another shatterling into the fight. The central window, showing the hurricane, will not break on its own unless all six of the other windows have been broken and any remaining shatterlings have been defeated.

DEVELOPMENT

As soon as the central window showing the tempest is broken or removed, or as soon as all shatterlings have been defeated, read the following aloud:

> The window breaks, and an incredible force sucks the air and all of the room's contents through the window. The force seems unrelenting.

The entire party is pulled out of the room by the hurricane winds. Allow them to attempt to resist or grab a ledge if they wish, but eventually the hurricane overcomes everything. Even the chamber of windows disappears, leaving the characters to be tossed amidst the storm.

> You are pulled from your feet and out the window into the middle of the tempest, with the ground several hundred feet below you. But somehow, the winds carry your weight, keeping you from immediately plummeting to your deaths.
>
> The raging winds and incessant lightning ravage the jungle, striking the trees and soil below. Somewhere, a river overflows, and the rampaging water lifts rocks and fallen trees as it crashes, coiling away from your sight. Several wildfires sprout where the lightning has struck, and from the thick smoke choking the torn skies you hear rumbling sounds and a pained shriek as an indistinguishable structure comes crashing down.
>
> Then, a shadowy figure looming along the horizon seems to approach and hover over you. A deep, phantasmal voice admonishes you inside your heads: "Atune! Think! Prevail!"
>
> As suddenly as you were sucked out into the raging storm, everything ceases, and you find yourselves lying on what seems to be a stone floor. But all around you is a night sky.

Rewards

For the successful completion of this portion of the journey, award all player characters a milestone advancement to bring them to their next level, which is typically 18th level, unless they skipped some portion of this adventure.

Shatterling

STEPPING THROUGH THE ENDLESS STARS

The adventurers regain their bearings in a new "room," an interdimensional space that links various portals. This area is not in the physical world, but a dreamscape players must traverse to cross the portal from one physical location to the next.

The area resembles a night sky, where the only solid ground is represented by floating, winding staircases; each staircase leads from a specific portal in the physical world to another. The path the party is on will lead them to a portal to the pyramids in the Arcanum Wilds.

The Portal Space

> You are met with the night sky. All around you is a beautiful display of gem-like tiny dots of light, scintillating over a velvety darkness. The star-lit space surrounds the foot of a stone stairway where you are all now standing. The steps are made of the same blue-gray stone as the rooms and chambers that brought you here.
>
> It looks barely wide enough for you to ascend single file. At certain points along the climb, it branches out in many directions. Similar stairways, branching out upward or downward from your stairs, seem to extend to infinity. Others lead to shining portals.

This sight of an endless expanse is enough to drive lesser beings to madness. Upon realizing they are in an endlessly ascending staircase in the void, each adventurer must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw or all of their saving throws against enchantment, illusion, or fear effects will be made with disadvantage until their next short rest.

If at least one of the party members succeeds at the save, read the following aloud:

> Facing the overwhelming nothingness around you, you realize that there is no portal back. You have been placed here by magic, and there seems to be no way out save for climbing these stairs suspended in the abyss.
>
> *"Focus…"* That spectral voice now rings loudly in your ears. *"Fearing… is falling… Look for the mark… of infinity…"*

As soon as the party starts climbing the stairs, they should declare their marching formation, as the stairs are only 10 feet wide. Esha will politely and calmly insist to take a place in the middle of the group, using her status as a healer to justify this position.

After a couple minutes of climbing, it becomes hard for the party to determine whether they are climbing up or down, or advancing at all. If any adventurer jumps, steps off the stairs, or uses magic that allows leaving

Cuicatl dragon

contact with the ground, they begin to drift toward the void, unmoored and untethered. The player character must make a DC 22 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw to regain their bearings, which allows them to float back down to the stairs again. If the check fails, they instead fall toward the stairs, taking 14 (4d6) psychic damage from the fall and becoming Frightened of the surrounding void until they leave this area.

Let the player characters experiment and take as long as they wish to finally decide to continue climbing the stairs. However, while the player characters are in the staircase area, they cannot take long or short rests; time does not really pass fast enough to rest while inside the portal.

When the player characters are all focused on climbing the stairs without other distractions, they notice a blue point of light ahead of them, which becomes larger and brighter as they advance.

After climbing for a short while, what seemed like a glowing dot is revealed to be the world of Rhaava, or the player characters' homeworld if it is not Rhaava; they can all tell by its features and continents. Step by step, the stairs lead them closer to it.

> As you near the glowing blue orb, you see its features and realize it is home, the place where you hail from. Suddenly, the void looks less oppressive and more like an endless realm of wonder where every world and creature floats endlessly and harmoniously.
>
> Your home is entrancing and calling you. Then, as your homeworld turns, a smaller glowing red orb appears along its orbit.

Every character must make a DC 24 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw. Any character that fails, or Esha, if all player characters succeed, jumps off the staircase in an attempt to reach the alluring illusion of home, heedless of the ominous red orb.

As soon as any character leaps toward the illusion, the red orb chimes with a deep tone; every character that jumped toward it is engulfed in a conflagration of heat and light, taking 17 (5d6) fire damage plus 17 (5d6) psychic damage. They then fall back to the stairs.

> The flames are gone as quickly as they appeared, leaving all of you dazed and confused.
>
> Esha looks troubled, as if trying to grasp at what just has happened. *"I… I was home… in the library of Nahuacáinn. I was looking… that was what I was— what I was doing when… I was looking for… I…"*

If the characters have the obsidian sphere, it glows again, showering the characters' minds with another set of flashbacks, this time dealing with their individual exploits and more recent adventures but blurring out the faces of their companions in the memory.

When the player characters begin discussing what they saw or what to do next, they notice something flying toward them. Two **cuicatl dragons** approach from the starry void, intent on attacking the party. These are the products of illusion magic, but their attacks and effects are quite real.

During the battle, a successful DC 24 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the stars in the void form the shape of a rune: the draconic word for "illusion." An adventurer that has recognized this pattern may trace it by spending an action to perform a DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If the check succeeds, one of the cuicatl dragons disappears as if it was never there. Spells and effects that dispel illusions, such as *dispel magic* or *true seeing,* can also destroy a single cuicatl dragon per casting by succeeding on a DC 24 check with the caster's spellcasting ability.

Once the cuicatl dragons are either destroyed or dispelled, the adventurers glimpse the end of the staircase. Read the next paragraph aloud:

> You reach a large circular landing, at the center of which is an empty archway made of the same polished blue-grey stone as the floor and the stairs. You can see the void, the rest of the landing and the other staircases through the arch.

The archway is actually a portal, but it isn't obvious. The characters can move around the archway and see the other side clearly. However any object or character that crosses the threshold from any side is immediately transported. When all the characters have crossed over, proceed to the next section.

MAP 4.2: THE PYRAMID OF ENLIGHTENMENT

6. The Towering Pyramid

> Light blinds you as you cross the threshold. Even with eyes closed, you can still feel the warmth behind your eyelids. A moment later, you hear trees rustling in the wind and come face to face with a magnificent tropical jungle extending before you.
>
> Behind you remains a huge circular archway, a mirror of the one you just came through. Trees of gargantuan proportions rise to the sky, their lush, green leaves blocking out most of the scorching sun. This environment feels familiar to you. You cannot shake the feeling that you have seen it before.
>
> You are on a small slope, from which you see a massive structure further down in a low valley ahead. It seems to be some kind of foliage-covered pyramid.
>
> As you are looking around, a small rock flies over your heads and through the portal you just crossed, falling on the ground behind it. Esha shrugs with a faint smile. *"Can't know if you don't test it."*

The party is in the Arcanum Wilds, the Coatl brood's territory on Drakha. A few miles ahead of them stands a pyramid connected to the Grand Laboratory, Kuxcoatl's lair and base of operations.

The pyramid is massive and beautifully designed, the engravings in its walls as exquisite as they are intricate. *Detect magic* and similar effects reveal a powerful energy emanating from inside the pyramid, from all magic schools at the same time, which can be felt from any point within the Arcanum Wilds.

> You get close to the entrance, past a jungle pool. It is massive and impressive with intricate runes carved on its circular archway. The path to the entrance is clear, and the breeze near the waterhole is comforting.
>
> There is a moment of absolute silence, broken only by the crack of thunder as the ground under your feet trembles. With a loud rumble, two huge rock-like beings trample out of the bushes, brandishing what seem to be ropes of lightning attached to their bodies. Even though they are mostly shapeless, their intentions seem clear enough.

The party may decide to explore the surroundings or replenish their supplies. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check allows them to find some fruit and a pool with clean drinking water some 100 feet away from the pyramid entrance. Tonati has enchanted the surroundings to force the characters toward the pyramid. If they wander about for more than an hour, or try to move away from the pyramid, the paths in the jungle lead them back to the waterhole area. *Detect magic* and similar effects reveal this to be a magical effect, and a DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana) check indicates it was put in place by someone other than whoever made the portal and built the pyramid. Esha, of course, is eager to enter the pyramid, and insists on leading the player characters there.

When the party approaches the pyramid, two large **striker rocks** emerge from the jungle and charge at the party, lightning crackling around their bodies.

The striker rocks relentlessly and fearlessly attack anyone that comes near the pyramid entrance. During the fight, the adventurers can use the nearby pond to gain a slight advantage against the elementals. They are mindless constructs, so leading them to the area shouldn't be hard. if the party does not arrive at that conclusion, Esha suggests it after 2 rounds of combat. If the elementals are forced to stand in the shallow pond, their Water Vulnerability trait kicks in (see their stats in appendix A).

If any characters try to evade the fight by slipping into the pyramid or running into the jungle, the striker rocks use their reaction to make a fulgurant whip attack against them and focus their attacks on these characters.

If the striker rocks are destroyed, the stones of which they are made crack and quickly turn into dust. The lightning that joined their body and made their weapons, gathers into dense transparent crystals.

When the dust is blown by the wind, there remain a number of rune-marked crystals equal to the number of characters in the party, including Esha, but no more than six crystals in any event.

Each of these runestones is surrounded by a weak, pulsing halo, and each halo is of one of the following colors: red, orange, green, yellow, blue, or violet. If there are not enough adventurers, including Esha, for the six colors, simply choose which colors appear.

Each crystal will immediately attune to the first character that touches it or picks it up. If they have not already had a crystal attuned to them, the colored halo vanishing from the crystal and briefly appearing over the character's head. Make note of which adventurer takes which crystal and its corresponding color of halo, as these will play an important part in solving the puzzles presented in the rooms inside the pyramid.

Afterward, the attunement reveals itself by coloring the numbered marking on the character's neck. If the character previously erased the marking somehow, it appears again, now shining with the color of the acquired halo.

If any character tries to touch a crystal after having become attuned to another one, they take 7 (2d6) lightning damage and are thrown backward 10 feet, taking another 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage and landing prone.

With the striker rocks vanquished, the path is now clear for the party to enter the pyramid.

THE PYRAMID OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The players have entered the Pyramid of Enlightenment, Kuxcoatl's impressive magical lair, at whose center lies the Great Library of Drakha - Kuxcoatl's repository of knowledge, spells, and illusions.

Thus begins the true test of this adventure, where Kuxcoatl himself will watch the heroes as they walk the magical traps, riddles, and deadly encounters of his abode... And the prize for the survivors shall be death by Kuxcoatl's hand.

7. The Cylinder Room

You cross the great circular archway and enter a long tunnel. You walk down the dim, humid corridor for a couple of minutes until the tunnel opens up into a huge, round chamber.

The ground inside is polished and immaculate, and an overwhelming silence eerily looms over the area. Whoever built this massive pyramid is certainly the same entity that built the other chambers, as the same ever present blue-gray stone is the main building material, and the architecture style is identical.

Esha seems to be erratic, looking intensely at the walls and around the room. You realize she hasn't looked this lost since you met her.

Once the characters are all inside, a solid stone wall covers the tunnel behind them shut, leaving them trapped in the chamber.

At the center of the chamber stands a strange carved stone cylinder, with three plate-sized stone dials on one of its sides. Each of the three dials on the cylinder can be turned to point at one of several runes marked around them. Anyone who knows the draconic language can interpret the runes. If the player characters cannot do it, Esha promptly does and interprets for them.

The first dial can be turned to a number from one to six. The second dial can be turned to a color from red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. The third dial has markings for six different runes, air, dark, earth, fire, light, and water, but not just anyone can turn it. The third dial will only turn for a character whose neck markings match both the number and color that the first two dials are currently turned to. When that character turns the third dial, their neck marking begins to glow, indicating they have gained an ability related to the cylinder. If the adventurer doesn't realize that they can turn the third dial, Esha suggests it.

Turning the third dial to any of the six runes will open the entrance again, but instead of leading back outside of the pyramid, the tunnel leads to a new chamber, depending on the element the third dial is turned to. If the player characters leave the chamber, proceed to the section for the corresponding room depending on the rune they chose on the third dial.

When the player characters enter a new room, whoever turned the dial gains a special benefit which should help them against the challenge in that room. In addition, each room grants a different, special benefit to the character whose neck markings show a certain color, as indicated in each room's description.

DEVELOPMENTS

Once all the surviving characters, including Esha, have turned the dial or all of the elemental runes have disappeared as per the effects described in the various room sections below, whichever happens first, grant all player characters a milestone award as per the "Rewards" section below and then proceed to the "Illusion Unveiled" section.

Death and Resting in the Cylinder Room

The cylinder room is the axis of the player characters' exploration of this pyramid, as they will likely return here several times during the last stage of tests.

If any adventurer dies during this part of the adventure, then they will wake up after one hour alive and well but having gained one level of exhaustion, as if they had been the target of a raise dead spell. If the party leaves the dead body behind after death, they find their revived teammate upon returning to the cylinder room. If they carry the body with them, they revive as soon as they enter the cylinder room once again.

It is impossible to take a short or long rest in this chamber, as illusory bright lights, vibrating sounds, whispers, and hums prevent concentration as soon as the party seems to be settling down. A character that reaches exhaustion level 6 by returning from death during this test is permanently dead.

8. Air Room

Read the following aloud if the player characters leave the cylinder room after having marked the air rune on the third dial.

The exit leads you to a wide balcony, where you immediately hear a wailing sound. Looking up and down the balcony's edge, you see darkness so deep it devours all light in every direction.

About 80 feet away, opposite the balcony, is a door floating in the darkness. Between here and there, is a series of large stone slabs floating and moving, hitting and grinding against each other.

A successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that, although their movement seems to be random, the floating rocks are closer near the side with the balcony, and they spread out a bit more as they get closer to the floating door on the other side.

The check also reveals that when two stone slabs hit each other, they both stop moving and lock in place momentarily; then they both shake and fall away, quickly getting lost in the inky darkness below. Some stones also seem to fall from the void above, falling quickly and then stabilizing and floating in the space between the balcony and the door.

As they enter the room, the character that turned the third dial to the air rune notices that some floating slabs have a faintly glowing white rune. Whoever has the orange-colored marking may also notice these runes by succeeding on a DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check.

The player characters must reach the door opposite the balcony, using the erratic floating stone slabs as an impromptu bridge to reach the other side. There is no actual ceiling or floor, just a void of empty space. Magic does not work in this area; any attempt to cast a spell or activate a magic item automatically fails.

Each player character needs three successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to reach the opposite door jumping from one rock to the next. Both the character who turned the third dial and the character with an orange-colored neck marking gain advantage on their ability checks to jump from one slab to the next. Any alternative approaches using equipment or creative solutions to cross the gap, however, also gain advantage on the ability checks made by anyone attempting them. No more than one character can stand on the same slab at the same time.

If a character fails any one of these checks or stands on the same stone slab for more than 1 round, the stone drops, and they fall. A falling character may grab a hold of another slab and return to safety by succeeding on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. If they fail the save, the character falls to their death in the void, appearing alive and well in the cylinder room when their teammates return to it.

If a character can see the glowing runes on some slabs and jumps specifically to those stones, a successful Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check permanently locks the slab in place with a loud and distinct crack. These slabs will not move again, allowing each of the other characters to make their next Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check with an advantage. Also, a character may stand on these locked slabs indefinitely, allowing them to help their companions in their attempts to jump onto or from the same stones.

When all the party has either crossed to the far door or fallen to the void, the survivors may now open the door, which predictably leads them back to the cylinder room. The air rune has disappeared from the third dial, and the number and color matching the neck markings of the character who turned the dial to the air rune disappear from the first and second dials. It's time for the player characters to try another dial combination to leave the room.

9. Dark Room

Read the following aloud if the player characters leave the cylinder room after having marked the dark rune on the third dial.

> Contrary to other rooms you have seen, the construction work in this square chamber has apparently been abandoned, and the whole room seems unfinished and even forgotten. In the center of the room is a large pit filled with a viscous liquid.
>
> The walls are lined with finely crafted shelves carved into the rock, laden with tomes, trinkets, and jars filled with various liquids and, in some cases, biological samples. They look somewhat out of place in an otherwise unfinished chamber. The stench in the room is overwhelming.
>
> You notice three gigantic piles of flesh inside three crystal containers, each placed in one of the room's corners. The irregular lumps seem to be moving, suspended in a viscous liquid.

This is an old neglected Coatl lab, which Kuxcoatl saw fit to use as part of the test for his new subjects.

The pit at the center has an extremely corrosive acid, which enables the merging of organic compounds. Any creature that enters the liquid takes 45 (10d8) acid damage every round and is considered grappled (escape DC 25) by the extremely viscous liquid.

The three crystal containers, each one standing at one of the three corners opposite to the one the adventurers use to enter this room, each hold a giant wriggling blob of flesh. These are failed experiments, a testament to Kuxcoatl's attempts to find a way to cross from Drakha to Valerna without waiting for the Eye of Kadmos to open.

The piles of flesh attempt to communicate with all of the adventurers but do so through confusing images, seemingly coming from various minds, and an unrelenting pain. A successful DC 16

Intelligence check, with no applicable skill, is required to understand the flesh blobs' tortured thoughts as they are projected to the group.

"Please… kill us." That is all that the blobs think. After the player characters have registered these thoughts, whether they understand them or not, they notice that the telepathic pleading is actually interfering with their concentration, preventing any spellcasting while inside the room.

The containers holding the blobs are invulnerable to physical and magical attacks except for strong acid. Even if the player characters manage to break a bottle, they find the blob of flesh inside it (26 AC; 80 hp) is also invulnerable to nonmagical attacks and all energy types except for acid.

Also, for every round that a character spends within 10 feet of one of the blobs, they must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw, becoming stunned for 1 round and taking 35 (10d6) psychic damage from the creature's pained thoughts on a failed save. A success negates the stunned condition and halves the damage. The character with the purple neck markings has advantage on this saving throw.

The fastest way to kill the creatures is to drop the bottles in the central pit. Carrying one creature to the acid requires three successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) checks to roll, push, or drag the large bottle from the corner to the pit. The character that turned the third lever to the dark setting has advantage on this check.

If the player characters ignore the blobs' pleading, the bottled creatures try to take over their minds. Each such character must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or dive into the acid pit. The character with the purple neck markings has advantage on this save.

Any character that dies inside the acid pit is horribly submerged in the deadly sludge, only to appear alive and well back at the cylinder room with one exhaustion level.

If all the abominations are destroyed, the player characters realize their psychic screams were somehow blocking awareness of the exit door, and it now stands revealed. The party may now exit the chamber to reenter the cylinder room. The dark rune has disappeared from the third dial, and the number and color matching the neck marks of the character who turned the dial to the dark rune disappear from the first and second dials. It's time for the adventurers to try another dial combination to leave the room.

TREASURE

Besides the trapped abominations, the lab has a plethora of magical items and reagents that the player characters may want to search through. Any character that takes the Search action finds a random item as indicated in the Items in the Dark Room table. No character may roll more than once on the table. If a player character rolls a result above 21 and obtains an item already found by another character, instead choose the unfound item closest to the obtained result for them to find.

Searching for items, of course, counts as ignoring the blobs' pleading (see above), and if the blobs are still alive, the characters risk psychic domination every time they search.

Items in the Dark Room

ABILITY CHECK	ITEM FOUND
10 or lower	Semi-useless stuff (empty flask, stale water mug, dried leaves, etc)
11	Grasshopper leg, silver dust, or colored sand
12	Brimstone, gold dust, or a vial of honey
13	Diamond dust, vial of human blood, or a vial of phosphorus
14	Nut shells, bat fur, or bloodhound fur
15	1,000 gp garnet gem, incense, or a box with 4 ivory sticks
16	Jade dust, silver rod, or umber hulk blood
17	1,500 gp powdered ruby or a preserved feather of Kuxcoatl
18	A random potion of *resistance*
19–21	*Potion of superior healing*
22	*Potion of clairvoyance*
23	*Potion of gaseous form*
24	*Potion of longevity*
25	*Potion of invisibility*
26	*Manual of golems*
27	*Robe of scintillating colors*
28	*Ioun stone of absorption*
29	*Mirror of life trapping*
30 or higher	*Tome of clear thought*

10. Earth Room

Read the following aloud if the player characters leave the cylinder room after having marked the earth rune on the third dial.

> You enter what seems to be a megalith arrangement around the stone floor. There are several menhirs of different heights crowding the chamber, aligned to a grid on the ground. All of the menhirs are made of dark stone save one, which is made from a translucent, quartz-like mineral. At the center of the room, there is a small depression in the ground, roughly matching the shape of the menhirs.

The room is a 40 feet square of bare stone, featureless but for the menhir arrangement. The door the party came through vanishes behind them, along with the walls.

As soon as any character steps into the grid sand starts falling from above and filling the room, its level is rising steadily. To represent the characters actually solving the puzzle under pressure and using the time they have at hand, we recommend the use of a timer, set to one minute with no pausing for planning, so there is a feeling of urgency.

Allow the party to use Room 10 in map 4.2: The Pyramid of Enlightenment to solve this puzzle. It takes a character 1 round to move a menhir to an adjacent empty space. Each party member may push one menhir during their turn; they are easy enough to slide. The exit only appears if the characters place the quartz menhir on the depression they noticed at first.

The adventurers have 10 rounds, or one minute, to solve the puzzle before they are drowned in sand and forcibly returned to the cylinder room with one exhaustion level. After the fourth round, a character trying to move a menhir has to succeed on a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check, save for the character with the green neck mark, who can still move the menhirs freely as if the sand parted before them.

The character who turned the third lever to the earth setting is the only one that can move the quartz menhir. Alternatively, this character may also spend their action to destroy one of the other menhirs, but they cannot also move the quartz menhir during that round.

If the quartz menhir is pushed into the depression square, an archway forms on the room's far wall, allowing the characters to return to the cylinder room. The earth rune has disappeared from the third dial, and the number and color matching the neck marks of the character who turned the dial to the Earth rune disappear from the first and second dials. It's time for the player characters to try another dial combination to leave the room.

11. Fire Room

Read the following aloud if the player characters leave the cylinder room after having marked the fire rune on the third dial.

> The passage leads you to a metal gate, through which you can see a circular arena, sand on the floor, and what seemingly sounds like the roars of dragons and the hisses of dragonkin.
>
> However, the arena is completely surrounded by a dark empty void, one that is now all too familiar to you.
>
> You almost feel like you have been here before. After a few moments pass, the gate in front of you opens, and a similar gate across the arena opens as well. From the opposite gate pour fifteen Coatl dragonkin, armed and ready to fight.

Dragonkin Warrior

This is a testing ground, sometimes used by the Coatl brood to watch their captives and other creatures engage in fights to the death and where no quarter is ever given, as this is where combat resilience, stamina, and strategy are tested or learned.

As the large metallic gate rises fifteen **Coatl warriors** emerge from it. The dragonkin serve as a challenge to test the party. Seven dragonkin move to the center of the arena, clearly ready for combat but waiting for the characters to make the first move. The rest of them fan out along the edge of the arena, forming a half-circle facing the player characters.

Coatl dragonkin

As the fight begins against the first group of seven dragonkin, the character who turned the third lever to the fire rune and the character with the red neck mark both deal an additional 3 (1d6) fire damage with all of their weapon attacks. If it's the same character, add both bonuses together for an additional 7 (2d6) fire damage.

The dragonkin fight fiercely and to the death. Any creature that dies in the fight will be swallowed by the sands of the arena. Dead party members appear in the main chamber, having gained one exhaustion level.

The eight dragonkin around the arena wait for the first group to fight; they only enter the fray when the first group is defeated, or if attacked or damaged. When the second group enters the fight, a set of runes starts glowing on the walls of the arena, matching runes on the dragonkin's chest armor. These runes give all surviving dragonkin resistance to all damage types except for the bonus fire damage of the marked player characters.

This spell can be broken by scratching out at least four of the eight runes on the walls (each with AC 15; 40 hp), which will immediately end the effect for all remaining dragonkin. Alternatively, the characters can try to sunder a dragonkin's armor by making their attack roll with a disadvantage. If the attack hits, it deals no damage, but that dragonkin loses the rune's protection henceforth in addition to the armor's protection bonus, lowering their AC by 4. The runes may also be dissipated with *dispel magic* or similar effects as an 8th-level spell.

Weapons, broken armor, and other remains from previous battles lie in the sand. During the fight, a character may perform the Search action, obtaining one of the items from the Arena Remnants table according to their Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check result.

Arena Remnants

ABILITY CHECK	ITEM FOUND
9 or lower	A broken weapon or armor piece
10–13	1 dagger
14–17	1 canteen filled with pitch
18–21	1 vial of lamp oil
22–25	1 *potion of giant strength*
26 or higher	1 *potion of superior healing*

If the characters defeat both groups of dragonkin, the steel gates lift and they may now exit the arena by the gate from which the dragonkin entered.

If the characters have the obsidian sphere, the characters face a new flashback, as this scene triggers one final hint of how they came here.

> Your heads begin to ache as another flashback strikes and rattles your minds. You see yourselves in a similar arena. But you are surrounded by dozens of silent, feathered dragons attentively observing your every move from the terraced stands, and the arena is in a dense forest, not in a black void. There are scores of bodies lying around you; these are the remains of your fallen enemies, littering the testing grounds you were all thrown into.
>
> A single feathered dragon stands out, his eyes glowing blue, his body marked with runes, and you can see what resembles a smile on his draconic face. He whispers a phrase in Draconic to himself, and then utters a spell…

If at least one of the adventurers speaks Draconic, they understand the phrase meant, "Yes, they will make the most spectacular subjects…"

When the party returns to the cylinder room, they notice that the fire rune has disappeared from the third dial, and the number and color matching the neck marks of the character who turned the dial to the fire rune disappear from the first and second dials. It's time for the party to try another dial combination to leave the room.

12. Light Room

Read the following aloud if the player characters leave the cylinder room after having marked the light rune on the third dial.

> You enter into a long corridor where the floor and walls are made of black rock. But there seems to be no ceiling, and you can sense powerful energy emanating both ahead and around you.
>
> The corridor is narrow. The air is dense, and there are several statues of Coatl dragons lining the walls, adorning what seem to be the columns supporting a high ceiling beyond your sight.

This chamber is a long and sinister corridor, flanked with columns carved like Coatl dragons. The columns are not the blue-gray stone of the floor or the other chambers, but a kind of semi-reflective, quartz-like rock. Closer inspection allows the adventurers to notice a dark smoke floating inside each column. These lustrous columns hold the imprisoned minds of dragonkin, driven mad by their lengthy captivity.

The rocks have polished surfaces which create a mirror of sorts, and are magical traps working similarly to the way that the *magic jar* spell does. There are eight columns lining the corridor, four on either side. Every time one or more characters who are not currently possessed pass a pair of columns with dragonkin minds still trapped inside, two of the adventurers, either the two marching in front or two chosen at random, must make a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw. If they succeed, they notice the dragonkin minds trapped within the columns, begging for release. If they fail their saving throw, the mind from one of the crystal columns will invade their body, and their own mind will be trapped in the crystal.

The character who turned the third dial to the light rune cannot be the target of the possession effect, and the character whose neck markings are yellow has advantage on their saving throw against possession. Also, these two characters can each free the trapped dragonkin minds in a single column by succeeding on a DC 22 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check, convincing them to let go of their endless cycle of self-torture. If the check fails, the column immediately lashes out against one of their teammates, requiring the target to make a saving throw against the effect as described above.

When a character becomes possessed, the effect looks like smoke comes out of the column and flows into their body, as a lighter colored smoke floats from the body to the crystal. Each round thereafter, the possessed character uses their turn to attack the ally closest to them to the best of their ability.

Any possessed character can attempt a new DC 22 Wisdom saving throw at the start of their turn to escape their prison and re-occupy their body, which traps the dragonkin mind back in the column again. The possession effect also ends with a *banishment* or similar magic effect or if the possessed character is rendered unconscious.

The minds trapped within a single column can also be freed with *dispel magic, banishment*, or similar effects. The effect counts as an 8th-level spell, and each column makes its Charisma save with a +8 bonus to the die roll. The trapped dragonkin minds are also freed if a column is broken (AC 20; 80 hp to crack the column's surface).

While in this room, Esha stays back and avoids approaching the crystals at first, but after the first character has been possessed she will get close to a mirror and automatically fail her saving throw, transforming into a feral hybrid jaguar and human creature and revealing abilities and skills quite different from those she initially presented to the party (see appendix A).

When the group reaches the end of the corridor, they find an unlocked door that leads back to the cylinder room. The light rune has disappeared from the third dial, and the number and color matching the neck marks of the character who turned the dial to the light rune disappear from the first and second dials. It's time for the adventurers to try another dial combination to leave the room.

13. Water Room

Read the following aloud if the player characters leave the cylinder room after having marked the water rune on the third dial.

> You find yourselves outdoors, facing a river roughly 40 feet wide. There's a narrow bridge in front of you, made of polished white marble. It has intricate detailing on its sides, and it spans the river's width, terminating in a landing quite similar to the one you are on at the moment. You see no end to the river in either direction, but there seems to be a gate on the opposite landing.
>
> The river looks quite turbulent, flowing through very sharp rocks; the waters seem to repeatedly flow over the bridge as they crash into its sides.

A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the rocks are stained with blood; some of it quite fresh.

Any attempt to cross the river, be it by flying, floating, or walking across the bridge, causes magic darts to rain down on the crossing character, as if the stars themselves were shooting at them. The character is allowed a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the darts, taking 7 (2d6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage on a failed save. A character that fails this save is also thrown back to the beginning of the bridge, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage if they were not already on the bridge. Characters that were flying particularly high or far from the bridge should take more falling damage according to the distance. A character that falls to 0 hit points is swallowed by the troubled current, their body beyond recovery.

Any character swallowed by the river appears back at the cylinder room, alive and at full hit points, and with an additional Exhaustion level.

The character who turned the third dial to the water rune and the character with the blue neck marking have advantage on this saving throw, as the water rises to protect them from the darts.

If a character leaves sight of the bridge trying to follow the riverbank, they are attacked just as if they were trying to cross. They may continue exploring in any direction they wish for as long as they succeed on their saving throw every turn, except that successful saves bring them no closer to the exit platform.

When all surviving adventurers are standing at the exit platform, the gate on that side opens, allowing the characters to return to the cylinder room. The water rune has disappeared from the third dial, and the number and color matching the neck marks of the character who turned the dial to the water rune disappear from the first and second dials. It's time for the party to try another dial combination to leave the room.

Rewards

When the party has visited all six rooms, or when each player character has turned the third dial once, this chapter of the adventure ends. Award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

ILLUSION UNVEILED

When the player characters have entered all six rooms or when all characters have turned the third dial once, all runes disappear from the three dials on the cylinder, and the room exit opens on its own.

Now, when the player characters exit the room, they are consumed by darkness.

If they have the obsidian sphere, they experience one final flashback:

> Darkness surrounds you. You shiver. It's hard to breathe. You don't know where you are. Then you see your home world again.
>
> You see a town. It is nighttime. Quiet and peaceful. Without warning, the skies are aflame and dragons swoop roaring, crashing, burning. People run for cover; soldiers grab their weapons and take their positions.
>
> Resistance is useless. Whole towns are razed. You see yourselves fighting? running? And then the dragons overwhelm you. They carry you away to Drakha, their home - the Red Moon where dragons reign.

When the adventurers have walked for a moment in the darkness, the chamber is lit again, and a voice echoes in the dim light:

> *"And so, we come to this: another stifled project. Your minds are quite basic, yet your motives, your priorities… those still baffle me."*

The player characters are now in another, very different chamber. They see a Coatl dragon, bound in chains; there are many stones with glowing runes floating near its head.

> *"She is Tonati,"* the voice explains, *"the meddler in your favor. Unlike yours, her motives were quite transparent. She believed she was helping you all along while you were busy trying to solve the various tests in this experiment… But she could not have expected that her sleeper agent, to whom she offered freedom in exchange for cooperation, was my creation, a magical construct pretending to report to Tonati while all along she spied for me."*
>
> Esha appears before you, the same as she always has, but as the voice goes on, she begins fading, vanishing into thin air. *"So, what do you think of Esha? Did she convince you she was human, a mortal like you? Even for an instant?"*
>
> A thick purple cloud forms around Tonati. The ancient Coatl dragon opens her eyes, but her stare is blank. *"Pay no mind,"* the voice continues. *"She will merely bear witness, and… hopefully, she will learn something valuable out of all this. After all, she is of my brood. There will be no resistance, no escape. You cheated on the test. You…"*
>
> The voice stops as Tonati's eyes regain a flicker of life. She quickly traces some runes in the floor. *"Defeat him…"* a different voice says in your minds, far weaker than that of the first. *"New leadership… New life…"*

From this point on, the adventurers will have to fight mighty Kuxcoatl in his lair, the Grand Laboratory.

14. The Fight with Kuxcoatl

> In a flash, you are transported into a different chamber, a massive laboratory. You have come into a dreamscape of arcane writings, unusual magical objects, unfathomable decorations, and countless runes. There are glowing writings in every corner of the floor and ceiling of this building. There's a massive shaft in both the floor and ceiling, wide enough for a mountain to crash through. It feels as though you were never supposed to be here.
>
> As you take in the myriad wonders that spread before you, a number of dragonkin and librarians look at you askance and begin hurriedly vacating the premises. They seem to know, and fear, what comes next. The sound of enormous flapping wings resounds above you, and a flying multicolored wyrm, the size of the mountain you had imagined and even more dazzling than his lair, flies down the shaft to meet you.
>
> The master of the house has arrived. This is the mighty Kuxcoatl, the Arcane of Power and azhurma of the Coatl brood. *"A final trick. Never mind. I have my test results. You are nothing to me but power to devour."*

FIRST PHASE

The battle begins as soon as a character attacks Kuxcoatl. If no character attacks Kuxcoatl, he initiates combat by attacking the intruders himself.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The area is well lit with torches, sconces, lamps, and the glow of the runes on the walls, floor, and ceiling. You can feel the magic tingling in the air. Far below, at the bottom of the shaft, there's water.

As the fight begins, the players start in area 14 of map 4.3: The Grand Laboratory. During the fight, Kuxcoatl flies up and down the shaft in his lair, traveling among the levels and forcing the players to pursue or flee, as indicated in the Kuxcoatl's Lair section.

Kuxcoatl's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

As soon as the fight starts, it triggers Kuxcoatl's *contingency* spell with a *mirror image* effect. Kuxcoatl begins the fight with three duplicates. Kuxcoatl prefers to start the battle with disabling spells such as *confusion, dominate person, hold person*, and *suggestion,* using breath weapons to finish off large clusters of enemies.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Two or more of Kuxcoatl's body parts are below their maximum hit points, and two or more active experiments (see the "Kuxcoatl Exploits" section) have been triggered.
- One of Kuxcoatl's body parts is broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, Kuxcoatl summons more magic power to him, and the air becomes charged with unstable energy.

SECOND PHASE

Kuxcoatl is getting serious now and will bear all his magic power down on the player characters, lest they do any real damage to his lab.

LAIR CONDITIONS

A magic tingling warns you that there's wild arcane power in the air. Kuxcoatl revels in it, but you may not be so lucky.

Immediately after any creature other than Kuxcoatl casts a spell, they must roll a d20. On a result of 1 or 20, the spell fizzles with no effect and the spell slot is spent.

Kuxcoatl's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

As soon as possible, Kuxcoatl uses a *mislead* spell to slip away from the character's attention. While the characters are distracted with his illusory double, he casts as many buff spells on himself as his actions allow, as he can concentrate on as many spells as needed at the same time.

If the player characters don't interrupt him first, he casts *blink,* then *globe of invulnerability,* then *haste,* then *protection from energy,* then *greater invisibility,* then *false life* (which grants the temporary hit points to each of his body parts), then *stoneskin,* or any other spells the GM determines would serve him in preparing for battle against the adventuring group. If allowed to cast all of the above spells, Kuxcoatl then pounces upon the player characters by surprise, using his strongest attack available at the moment.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Three or more of Kuxcoatl's body parts are broken.
- Five or more active experiments have been triggered.
- Two of Kuxcoatl's body parts are broken, and three or more active experiments have been triggered.

When one of the above conditions is met, Kuxcoatl raises up a massive magical vortex and strikes with unbound magic at the characters.

FINAL PHASE

Kuxcoatl has become desperate, unleashing his full power and that of his lair on the intruders that have proven to be more of a threat than a nuisance.

LAIR CONDITIONS

Kuxcoatl's lair, which moments ago seemed like an ancient place of learning, has now become a conduit for raw power. Runes on the walls glow wildly, blinking in discord and emitting sparks that link with each other across walls and floor levels.

A massive swirl of white-blue energy surrounds Kuxcoatl like a whirlpool. The dragon seems supercharged with equal parts magical energy and pure animal wrath. His eyes glow with crackling white plasma, and his every move triggers a burst or a spark in the vortex, sending random magic blasts everywhere.

During Kuxcoatl's upkeep, one of the player characters, chosen randomly, is struck by a magic spark, taking 21 (6d6) force damage, without any saving throw allowed, and being pushed to last in initiative order for that round.

When any creature other than Kuxcoatl casts a spell, they must roll a d20. On a result of 1 or 20, they take 21 (6d6) force damage and their spell fizzles, the spell slot spent with no effect.

Kuxcoatl's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 5

Programmed Illusion: Having predicted the possibility of defeat in his own lair centuries ago, Kuxcoatl prepared a *programmed illusion* to one day avoid this exact situation.

Kuxcoatl roars at the center of his magic maelstrom, floating like a rag doll among the arcane swirls. Suddenly, all of the runes remaining unmarred on his body glow in unison with the symbols on the walls, and crackling energy leaps from Kuxcoatl to every point in the lair. There's an horrendous cracking sound, and the magic vortex is replaced with an explosive wave that sends you flying and darkens everything around.

When you come to, everything is quiet. The lights are out. The books, formulas, and artifacts have been reduced to half-burned rubbish, and no visible trace remains of the Great Wyrm.

The illusion triggers as soon as any creature deals damage to Kuxcoatl during this phase. It looks like an energy blast coming from one of the runes on the walls, going through Kuxcoatl and killing him. Kuxcoatl uses illusory cantrips to make it look like there was a big energy explosion, blowing him up in a great magical inferno.

If Kuxcoatl has less than three actions remaining when this happens, he dives to the underwater level of his lair to pretend to have disappeared in the explosion. If he has three or more actions, he uses his Familiar Casting to cast *mirage arcane* and make it seem like the pyramid itself is crumbling, leading the player characters to flee.

If the illusion fails to trick the party, Kuxcoatl turns to direct attacks, seeing that these enemies won't fall for his trickery, unleashing his strongest special actions and high-level spells, such as *disintegrate, forcecage,* or *prismatic spray,* to wipe the characters out once and for all.

If a player character dispels the illusion, by *dispel magic* or other means, or Kuxcoatl is defeated (see below), the dragon's lair is revealed to be quite intact and mostly undamaged, and while it's still filled with crackling and tingling energy, it's nowhere near the magic maelstrom of Kuxcoatl's illusion.

Phase End

The encounter ends when Kuxcoatl is defeated. This requires fulfilling one of the following conditions:

- Four or more of Kuxcoatl's body parts are broken, and his remaining body parts are all below their maximum hit points.
- Three or more of Kuxcoatl's body parts are broken, and eight or more active experiments have been triggered.

Conclusion

If the player characters defeat Kuxcoatl without deciding to kill him, or leave him wounded, believing he was defeated, he casts a last spell, gasping and coughing.

> Kuxcoatl recognizes that he now lies defeated, and with the last of his faltering strength, he casts a teleport spell which takes all of you, and the still groggy Tonati, to the edges of the Arcanum Wilds.
>
> As soon as the dragon sees the jungle sprawling before her, she lowers her head, only to suddenly raise it to let out a roar of frustration that pierces the sky and shakes you to your very souls. After she is done crying out in anger, she tells you, *"I hope you learned your lessons well and count your graces. Kuxcoatl is usually not this forgiving, but he does enjoy real competition. Now, I suggest you leave. We Coatl have much to learn from all of this."*
>
> With that, Tonati extends her wings and flies away from the group, into the Arcanum Wilds.

If the party kills Kuxcoatl, read the following aloud:

> Kuxcoatl lets out a pained roar, this time for real, and his runes all go out like flickering candles. The utter silence of the azhurma's death and lack of grandeur makes it somehow more impressive than the glorious, make-believe defeat Kuxcoatl's magic had staged for you. This is more like the snuffing of a candle. The dragon slumps to the ground almost noiselessly in the dim light.
>
> With no further explosions or surprise attacks, the arcane demigod rolls down the shaft at the center of his lair, slowly sinking below the dark waters. No arcane glow, no glint of power comes from the shadow of Great Kuxcoatl as the depths take him forever.

Afterward, Tonati replaces Kuxcoatl as azhurma of the Coatl brood and swears that the player characters can always count on the Coatl as friends. But it is well known on Drakha that dragons don't consider Valernians worthy of their word.

KUXCOATL, THE ARCANE OF POWER

Mysterious Kuxcoatl, the Wise Recluse of the Arcanum Wilds, is the great librarian and researcher among the Azhurma, with a hunger for discovery and knowledge. The lair of Kuxcoatl is hidden in the depths of a thick jungle amid the most dangerous lands of the Red Moon. Getting here must have been an epic adventure by itself.

Kuxcoatl is one of the smartest dragons alive and a force to be reckoned with. His magical prowess proves a challenge to spellcasters, as he is able to counter and repel spells launched at him. Kuxcoatl's lair is full of opportunities to meddle in his plans. The characters must work in tandem to distract him while preparing different sections of the lair to fight him.

Kuxcoatl's Lair

Kuxcoatl resides in a pyramid of power at the center of his domain. This pyramid consists of six different floors (numbered 14 to 19 in map 4.3: The Grand Laboratory), each floor 60 feet high: one surface floor (marked as 14), three levels above (15, 16 and 17), and two underground floors below (18 and 19). The lowest floor (19) is completely submerged in water, which rises to the level of the second-lowest floor.

The floors are connected by a large, circular shaft in the center that Kuxcoatl uses to move up and down, and the edges of the floors are all flush with both each other and the edge of the shaft, so that no floor extends out into the shaft beyond any other. Characters can climb between the floors without requiring a skill check by using special climbing vines designed for Kuxcoatl's servants and apprentices or by flying or levitating up or down the shaft. Moving from one floor to the one directly above or below in these ways requires 60 feet of movement.

Kuxcoatl makes liberal use of his fly speed in combination with this shaft, forcing the players to climb up or down, or hide beneath the pit's edge, to fight him and his spells.

Jumping down the shaft allows a character to land in the water that has filled the bottom floor by spending only their base movement speed, but the fall inflicts 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage per 60-foot drop, or full floor, that they must fall to reach the surface of the water. A character may instead use the same amount of movement and attempt either a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to either fall to the floor immediately below them, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall as per usual, or to dive into the water at the bottom gracefully, avoiding all fall damage. Failure on this saving throw or check results in the character falling into the water at the bottom and taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage.

Kuxcoatl Exploits

The following exploits can be used to gain an advantage over Kuxcoatl during the battle if the characters discover them.

Runes of Power

The body of Kuxcoatl is marked with runes that amplify his magical power. He refreshes these runes every day to keep himself and his power charged at all times. Each of Kuxcoatl's body parts has a specific set of runes protecting it.

A character may specifically target a body part's runes by taking disadvantage on their attack roll against that body part. If the attack deals damage, the runes on that body part are disrupted for the rest of the encounter.

A character within 5 feet of one of Kuxcoatl's body parts may instead use an action to disrupt the runes on that body part by succeeding on a DC 27 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion) check. If the check succeeds, the runes on that body part are disrupted for the rest of the encounter.

If the runes on one of Kuxcoatl's body parts are disrupted by erasing or destroying a part of the writing, then for the rest of the round in which they were disrupted, Kuxcoatl suffers disadvantage on his spell attack rolls, all saving throws against his spells are made with advantage, and that body part does not benefit from Kuxcoatl's damage reduction.

If five or more of Kuxcoatl's body parts have their runes disrupted, all of Kuxcoatl's special actions have their action costs increased by 2.

Experiments

Kuxcoatl's lair is full of arcane formulas inscribed on the walls and floor. These are Kuxcoatl's thoughts, projects, and ongoing arcane experiments. Any player character that wishes to take notes from Kuxcoatl's writing may spend an action copying or studying the symbols to automatically gain a single scroll of a random 1d6 level spell from the wizard spell list.

Active Experiments

A few of Kuxcoatl's experiments are active, which means they currently hold enchantments that may be triggered by interfering with the writings. Active experiments are marked as circled symbols on map 4.3: The Grand Laboratory.

As an action, a player character may disrupt, erase, or trigger one of the active experiments. The character must make a DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (Investigation), or Intelligence (Religion) check. If the check succeeds, magic energy starts pulsating across the lair and tugging at the runes on Kuxcoatl's skin. This causes the triggered experiment condition during Kuxcoatl's next upkeep, as described below. If the check fails, the character takes 10 (3d6) force damage from Kuxcoatl's arcane wards, and there is no further effect.

A character may try to destroy an active experiment by attacking it (AC 19; 10 hp). After a character makes an attack against an active experiment, magical wards on the experiment retaliate by immediately dealing 10 (3d6) force damage to that character. If the experiment is reduced to 0 hit points, add the triggered experiment condition to Kuxcoatl's next upkeep, as described below.

Triggered Experiment

Triggered experiment is a special condition that affects Kuxcoatl during his upkeep as a result of a character interacting with one of his active experiments. While suffering this condition, Kuxcoatl begins frantically looking around and casting cantrips, trying to prevent a magic mishap in his rune-covered laboratory. Multiple instances of the triggered experiment condition can accumulate over a round to all affect Kuxcoatl beginning in his next upkeep.

When Kuxcoatl begins his next upkeep after accumulating one or more instances of the triggered experiment condition, he suffers the effects for the rest of that round. This condition causes different, cumulative effects based on how many instances are active at the same time, as below. At the end of the round, all instances of the triggered experiment condition that Kuxcoatl has suffered the effects of are removed. Any new instances of the condition that were triggered in that round will take effect at the start of Kuxcoatl's next upkeep as normal.

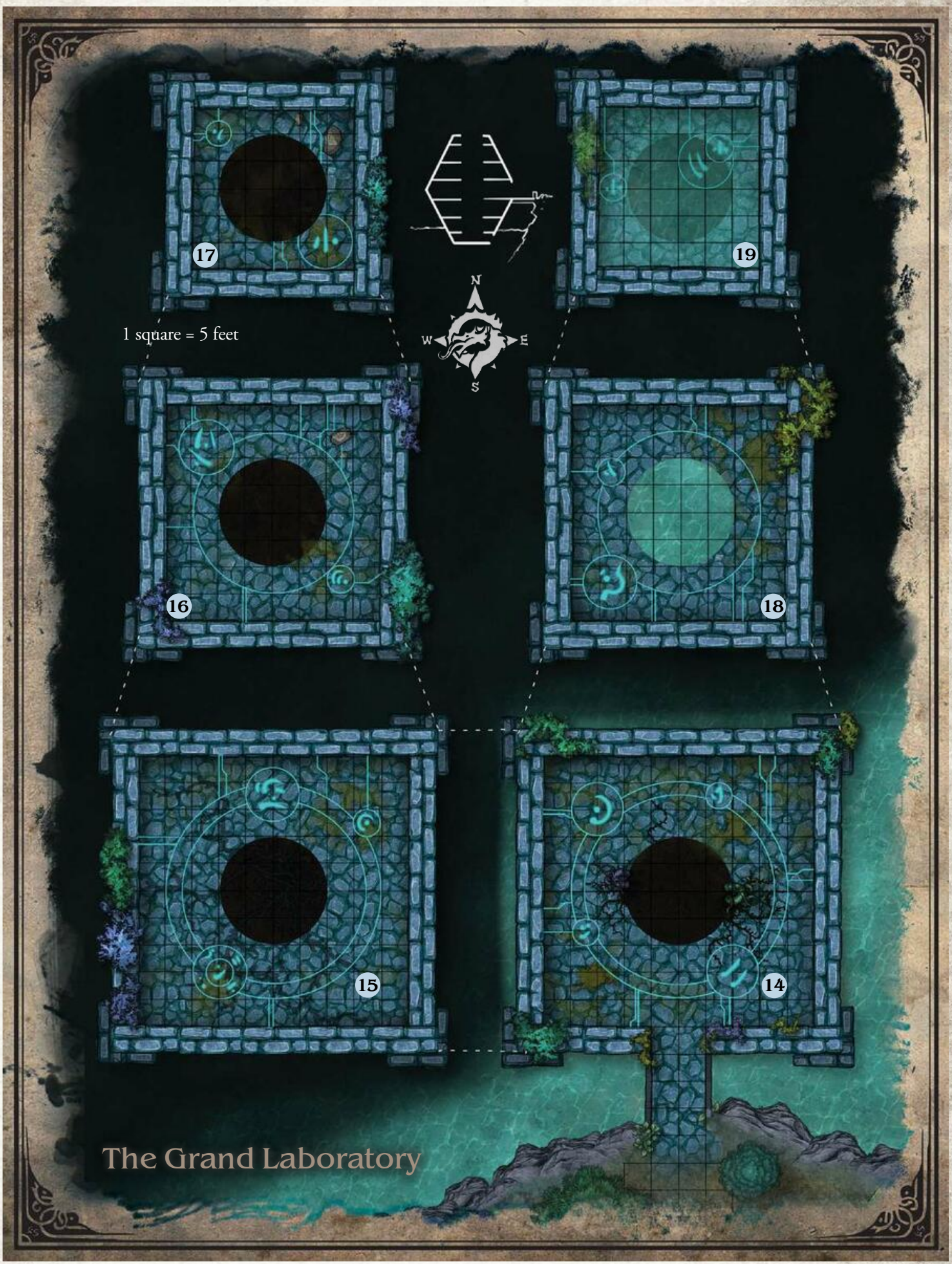
When suffering from at least one instance of the triggered experiment condition, all of Kuxcoatl's actions have their action costs increased by 1. If there are two or more triggered experiment conditions at the same time, all attack rolls against Kuxcoatl are made with advantage, as his attention darts from one end of his lair to the other. If there are three or more triggered experiment conditions at the same time, all attacks made against Kuxcoatl ignore his damage reduction because of the pulsating runes on his body. If there are four or more triggered experiment conditions at the same time, one of Kuxcoatl's randomly selected body parts takes 10 (3d6) force damage during his upkeep, ignoring his damage reduction.

Superior Pride

Kuxcoatl is known for showcasing his superior intellect at every chance. A character may exploit this by using an action to goad Kuxcoatl into attacking any specific creature that Kuxcoatl can see. This requires making a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the check succeeds, Kuxcoatl attacks only that creature until something else specifically grabs his attention.

Antimagic

Any creature using an attack or a spell with an antimagic effect against Kuxcoatl has advantage on the attack roll and causes him to have disadvantage on any saving throw made against the attack or spell. If the attack or spell hits and deals damage, that damage bypasses Kuxcoatl's damage reduction and automatically disrupts the runes in the attacked body part for the rest of the encounter.



MAP 4.3: THE GRAND LABORATORY

KUXCOATL

Gargantuan dragon, lawful neutral

Armor Class see "Kuxcoatl's Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Kuxcoatl's Body Parts"
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	17 (+3)	24 (+7)	30 (+10)	16 (+3)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +12, Int +19, Wis +12
Skills Arcana +19, Athletics +16, History +19, Religion +19
Damage Reduction 7
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from non-magical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted and frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Arcane Runes. Kuxcoatl has runes embedded on his body that fuel his magical abilities. Each of these runes protects one of Kuxcoatl's body parts from the dragon's own spells. Disrupting these runes weakens Kuxcoatl (see the "Kuxcoatl Exploits" section above) and leaves the corresponding body part vulnerable to being targeted by the dragon's own spells.

Drakhan Resistance. Kuxcoatl has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Innate Spellcasting. Kuxcoatl's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 27, +19 to hit with spell attacks). He knows all spells from the wizard spell list and may cast them all at will, without requiring any components, but he prefers the following:

1st level: *color spray, false life, magic missile, shield, silent image.*
2nd level: *blindness/deafness, blur, detect thoughts, hold person, invisibility, mirror image, ray of enfeeblement, suggestion.*
3rd level: *blink, counterspell, dispel magic, gaseous form, haste, major image, protection from energy, slow.*
4rd level: *banishment, confusion, greater invisibility, polymorph, resilient sphere, stone shape, stoneskin.*
5th level: *arcane hand, dominate person, modify memory, wall of force.*
6th level: *eyebite, flesh to stone, globe of invulnerability, irresistible dance, magic jar, mass suggestion, true seeing.*
7th level: *forcecage, mirage arcane, prismatic spray, project image.*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Kuxcoatl fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magical Negation. When Kuxcoatl uses *counterspell* or *dispel magic*, it always counts at as a 7th level spell.

Magic Weapons. Kuxcoatl's weapon attacks are considered magical.

Unbroken Concentration. Kuxcoatl can maintain concentration on as many spells as he wishes without penalty. His concentration is broken only if he falls unconscious.

ACTIONS

Upkeep Actions

During Kuxcoatl's upkeep, he replenishes his action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and he may take any of the following actions.

Quick Cast (0 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Kuxcoatl can use any wizard spell of level 2 or lower as a free action.

Combat Analysis (1 Action). Kuxcoatl chooses up to two creatures he can see. Both of the chosen targets have disadvantage on their attack rolls against Kuxcoatl until his next upkeep.

Shake (1 Action). Kuxcoatl can shake all of his body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Kuxcoatl's body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they're holding onto in order to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and becomes prone.

Symbol (2 Actions). Kuxcoatl triggers one of the magic wards hidden among the runes in his lair. This works as a *symbol* spell, with the specific symbol effect being chosen randomly.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Kuxcoatl can heal one body part that has not yet been reduced to 0 hit points. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum.

Melee Actions

Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10 + 7) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Kuxcoatl's claws must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the claw's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Tail Lasso (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 24). If the creature fails to escape the grapple on its next turn, Kuxcoatl automatically throws his victim up to 40 feet away, dealing 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and knocking them prone.

Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing damage and 9 (2d8) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Kuxcoatl's head must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Wing Flap (2 Actions). Each creature in a 20-foot radius around Kuxcoatl must succeed on a DC 24 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 40 feet and take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage. Kuxcoatl can then move up to his flying speed in any direction. Any creature mounted on Kuxcoatl's wings must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the wings' shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Rune Exhaustion (6 Actions). Kuxcoatl makes 2 claw attacks, 1 bite attack, and uses his Wing Flap once. Each of the attacks deals an additional 10 (3d6) force damage. Each attack targets the creature closest to the corresponding body part. Any creature mounted on one of Kuxcoatl's body parts must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against that body part's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Kuxcoatl must disrupt one of his runes to use this attack. One rune that has not already been disrupted, chosen at random among Kuxcoatl's body parts that still have undisrupted runes, is now disrupted. Kuxcoatl doesn't suffer any harmful exploit effects from disrupting this rune.

Breath Weapons

Dragonfire (2 Actions). Kuxcoatl breathes fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a success.

Blue Flame Sphere (3 Actions). Kuxcoatl breathes blue methane fire in a 30-foot sphere around him. Every other creature in that area must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Biting Wind (5 Actions). Kuxcoatl breathes a 40-foot wide cylinder of icy wind that reaches all six levels of his lair. Every other creature in that area must succeed on a DC 24 Constitution saving throw or take 45 (10d8) cold damage and become incapacitated until the end of its next round. A successful save halves the damage and negates the incapacitated condition. Kuxcoatl must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Blizzard (5 Actions). Kuxcoatl breathes a 120-foot cone of furious winds. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 24 Constitution saving throw or take 66 (12d10) cold damage and become paralyzed for 1 minute. A creature that succeeds on the save takes half that damage and is restrained until the end of its next turn instead.

The action cost of this ability increases by one every time Kuxcoatl uses it. Kuxcoatl must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Special Actions

Don't Mind If I Borrow That (2 Actions). As a bonus action, Kuxcoatl may replicate any spell cast by another creature within the last round, using that creature's spellcasting attack modifier and spell save DC.

Sealing Magic (2 Actions). Kuxcoatl cancels one triggered experiment in the area. This ability's action cost already includes the increased action cost penalty from triggered experiments.

Familiar Magic (2 Actions). Kuxcoatl casts one of his preferred wizard spells (see his Innate Spellcasting trait). Regardless of its casting time, the spell takes effect on this turn.

Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better (3 Actions). Kuxcoatl may replicate any spell cast by another creature within the last round, using his own spellcasting attack modifier and spell save DC. The creature whose spell Kuxcoatl copies must then make a DC 24 Charisma saving throw or lose access to one spell slot of their highest spell level, just as if they had spent the spell slot.

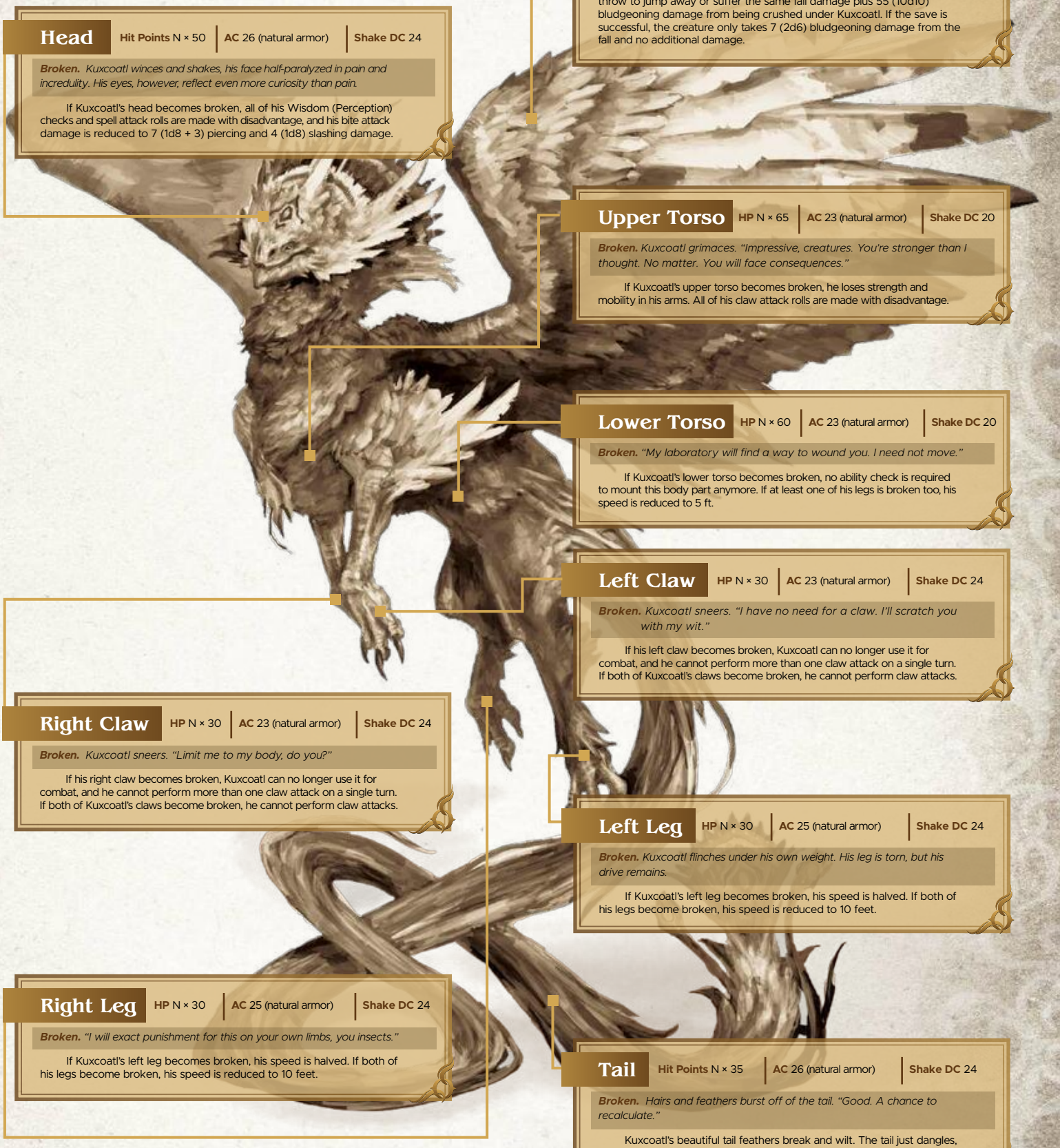
Tired of Your Tricks (4 Actions). Kuxcoatl casts *antimagic field* without needing to maintain concentration for the effect to continue. This field doesn't suppress or disrupt any of Kuxcoatl's runes, but it otherwise cancels all magical effects coming from and to Kuxcoatl and his lair in the spell's area.

A creature can counter the field by succeeding on a DC 27 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion) check, or by *casting an antimagic field* of their own specifically targeting Kuxcoatl's field, which cancels both effects. Kuxcoatl can cancel the *antimagic field* at any moment without spending any action.

Magical Destruction (6 Actions). A storm of unbound magic whirls around Kuxcoatl. Every other creature within a 60-foot radius of Kuxcoatl must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw or take 110 (20d10) force damage, or half as much on a success. Kuxcoatl must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this ability again.

KUXCOATL'S BODY PARTS

Kuxcoatl's body is covered with runes that empower his spells. A creature may target the set of runes on one of Kuxcoatl's body parts instead of the body part itself by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If such an attack deals damage, the runes on that body part are disrupted as described in the "Kuxcoatl Exploits" section above.



Head

Hit Points N × 50 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Kuxcoatl winces and shakes, his face half-paralyzed in pain and incredulity. His eyes, however, reflect even more curiosity than pain.*

If Kuxcoatl's head becomes broken, all of his Wisdom (Perception) checks and spell attack rolls are made with disadvantage, and his bite attack damage is reduced to 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing and 4 (1d8) slashing damage.

Wings

HP N × 30 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20 (grounded) or 24 (flying)

Broken. *Kuxcoatl stands. "It's foolish of you to believe that the only way I can get to you is through flight. I've thought of everything."*

If Kuxcoatl's wings become broken, he loses his flying speed and cannot use his Wing Flap any longer.

If airborne, Kuxcoatl immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Kuxcoatl's body must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Kuxcoatl. If the save is successful, the creature only takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and no additional damage.

Upper Torso

HP N × 65 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *Kuxcoatl grimaces. "Impressive, creatures. You're stronger than I thought. No matter. You will face consequences."*

If Kuxcoatl's upper torso becomes broken, he loses strength and mobility in his arms. All of his claw attack rolls are made with disadvantage.

Lower Torso

HP N × 60 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *"My laboratory will find a way to wound you. I need not move."*

If Kuxcoatl's lower torso becomes broken, no ability check is required to mount this body part anymore. If at least one of his legs is broken too, his speed is reduced to 5 ft.

Left Claw

HP N × 30 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Kuxcoatl sneers. "I have no need for a claw. I'll scratch you with my wit."*

If his left claw becomes broken, Kuxcoatl can no longer use it for combat, and he cannot perform more than one claw attack on a single turn. If both of Kuxcoatl's claws become broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Right Claw

HP N × 30 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Kuxcoatl sneers. "Limit me to my body, do you?"*

If his right claw becomes broken, Kuxcoatl can no longer use it for combat, and he cannot perform more than one claw attack on a single turn. If both of Kuxcoatl's claws become broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Left Leg

HP N × 30 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Kuxcoatl flinches under his own weight. His leg is torn, but his drive remains.*

If Kuxcoatl's left leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both of his legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Right Leg

HP N × 30 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *"I will exact punishment for this on your own limbs, you insects."*

If Kuxcoatl's left leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both of his legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Tail

Hit Points N × 35 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Hairs and feathers burst off of the tail. "Good. A chance to recalculate."*

Kuxcoatl's beautiful tail feathers break and wilt. The tail just dangles, and he can no longer use his tail lasso attack. Mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

TO BE IN ALL SHADOWS

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

"Beyond the end, Nixis is. Nixis waits. Death will conquer all, Nixis conquered death and crossed the Threshold. Her brood spreads both enticing lies and pitiful truths. They roam free until her irresistible call finally beckons them to the Catacomb Reaches and into the Great Mausoleum so that they can bask in the dark radiance of She Who Crossed and Awaits. For, yes, Nixis patiently waits and unavoidably remains."

—Tablet found in a corpse in the Far Wastes

Death ultimately awaits even the most powerful beings on Drakha, and everything that dies on the Red Moon brings power to Nixis, the azhurma of necromancy.

A group of adventurers carry out a diplomatic mission to the human enclave hiding at the edge of U'druzt, the precipice overlooking a fog-covered region known as the Catacomb Reaches. But the rotting curse of Nixis, who awaits everyone at the end, has corrupted the humans, the mission, and, if Nixis has her way, the adventurers themselves.

INTRODUCTION

The most ominous of all fortifications on Drakha, the Great Mausoleum stands inside Ossarium, a massive open grave left after a cataclysmic battle that took place untold ages ago. Such were the death and magic unleashed that day that they forever tainted the area and turned the whole region into the Catacomb Reaches, a territory forsaken by most other creatures on Drakha… *living* creatures, that is.

Even the colossal, all-powerful azhurmas prefer not to ponder on its existence long, for what lies in there defies their logic and reminds them of the long-delayed, yet decidedly unavoidable end of their own mighty existences. It also brings to mind the underlying, unspoken fear that their final moments may indeed be brought about by Nixis, the Mausoleum's sole ruler, and her devious, unfathomable plotting, executed through her countless hidden, relentless, and often unsuspecting agents.

One of her latest plots leads a group of adventurers into what they expect to be a rewarding journey, but then they slowly realize, hopefully, it is leading them further and further toward their preordained, unavoidable doom.

"To Be in All Shadows" is a horror-themed adventure, subtly so but horror nonetheless, and a prevailing aspect of all great horror stories is the mounting dread as the protagonists' every action seems to bring them one step closer to their untimely end. However, this is also a heroic adventure, where your player characters are meant to prevail and finally confront—and hopefully defeat—the puppet master at the very end, fighting her in her very lair and escaping the damnable conditions bestowed upon them by the actions of those they sought to help. Thus, it falls to you as the GM to establish a balance between impending doom and ultimate hope.

Running the Adventure

"To Be in All Shadows" is an epic adventure meant for three to five player characters that will start at 17th level. During the course of the adventure, the player characters will advance to 20th level using the milestones system before engaging in the final battle against Azhurma Nixis.

The adventure is set on Drakha, The Red Moon, a world ruled by dragons and their servitor kin. For more details in this setting consult the "Drakha, the Red Moon" section at the start of this book.

The "Adventure Background" section below tells you everything you need to know to understand this adventure's immediate setting. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run, giving you a broad sense of the events involved and how they should unfold throughout the adventure.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.
- This adventure handles some terror themes. Talk with your players regarding consent and safe environments before running the adventure.

The Catacomb Reaches

A broken stretch of land magically locked in perpetual twilight, near the Red Moon's far side, the Catacomb Reaches is a desolate, haunting place where the Drakhan deserts give way to a series of low crags and plateaus extending for miles and where there is little life save for scurrying crusher beetles and other opportunistic carrion feeders.

At the end of the Reaches lies Ossarium, a vast, ancient valley, where the remains of numberless combatants from an age long past lie in wait. The area is scattered with Nix brood "nests" and what can only be described as ceremonial sites, where offerings of bones are placed and assembled into mockeries of dragons and other dragonkin.

Ossarium contains the Great Mausoleum, the lair of Azhurma Nixis. The structure has a definite draconic origin, but it also shows elements which are utterly alien even by Drakhan standards and bears testament to an age long forgotten but no less real. Within its darkened halls, in a chamber filled with waning magic and ancient secrets, Drakha's dracolich azhurma, the Veilbreaker, awaits.

Special Rules

Use the following special rules when running any adventure in the Catacomb Reaches. These are intended to complement the special rules detailed in the "Magic on Drakha" section at the start of this book.

- All spells and effects of the Necromancy school are cast as if spending a spell slot 1 level higher. Whenever a player uses a necromancy spell or effect, they gain taint (see the "Taint" section).
- The Catacomb Reaches is the only known place on Drakha where *revivify, raise dead, resurrection, true resurrection,* and similar spells work normally. However, the caster of such a spell gains taint (see the "Taint" section). Furthermore, the caster and the target of the spell gain a necrotic tether. This means that, for as long as both creatures remain inside the Catacomb Reaches, each time the target of the effect takes radiant, psychic, or necrotic damage, the caster also takes the same amount of the same type of damage. A tether only ends if one of the tethered characters dies or leaves the Catacomb Reaches.

TAINT

When a character inside the Catacomb Reaches uses a necromancy spell or effect, or uses magic to raise another creature from the dead, mark them as having Taint. This is a 9th-level necromantic effect that does not go away on its own but can be dispelled by any effect that removes necromantic effects.

Taint has no immediately obvious effect and is undetectable except through the use of a DC 28 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Insight) check. It remains until dispelled or until the adventurers defeat Nixis.

While a character has taint, they are subject to Nixis' magic in certain insidious ways, detailed at specific points in the adventure and during the final battle.

If a character with Taint dies, they rise again at full hit points after 1 minute, but as an undead. Their stats and abilities remain unchanged, but they are Charmed by Nixis, and they attack their companions to the best of their ability until stopped or killed again. They also become immune to poison and necrotic damage and the Exhausted and Poisoned conditions. Dispelling effects remove the Taint, but cause the character to die again.

Adventure Background

The Amberskins are a semi-nomadic tribe of non-dragons, whose members are either Valernian in origin or from Valernian parents. Most of them escaped or were freed from dragon captivity and have managed to eke out a precarious existence in the Drakhan wastelands.

The Amberskins maintain a partially occupied settlement at U'drutz, or the Cleave, the terraced precipice that marks the natural border of the Catacomb Reaches. There, protected by the fear of other dragon broods who dare not cross Nixis or her borders, the Amberskins have managed to survive and remain independent, though they are always under the shadow of the undead azhurma. And despite their life at, quite literally, the edge of a cliff, they maintain a close community and stable leadership.

The Edge of a Cliff

Lately, however, the Amberskins' leadership has been teetering on the razor-thin edge of generational conflict. Their chieftain and founder, Vodgo, has fallen deathly ill, and already tensions run sharp regarding succession.

First in line is Atyan, a Drakha-born human, who would be too young to claim the leader's mantle but has enough followers and determination to take it by force if necessary.

Her main opponent is Rysamora, a Valernian mountain matriarch, who does not seek leadership herself but does not want the Amberskins to fall under the sway of the ruthless Drakha-born faction.

Tulemo, the tribe healer, has worked nonstop to heal Vodgo or, at least, stall his eventual demise, with bleak prospects. Meanwhile, his assistant Linji, an elf dreamshaper, claims to have found a way to cure the chieftain, one that the elders may not approve of.

The League

An incipient confederacy of tribes and bands consisting mainly of freed Valernian captives and their descendants, the League seeks, or hopes to build, a place where humans and other non-draconic peoples may live free from the influence and oppression of dragons.

As part of their efforts to find such a territory, a group of adventurers have been given a scouting mission to survey the zones near Drakha's Farside and reestablish contact with the only tribe known to have settled in the region: the Amberskins, whose continued success as an independent tribe has always been an inspiration and role model for the League. The Amberskins were also the first to prove that the regions near the Red Moon's equator could offer the necessary distance from the established dragon domains to offer relative safety to non-draconic residents.

The assigned group of adventurers reaches U'drutz at a turbulent time, and they are soon pulled into both a web of intertribal conflict and an open, desperate action against the forces of the undead Nix dragon brood. And every decision they make seems to draw them ever closer to Nixis' dark, ultimate plan...

Adventure Overview

The adventure begins with the party exploring the hostile, bleak region of U'drutz and fighting off a few undead to reach the Amberskins' camp. There, they become involved in the tribe's succession war, caused by the chieftain's grave illness.

But the Amberskins have a more pressing danger to take care of. For some reason, the Nix brood has decided this is the right time to carry out an aggressive expansion of their hunting territories. They have set their sights on the Cleave, and the Amberskins will need to retreat or perish.

After a sudden attack on the camp during a particularly quarrelsome meeting, the Amberskins and the adventurers are forced to leave U'drutz and venture into the Catacomb Reaches. But, unknown to most of the tribe, the apprentice Linji begins studying the dragonkin's dark necromancy, hoping it will cure the dying chieftain and save the Amberskins.

From this point on, the party and the tribe will be drawn deeper and deeper into darkness, physically and figuratively, as they travel the Catacomb Reaches toward the Ossarium, lording over the unhallowed landscape, and the Great Mausoleum to be found therein, the lair of Nixis herself.

"To Be in All Shadows" is divided into four parts, each one meant to be played over one gaming session. In "The Edge of Existence," after a brief prologue where the adventurers make their way across rocky terrain and face undead creatures, they arrive at U'drutz, an imposing cliff with many terraces on the way down to yet another patch of wasteland, but this one is covered in fog under the twilit sky so characteristic of these regions near Drakha's equatorial belt.

Halfway down the cliff, the adventurers find the Amberskins' current camp and the tribe in turmoil. As the internal rift between tribal factions continues to grow, a sentry alerts the camp about an incoming warparty of Nix'udjar. The party is forced to meet the reckless attack by the gaunt and ghoulish creatures. During this strike, Linji, an elf wizard from the Amberskins, bears witness to the amazing and horrifying abilities of the Nix'udjar and comes up with a plan to delay Vodgo's final breath and save the tribe from the inner strife threatening to tear it in half.

As "The Nature of Strife" begins, the Amberskins, faced with the dragonkin onslaught, are forced to flee into the misty wastes of the Catacomb Reaches while the battle continues behind them. The Nix dragons have set out after the party, and they can be heard crawling and swooping somewhere not too far behind.

The tribe seeks a desperate solution - to unearth a relic of ages past, probably a remnant of the battle that took place at the heart of this blighted region. It is a huge barge-like vessel stranded amid some rocks. The adventurers find that it can still run, responsive as it is to channeled magics, and it's big enough for the Amberskin survivors. The challenge lies in restarting the machine and rescuing the Amberskins while an army of undead dragons chase them all.

"Legacy of The Void" sees the barge speeding further into the Ossarium, with more and more Nix'udjar warbands and Nix dragons trying to stop it. This part of the adventure is only one encounter: a short but intense race between the heroes' floating vessel and three dragons, which the adventurers need to defeat one by one.

As another tribal quarrel breaks on the vessel's lower deck, the party realizes the true horror of Linji's "cure." It has turned Vodgo into an undead abomination, which attacks its former tribespeople. Just before the factions come to blows, the barge hits a huge pile of bones and the rock hidden beneath, causing it to savagely jolt and crash, throwing everyone on the decks to the floor or, in many cases, overboard.

In "It That Waits Beyond," the party wakes up and must face the Amberskins tribe, as they have now been turned into an undead horde. Afterward, they face the master of the Catacomb Reaches, Nixis herself, who was watching all of this and remains patiently waiting for and gently beckoning the party.

Adventure Hooks

Should the adventurers come from a previous campaign outside of the Dragonbond setting, assume that they have died. However, instead of going to another plane (or to "the light," or an eternal void), they appeared on Drakha as part of Nixis' ultimate plan, drawn by her necromantic power.

Believing that they are in some kind of afterlife, or perhaps realizing this is actually another world, the player characters spent some time on the Red Moon, acquainting themselves with its strange day–night cycle and its stern dragon rulers. In time, the player characters joined the League, who, based on the party's great skill and power, gave them the dangerous mission to find and contact the Amberskins at the Cleave.

THE EDGE OF EXISTENCE

The council was clear: *"The Amberskins are a vital part of our plan to create a confederacy and finally claim a stretch of territory as our own."* You all only wish the journey hadn't taken you so long and so close to the Red Moon's equator, where the light of day dims and only Rhaava's Northern pole is barely visible on the horizon.

The edge of the leagues-long cliff known as U'drutz is now well within sight, but you know this is only the first part of your real mission: finding the Amberskins tribe and convincing them to join the rest of the Valernian groups in the effort to claim a region suitable for establishing a permanent settlement, relatively safe from draconic attacks and persecution.

The party arrives at the top of a huge cliff extending beyond their sight in both directions. The central area is composed of uneven terraces and small plateaus, creating a broken, sharp contrast to the vertical walls running into the distance along the cliff's face.

The party must succeed on a DC 22 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to pinpoint locations that may serve as humanoid settlements, and then they must succeed again on a DC 22 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to find the Amberskins' camp.

The adventurers will eventually find the Amberskins' camp regardless, but if either of the above checks fail, they first come across three **drakehaunts**, which roam the Cleave looking for prey and attack the party right away.

Eventually, the heroes find enough signs to point them to a cave under a ledge.

> In a dark spot under an overhanging rock formation, you discover the entrance to a cave, thanks to the slow-moving, half-hidden Valernian sentries guarding it. It's hard to tell at this distance, but the sentries seem to be watching the base of the cliff and the foggy expanse beyond.
>
> Getting down to the cave will take you a while if you decide to follow the paths among the rocks along the side of the cliff, or you can decide to reach the ledge and then rappel down with your ropes into the hidden cave below.

As the player characters decide how their characters will approach the Amberskins' camp, describe the stretch of wasteland extending at the foot of the cliff, covered by what seems to be a curtain of fog obscuring the land. Along the cliffside are several points that could be easily turned into defensible positions, if other Valernian groups sent more workers and everyone applied their collective resources to defend the area. All that is left for the party to do is to be at their best and convince the Amberskins to share the region with the rest of the incipient League.

If the adventurers decide to take the long path to reach the cave, they climb down crags and trails for half an hour, and they come across a patrol of seven **Nix'udjar dragonkin** lying in ambush. The dragonkin were sent to spy on the camp and are not expecting the players, so either group is equally likely to surprise the other. If the adventurers survive the encounter, they reach the Amberskins' cave without further incident.

If the player characters wish to rappel down the cliff face to save time, they need to use ropes and succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, taking 35 (10d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure from the fall. Whether the check succeeds or fails, the sentries are startled because of the party's abrupt arrival, which imposes disadvantage on the first Charisma check an adventurer makes that targets an Amberskin.

Regardless of the method or path used, a band of several young Valernians is already waiting at the cave entrance. Allow the party members to make a DC 21 Wisdom (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception or Intimidation) check to be allowed passage into the cave. If successful, they are led inside. If not, Nukkos (see "The Amberskins" below), an Amberskin speaker, addresses them outside of the cave.

Let the player characters explain their presence and intentions with their own arguments, requiring a DC 16 (or higher) Charisma check where necessary. In general terms, the Amberskins are tied up right now, and any decision as important as an alliance with the League must be postponed until the matter of leadership succession is resolved.

If the player characters bring proof of the Nix'udjar patrol stalking nearby, the Amberskins are alarmed. The Nix "have not crossed their border" in decades...

If the adventurers fail to gain entrance to the camp, they are simply told that the tribe is mourning the grave health of their leader and are ordered to wait outside until the matter is resolved. Proceed straight to the section labeled "The Surprise Attack."

If the adventurers are allowed inside the cave, they meet the Amberskins and their principal figures up close and personal. Read the following aloud as the party enters the cave:

> The cavern is much larger than the side entrance would have suggested, extending inward with several caves and chambers, their pits and hollows creating a play of quivering shadows from the torch flames.
>
> Occupying this complex are hundreds of humans, elves, dwarves, halflings and other Valernian peoples of all ages and genders, living in shelters that seem too well built and cozy to be an encampment and too flimsy and practical to be a permanent home. The tribe looks large, active, and accustomed to mountain life.

Let the party conduct their interactions with the Amberskins as they wish, using "The Amberskins" section below for guidance. The adventurers may take a short rest during this encounter if they so wish.

The Amberskins

A tribe of second-generation Valernians, born on Drakha, and their parents, the Amberskins are a successful and prosperous group, despite their precarious location at the border of the Catacomb Reaches near Drakha's Farside.

They are united and cooperative, but there has been a growing schism between the old generation and their Drakha-born descendants, who wish for more ruthless leadership to stand up to the dragons and other dangers of the Red Moon.

More recently, the Amberskins have been preoccupied with the rapidly declining health of Vodgo, their chieftain, and a sizable portion of the younger members have been drawn in by the discourse of recognition and "ascendancy" from Atyan, the de facto leader of the tribe's Drakha-born faction, who seeks the opportunity to replace the old patriarch as a new, fresh leader.

Atyan

*NE human female **gladiator** (Drakhani)*

A descendant of Ysvalian parents, Atyan is too young to be elected as chieftain of the traditionalistic Amberskins. As determined and resilient as any V'laer-kez (Drakha-born Valernian), she is well known among the rest of the native Drakhani humanoids for her pragmatic nature and knack for picking the side with better odds to win any argument, even if these traits are not as evident to others in the tribe.

ROLEPLAYING ATYAN

Atyan is quick to try and befriend the adventurers, sizing them up and trying to ensure they support her claim of more recognition and increased power for the V'laer-kez members of the tribe. For Atyan, power is both a confirmation of her right to exist and a resource to be amassed, much like the draconic way of conceptualizing power.

Rysamora

*LN human female **priest** (Primalian)*

A middle-aged Primalian and Valernian traditionalist, Rysamora is concerned with the growing secessionist sentiment among the tribe. Granted unexpected authority with Vodgo's illness, she dreads what may happen after the quickly approaching demise of Vodgo, the current chieftain. She doesn't want to see the tribe break apart but will have no qualms about letting the Drakha-born go their separate ways, as long as they do not march in the same direction as the original Amberskins.

ROLEPLAYING RYSAMORA

Rysamora listens to the adventurers' offer empathetically, but she is concerned about having the dispersed Valernian groups come to U'drutz because of the increased danger it would mean for her tribe and their continued survival. She tries to block them from talking to Vodgo, unless Tulemo is present. She knows that Vodgo will listen to them, but she wants nothing to disturb her ailing chieftain's delicate health, much less a fairy tale about unity and freedom in this moment of crisis.

Tulemo

LG human male ***druid*** *(Tyverian)*

A Tyverian healer and the physician in charge of Chief Vodgo's health, Tulemo has grown frustrated by his inability to cure the chieftain's strange illness and scared for the tribe's stability, as Vodgo's death would further divide the tribe. Tulemo is one of the tribe's elders in Vodgo's absence, but he fears that the younger members will try to assert a bigger role in steering the new leader if not outright promote one of their number to actually become chieftain.

Roleplaying Tulemo

Tulemo pays little attention to the suggestion of an alliance with the League. It sounds nice to begin with, but he's far more worried about the dying chieftain and the unavoidable conflict it will create with Atyan and her supporters. And he can't help but blame himself for failing to come up with a cure. Nevertheless, he allows the player characters to speak directly with Vodgo if they ask to.

Nukkos

N orc male ***berserker*** *(Drakhani)*

Another V'laer-kez, whose Obakkar blood makes him one of the strongest members of the tribe, Nukkos believes that the transition, regardless of who emerges as the new leader, should come without endangering the tribe's unity.

Roleplaying Nukkos

Nukkos listens attentively as the player characters introduce themselves but is not willing to listen to their diplomatic mission. In his head, this is elder business, with which he has no grounds to involve himself. He points the adventurers to Rysamora or Tulemo, the tribe's acting elders while Vodgo is mostly incapacitated.

Linji

CG Ellari elf male ***mage*** *(Drakhani)*

An Ellari alchemist and dabbler in Dreamshaping, Linji believes he has found a way to cure Vodgo's malady, but it requires… unusual methods. Still, Linji is more than willing to try it—or anything else, really—to postpone his chieftain's demise and the struggle for power that is brewing among the Amberskins.

Roleplaying Linji

Like his master Tulemo, the apprentice Linji is worried about the chieftain's health, first and foremost, but he has a plan to solve it, a plan that would not meet with the elders' approval. So, he won't share it with the adventurers for now.

Vodgo

NG human male ***veteran*** *(Tyverian)*

An old traditionalist kidnapped from his native Tyveria decades ago and the longest surviving member of the current Amberskins tribe. In his youth, Chief Vodgo was an apprentice to the tribe's founders, the Fulgenreavers Adventurer Band. Like everyone else in the tribe, he has no idea of the reason or nature of his illness but is as ready to die as anyone.

Roleplaying Vodgo

Despite his rapidly declining health, Vodgo is both willing and able to talk to the party about their mission. He shares Rysamora's concerns about increased danger but only if there was a massive influx of simultaneous arrivals to the Cleave. With reasonable migration control, Vodgo thinks a region mutually defended by and shared among several tribes would be less threatened, not more. He tells the party that if they convince the rest of the tribe, he will gladly accept their proposal and name a successor to appoint intermediaries and ambassadors to the League when he dies.

Nix'udjar dragonkin

Vodgo's Illness

Vodgo's sickness is not common and cannot be cured by common means nor the usual magical ones. In fact, Vodgo, like most Amberskins, has been touched by the power of the nearby Nix brood's territory, infecting him with a curse resembling undeath. As a result, healing and curing effects don't help his condition but actually worsen it. Not Vodgo, Tulemo, nor anyone else in the tribe has realized this.

A DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that Vodgo is already dead in magical terms, though he remains alive in body, and that *cure wounds, lesser restoration, remove curse,* and similar spells and effects hurt him instead of healing him. The check doesn't explain how this is possible or why he hasn't died or become fully undead, but *commune, detect magic,* or other divination spells reveal that it is somehow linked to the nearby Catacomb Reaches, the territory of the undead dragons.

Sharing this information with any tribe member will only add to their worries, as Atyan tries to use it as another argument in her favor and Rysamora tries to dismiss it as mere exaggeration.

If the party speaks with Chief Vodgo, Rysamora is forced to convene an urgent tribal council to name a new leader among the elders, preferably Tulemo or herself, and prevent Atyan and her upstarts from taking power. Atyan smells a rat and quickly incenses the tribal youths, organizing them to stop the meeting and challenge Rysamora's authority. However, a warning stops the confrontation: proceed to "The Surprise Attack."

If the party doesn't speak with Vodgo, let them roleplay a little as they speak to tribe members and get better acquainted with the Amberskins' situation. Then, the warning comes. Proceed to "The Surprise Attack."

The Surprise Attack

Suddenly, right in the middle of the adventurers' interactions with the Amberskins, the sentries outside the cave raise an alarm. An attacking force is emerging out of the fog and coming up the cliff.

Many of the tribe's warriors exit the cave to face whatever comes. If the adventurers join them, read the following aloud:

MAP 5.1: THE AMBERSKINS CAVE

> Out in the twilight, pouring from the fog wall below like a torrent of larvae, hundreds of marauders come out of the borderlands, endlessly chittering and slithering up the ramps and clifftops. Torchlight allows you to glimpse at those closest to your position as they relentlessly climb toward the cave entrance. They are gaunt, misshapen dragonkin, with disproportionately large heads, hollow eyes, and mummified skin: Nix'udjar, undead dragonkin, the servants of Brood Nix.

If the adventurers come out of the cave to help against the dragonkin, they must face two groups of five **Nix'udjar dragonkin** each, one right after the other. Otherwise, they can only listen as the Amberskin warriors pour out to defend their territory, eventually routing the attackers.

If the party survives the battle, they notice victory was costly, with nearly one score Amberskin warriors killed in the raid. As the dead warriors' parents moan for their children and the survivors look grimly upon the fog-filled horizon, the adventurers notice that all of the fallen dragonkin have a strange, large rune etched into their foreheads. And the same rune has been carved on the foreheads and chests of each and every fallen Amberskin.

When the surviving Amberskin send groups to collect their dead from the cave entrance, screams arise nearby, drawing their attention.

> As you turn to the source of the screams, you see a torrent of Nix dragonkin coming out of the night on all sides. As the Amberskin warriors scramble to defend their tribe, a couple of the fallen dragonkin rise again, the rune on their forehead glowing with a faint, sickly green haze, and impale an unsuspecting Amberskin from behind with their spears, raking at her falling body with their free hands.

Another warband, larger than the previous one, has stealthily climbed the cliff walls above the camp and is now pouring into the cave entrance to slaughter everyone inside.

If the party is inside the cave, they must fight an onslaught of eight **Nix'udjar dragonkin** while the Amberskins fight off the rest of the attackers. If the party is outside the cave, they identify the leader of this attack, one **Nix'udjar corpsemancer** protected by three **Nix'udjar dragonkin**, and may attack them if they wish.

If the adventurers did not encounter the Nix'udjar patrol before reaching the Amberskin camp, then right after this encounter ends, they must fight another group of seven **Nix'udjar dragonkin** as that patrol joins the charge.

If the adventurers survive the battle, their victory gives time for the surviving defenders of the tribe to form a circle around Vodgo and the elders to help them break the onslaught and escape the cave.

The party is pulled into this circle, running out of the overwhelmed cave and leaving behind the devastated Amberskin camp.

Even as he needs to rely on Tulemo and Nukkos to help him walk, Vodgo yells for his people to close ranks and climb down to the foot of the cliff. While the group descends, surrounded by the pursuing **Nix'udjar dragonkin**, a swarm of skeletal flying lizards - lesser undead dragons - pounce upon the escapees. The party must fight **4 Nix drakes.**

If the drakes are defeated, this allows the surviving Amberskins to escape the onslaught, regroup at the foot of the cliff, some of them carrying their wounded, and leave their camp behind, where the cruel Nix'udjar are still slaughtering their remaining brethren.

The group retreats into the foggy plains, preparing for the next wave of the dragonkin assault, which may come from any direction. Read the following as the adventurers join the Amberskins' mad scramble into the fog:

> Across the thick mist, you see the shadows of dragonkin circling back and racing at you while the dragonkin you left for dead on the cliff are rising up again, apparently resurrecting even more quickly the more their brood approach their fallen bodies. You could swear the dragonkin warband slows its pace, allowing for their fallen comrades to reanimate and join their ranks. And then they advance again, relentless and unstoppable.

If the party has not yet discovered the Nix'udjar weakness, the destruction of their runes as described in their stat block, read them the following:

> Two of the closest dragonkin pursuers fall suddenly, and you witness Nukkos, fierce determination on his face, signaling to those of his fellows closer to him and loading his sling for another shot.
>
> Rysamora screams something at Nukkos, and the slingers stop their attack. But as they run to keep pace with you, Nukkos yells at you, *"You see that? You see that?!"*

Have the adventurers make a DC 26 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Arcana) check. A success reveals that Nukkos hit the dragonkin's runes and that those dragonkin whose runes were destroyed no longer rise.

In any event, Vodgo screams for everyone to escape into the mist, and the Amberskins obey.

Rewards

As the party enters the unwelcoming fog, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

THE NATURE OF STRIFE

After hours of fleeing through the mist, the Amberskins quickly form small groups to carry their wounded and escape the reach of the dragonkin horde on their heels. The player characters find themselves in their own group, separate from the others. Assume the party managed to take a short rest between the last battle and this one.

Suddenly, another force of Nix'udjar dragonkin intercepts the fleeing groups. The adventurers must face five **Nix'udjar dragonkin** and one **Nix'udjar corpsemancer.**

If the adventurers survive, they notice that most of the Amberskin survivors are also defeating the attacking dragonkin, guided by the discovery that destroying their runes prevents them from rising again.

As the other survivors push on and clash with the ghoulish creatures already in the plain, you notice how Vodgo calls for Rysamora and tells her something. She looks shocked, but nods and starts yelling for the tribe to make it to "the Husks."

You also notice how Linji approaches one of the fallen dragonkin and seems to be examining it for a while. When he notices you watching him, he stands up and runs to catch up with Vodgo's porters.

The only screams and moans during the battle come from wounded Amberskins. The nightmarish creatures you are fighting don't make a single sound. If not for the rattling of their decaying armor, they would be silent even in falling.

After the fight, it becomes clear that the tribe lost another group to the Nix'udjar, but the survivors resolutely push through and start running in a very specific direction. It is obvious they know something they have not shared with the party.

After the tribe clears the line of remaining dragonkin, have the adventurers make a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, the group notices that Rysamora is looking over her shoulder and speaking with Tulemo. She looks suspicious, and her glances at the party make it evident that she is making quick assessments of the adventurers and not liking what she sees.

If the party runs after the Amberskins, ask them to succeed on a DC 17 Strength (Athletics) or Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check. If the check fails, or if the adventurers wish to stay behind or run in another direction, they are left behind as the party loses track of the Amberskins as the rest of the dragonkin creep about in the distance. The party must face four **Nix'udjar dragonkin** before attempting to rejoin the Amberskins' flight. If they insist on not joining the Amberskins, throw ever-tougher Nix'udjar encounters at them, or two **Nix dragons** if required, until they die or escape.

If the adventurers successfully follow the Amberskins, they begin noticing the broken silhouettes of several low mounds amid the fog. This is where the Amberskins are heading, but soon they scatter into smaller groups, fading into the mist. One of the Amberskin groups seems to have slowed down, as they are carrying several of their wounded.

Ask the party for a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception or Survival) checks. If the check succeeds, they see faint traces on the ground, as if something tried to cover its tracks, heading in a different direction from the Amberskins. If the party scores more than two successes, they also spot a small den in the distance leading into what seem to be underground tunnels.

If the party wishes to catch up with the slowed refugees, they encounter Atyan, who seems happy to see the adventurers and even tells them she confronted Rysamora over the decision to leave them and the badly wounded behind. She quickly adds that the older woman is planning to use the Husks, a set of mounds nearby, as a temporary base, as the dragonkin always keep away from them. She doesn't know why. Before the conversation continues, however, everyone hears a shrill sound from the dark sky. Proceed to "Death from Above."

If the party instead wishes to head to the mounds on their own, a strange sound stops them in their tracks 100 yards from their destination. Proceed to "Death from Above."

If the party would rather explore the tunnels they spotted, then as they approach, they notice the passages have been excavated in stages over a long period of time and using crude implements. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check reveals that the tunnels were made by Valernian tools, suggesting it was the Amberskins themselves who dug these tunnels to reach the mounds unseen. Further down the passages, the party encounters some Amberskin stragglers who confirm it was Rysamora's idea to leave the adventurers behind. After a short underground walk, the party emerges from the tunnels much nearer to the mounds than they would have suspected. But something is happening there: Proceed to "Death from Above."

If the party follows the strange semi-hidden tracks they found, they catch up with Linji and two other Amberskins who are carrying a semi-conscious Vodgo and dragging the tied corpse of a dragonkin covered with a rag. Linji is frantically adding a foul concoction to the chieftain's medicine. Before the adventurers can react to this, they and Linji's party hear a horrible screech from the sky, and a shadow flaps overhead toward the mounds. Proceed to "Death from Above."

Death from Above

Read the following as the party looks up to the source of the noise they heard.

> The screeching sound above you is the wind passing through the frayed, leathery skin of rotten wings, followed by the rhythmic, coarse rattling of huge bones. Before you have time to react, two large shadows cross the sky above you and blast a thick liquid that leaves a greenish haze as it flies toward the ground and one of the mounds. Soon you hear gurgling and retching from the vicinity of the Husks mixed with screams of pain and fear.
>
> As the two shadows turn and swoop down, you see the gaunt shapes of Nix dragons with frayed wings and rotting flesh as they land between the mounds and the Amberskin refugees.

One of the Nix dragons focuses on slaughtering the Amberskins to prevent them from reaching the outcroppings, while the other one turns toward the party. Run an encounter against a **Nix Dragon.** During the battle, any character with the ability to cast necromantic spells suddenly has the idea to raise some Amberskin corpses to help them, as if someone had suggested it.

The character is free to act on the suggestion or not, but if they do, they gain Taint as described in the "Special Rules" section.

If the adventurers win the battle, the second Nix dragon flies away, leaving a few Amberskin survivors to cheer for the adventurers' intervention. The party and their Amberskin allies have, at last, earned a respite.

While the Amberskins treat their wounded and regroup amidst the Husks, the party may take a long rest without fear of any surprise thanks to the many Amberskin sentries.

The Husks

These mysterious, low mounds seem very important to the Amberskin tribe. If the adventurers want to explore the area, ask them for a DC 28 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Perception) check. Success reveals that the mounds are actually a large structure buried under the rock, perhaps millennia ago. The tunnels that were dug to reach the mounds may not have been intended to create a hidden access point but rather a slow-moving, old mining effort to reach whatever lies under the Husks.

If the adventurers question Rysamora or Vodgo about the mounds, they are evasive, suggesting the secret was never meant for outsiders.

Inquiries regarding Vodgo's health result in Tulemo letting them know that he remains stable but very weak, and it's better not to bother him. If they mention Linji's experiments, Tulemo warns them not to cast aspersions on the loyalty of Amberskins.

Confronting Linji about the medicine he gave to Vodgo, causes him to deny any strangeness, insisting that it was only the usual treatment intended to keep him alive as long as possible. A successful DC 24 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he is lying about something, but his intentions to heal Vodgo are honest and true.

If the adventurers question Rysamora about leaving them behind, she flatly states that it was either that or risk her people, and she was not about to risk her people for some recent arrivals, grateful as she may be for their help during the escape.

After a few hours, the party may confirm that the Nix'udjar seem to indeed fear the Husks, although they keep amassing around the Amberskins' camp at the mounds with an ever-larger army waiting for their enemy to make one false move or to begin dying of starvation. After all, the undead have all the time in the world. Atyan, of course, complains about the tribe leaders having led them all into a deathtrap, but this time even Vodgo asks her to be quiet, claiming that "all will be clear."

Rysamora, Linji, and some other surviving scholars spend most of this time examining a wall-like structure at the northwest end of the mounds. If the adventurers want to join in, they notice that the wall is carved with ancient, draconic runes. A successful DC 26 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that they are activation runes, meant to operate a powerful artifact, but the required method or process is unclear, as draconic runes do not follow the rules of standard arcane or divine magic. If the players search the area, a successful DC 24 Intelligence or Wisdom check reveals a Deathless Spear buried in the sand.

If the party asks Rysamora or another scholar about the wall, they simply state that "we have just a few hours to solve a puzzle that has stumped our elders for decades."

Later, the scholars' efforts seem to work, as some of the runes on the structure start lighting up, slowly and sleepily at first, but gradually glowing faster. This stirs the Nix army surrounding the mounds, whose eyes begin glowing in unison with the runes. The Amberskin sentries stand at attention, fearing that the dragonkin may lose their fear and rush the encampment at any moment. There is a moment of tense silence while the undead army seems poised to strike, and Rysamora and the other sages frantically hurry to finish activating the runes. Then, something else stirs in the Nix army.

> You all stand there, your pulse pounding against your temples, as the dragonkin army stares you down with their expressionless, glowing eyes. Several Nix dragons fly above their heads in the thick mist.
>
> Then, from the rising vapors behind the undead warband comes an even larger skeletal dragon with a glowing blue-black halo pulsing along with the rune in its forehead. Many of the Amberskins seem numb or petrified with terror as the gargantuan skeletal monster tramples the immobile dragonkin in its path until it stands in front of the army.
>
> The other dragons gather behind this great dracolich as it raises one of its front claws and strikes the ground with a mighty blow. This must be one of Nixis' closer, mightier brood, the general of this deathless army. You feel a sudden, ghastly chill twisting in your chests and scratching at your minds and hear a cadaverous, hoarse voice boom inside your head: *"Okraskaros' blot!"*

Let the adventurers state their actions or intentions. Then, just as it seems the dracolich will order its forces to overwhelm the survivors, the tunnels around the mounds light up with a sickly bluish energy that slowly engulfs the Husks until it reaches the runed wall-like structure, and the earth boils and bursts in a sky-high eruption of rocks and gravel.

Below the devastation, the adventurers witness the verdigris shell of some sort of vehicle, long buried amid the Husks. It seems like the barge of a ship, built of dull metal with archaic decorations and emitting ghastly blue light from several points in its hull. Rysamora leaps to what seems to be the vessel's deck, while Tulemo and Linji help Vodgo aboard, surrounded by Nukkos and the few elite guards that remain alive. Then, Rysamora shouts for all who can board it to do so, and dozens of women, men, and children rush to comply.

At the same time, the runes in the heads of the undead light up with the same blemished blue energy, and the entire army breaks into a charge. As the adventurers run to board the strange vessel, they must face two **Nix'udjar dragonkin** on the back of two **Nix drakes.** If the party wins the fight, they can board the ship.

Once on board, Vodgo greets the party and, between coughs and wheezes, haltingly tells them that they have boarded what the Amberskins call the Warsled, a wondrous invention from a remote age that they believe was created by wizards and artificers unknown and long gone.

But they are still in serious trouble.

As the undead army rushes the amazing vehicle, you realize with a chill that it isn't moving. Rysamora sends Nukkos below deck to "get the spears" while she commands Atyan and her warriors to ready a line of arbalests hidden under tarps that are spread across the deck. She motions for you to help too.

"When the spears arrive," yells Rysamora, *"load one of them into one of the weapons, like this,"* Rysamora tells you. *"Then, pull those levers and point the weapon toward those creatures!"*

You notice how the bluish energy seems to keep running along certain rods and railings, and feel the vessel shake under your feet. However, it remains unmoving.

MAP 5.2: THE HUSKS

The Warsled

This ancient fortress-barge was created during an earlier era on Drakha. When a Valernian prisoner, a Nwoda sky dwarf, earned the Ehrlya's trust, she was allowed to design and build a Va'ra-powered ship, which she later used to escape captivity. Nobody knows what became of the Nwoda engineer afterward, but the ship's presence here hints at her horrible end. The fortress-barge has been buried since the great battle that devastated the region where the Catacomb Reaches now lie and has remained buried and forgotten for eons, until now.

The Arbalests

There are six arbalests mounted on the warsled's deck, which may be rotated in any direction. Each arbalest is a stationary ranged weapon that can be operated by a single creature. It takes one action to load the weapon and another action to aim and fire it.

The weapon has a range of 120/420 feet. As with most ranged weapons, add the Dexterity modifier of the creature firing the arbalest to the attack roll, but there is no applicable proficiency bonus. On a successful hit, an arbalest spear deals 2d6, plus the shooter's Dexterity modifier, piercing damage.

To get the ship moving, ask the adventurers for a DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) or Wisdom (Insight) check. Any character that helped the Amberskins examine the runes in the "wall" gains advantage on the check. Success reveals that the whole vessel is storage for raw magic or lifeforce, known as Vaala, and that, over the millennia, it became corrupted by the necromantic energies of the Catacomb Reaches.

To work, the ship needs to be "brought back to life." This means that the Va'ra crystal that powers it needs to be fed with a living being's lifeforce. A single living character must touch the crystal and release their Vaala into it. This causes the creature to gain two levels of exhaustion, which may not be recovered through rest while the ship exists, but they are considered to have "raised" the ship.

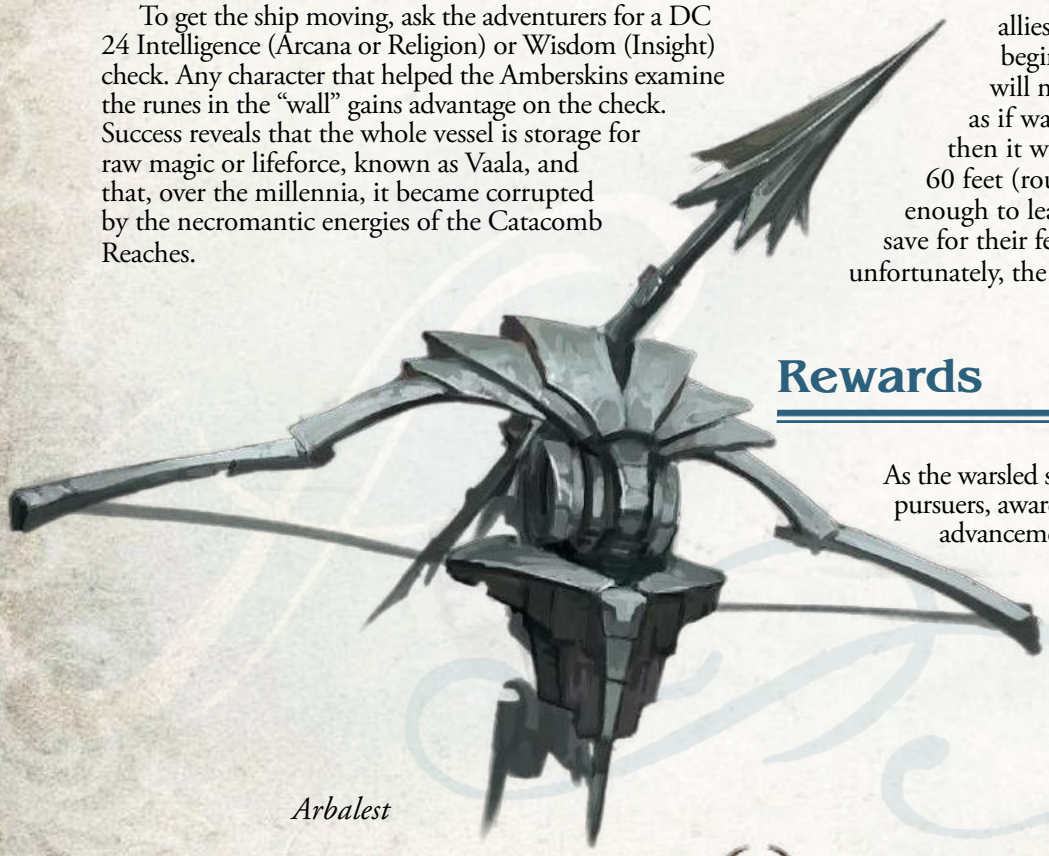
The ship may also be "raised" without exhaustion through a spell that can raise or animate a corpse, such as *animate dead, create undead, raise dead, heal, or resurrection.*

Regardless of the means used, the character that "raises" the ship gains Taint as described in the "Special Rules" section.

If the skill check fails, or if none of the adventurers can cast any such spell, another squad of Nix'udjar on flying mounts overtakes the sled. The player characters must face three **Nix'udjar dragonkin** and three **Nix drakes.** During the battle, Tulemo understands how the warsled works and sacrifices himself to power the ship, giving his Vaala to replenish the runes. This immediately kills and dessicates Tulemo's body but imbues the warsled with his life essence, making his spectral presence the undead "helmsman" of the ship.

If one of the party members "raises" the warsled, they establish a tether to the ship, as though they have resurrected another creature, as described in the "Special Rules" section. Whoever has a tether to the ship can control its movements as if they were the pilot, or allow another person to physically control the helm in their stead.

As soon as the party and their allies get the vessel moving, they can begin to steer it with relative ease. It will move very slowly at first, lurching as if waking up from a long sleep, but then it will achieve a sustained speed of 60 feet (roughly 12 mph), which is fast enough to leave the undead army behind, save for their few flying units, including, unfortunately, the dracolich.



Arbalest

Rewards

As the warsled speeds away from the adventurers' pursuers, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

LEGACY OF THE VOID

The heroes have successfully commandeered an ancestral draconic ship, allowing them and their Amberskin allies to escape the undead army on their heels. This part of the adventure is a race against the undead dragons in pursuit of the party and their magical floating ship. Let the adventurers take a short rest as the chapter begins.

The first enemies to reach the ship, the lightest units, are the few mounted dragonkin that survived the previous chapter. The player characters must face two **Nix'udjar dragonkin** mounted on two **Nix drakes.**

After this encounter, two larger Nix dragons, closely followed by the dracolich, maintain pursuit, not overtaking the warsled but very slowly, minute by minute, gaining on it. They can't use their breath weapons or melee attacks, as they remain roughly 100 feet away from the ship, but the party may attack them with weapons, abilities, and spells that can cover this range, including the ship's arbalests.

After 1 minute of pursuit, the dragons finally overtake the ship. Have the party fight one **Nix dragon** while Atyan, Nukkos, and their few surviving warriors keep the other one occupied. However, this time there aren't enough Amberskins to really threaten the second dragon, so if the adventurers defeat the first one, they'll again have to fight one **Nix dragon.** During the battle, both dragons alternate between flying alongside the warsled and landing on the deck to strike at the party. Atyan and Nukkos, while feisty, can do little against these undead monstrosities.

Let the adventurers take another short rest after these two battles, after which the dracolich itself catches up with the warsled and unleashes its fury on the hated Ehrlya ship and its occupants. The party must now face a **Nix dracolich.** If they defeat the creature, the dracolich's necromantic energies destabilize the ship.

As soon as the skeletal dragon crashes into the ground, you can almost feel its undying hatred, and the warsled is surrounded by a halo of black flame. In its death throes, the dracolich's remaining magic fuels the conductive railings and coils of the vessel, and with a jolt, it begins to accelerate. You can't steer it anymore.

But it seems the horror is only beginning, as you hear a piercing scream coming from below deck.

Atyan and Nukkos look at each other with painful concern. Nukkos runs below, but Atyan considers it more urgent to try and regain control of the ship. If one of the adventurers has a tether with the ship, it is now lost and cannot be regained. Then, a second scream comes from below, this one of shame and despair.

If the adventurers go below deck to check on the noise with Nukkos, they encounter an unexpectedly nightmarish scene. The lower deck is littered with corpses, including many of the tribe's children, sprawled on the floor, their skin raked and torn as if mauled by a rabid animal. Amid the carnage, Rysamora scolds Linji, shocked and disgusted, as she points a vicious-looking dagger at him. Vodgo lies on a mat in the corner, bleeding. If Tulemo is still alive, he is desperately trying to bleed Vodgo and cleanse his stomach. Nukkos looks on helplessly, his gaze fixed on his dead relatives.

"I only meant to keep him alive long enough!" Linji shouts over Rysamora's vicious scolding.

"By poisoning him with the vileness running under those monsters' hides? You idiot! No amount of healing magic can take the taint off him, and you knew it!"

Linji turns to see you, his eyes full of desperation and pleading. Rysamora follows his eyes and looks at you, livid.

"You! All of this is your fault! You brought this upon us! The Nix'udjar wouldn't have come if you untainted hadn't come along with your diplomacy nonsense!"

Nix Drake

MAP 5.3: THE WARSLED

As the adventurers face Rysamora, many of the wounded scream as the corpses on the floor begin to stir and jerk. Vodgo begins to convulse and spits black blood. Then, the ship bounces and shakes. Something's happening outside.

Any party members remaining on or returning to the upper deck see the ship ram through a low bone mound and down a rolling hill, leading to a valley full of bones of all kinds of dragon broods, their dragonkin armies, and even Valernian soldiers. At the center of the grisly, silent battlefield lies a huge, monolithic mausoleum, a massive rune glowing above its entrance—the same rune the player characters saw on all of the Nix dragons and dragonkin, the rune of Nixis.

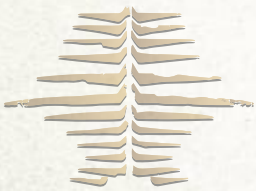
Then, the runic-sled crashes into yet another pile of bones, this one hiding a rocky formation underneath. The jarring impact causes the speeding ship to go vertical, catapulting everyone out before flipping over to one side and rolling several times before coming to a stop with an agonizing squeal of bent metals, crushed bones, and cracking boards. Everything turns black.

Rewards

As the darkness washes over them, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

IT THAT WAITS BEYOND

When the party wakes up, restore their spells, resources, and hit points as if they had taken a long rest. It is as if the necromantic power of this place has strengthened them.



You come to your senses, rattled and hurt. The pain is the first sign that you're alive. The second is the dust in your nose and throat. As you stumble to your feet, coughing, you have no doubt about it: You're alive.

But, perhaps, you're the only ones. Sprawled around the ancient sled's shattered form, impaled on broken, ancient bones or smashed against rocks, many of the tribe lost their lives in the crash. A few of them shamble across the crash site, addled, broken, or maimed. In shock and despair, they moan and weep and babble; their gazes lost, they wander, as if blind to what their tribe has been reduced to.

Then, they turn toward you with hungry madness in their eyes, and broken corpses begin to stir, to twitch, to crawl out of the wreckage…

In a horrid twist to their adventure, the party must face the Amberskins in the form of ravenous undead, cursed by the power of the Nix brood.

The Amberskins have become a horde of runecorpses, a type of rune-powered undead spawned by the taint of the Nix dragon brood. The adventurers must face a **runecorpse swarm** and a **runecorpse ruler**, which used to be Chief Vodgo. He spread the curse to the others through the dark magic administered by Linji. The swarm includes every woman, child, and man of the Amberskin tribe, including Atyan, Linji, Rysamora, and Nukkos.

If the party wins the battle, allow them to take a short rest. If any of them have Taint (see 'special rules'), they receive the benefits of a long rest instead. Investigating the corpses with a successful DC 24 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that they all had the taint of Nix dragon magic, even before Vodgo infected them with the runecorpse curse. That must have been what Rysamora meant when she called them "untainted."

A cavernous voice, the one that spoke inside their minds back at the Husks, begins calling to the party from inside the Great Mausoleum, beckoning them to enter. If the adventurers obey the voice, they encounter Nixis, the Veilbreaker, at her lair. If not, Nixis herself goes out to meet them.

> Ossarium is an endless waste of dead earth and gloomy skies. The terrain is almost covered with the bones—human, dragon, reptilian—of all the creatures that have come here and never left across countless ages. Here and there, clutches of rotting, blackened eggs appear among the bones in a cruel mockery of loving nests.
>
> And then the bones stir, move, and shake, and a humongous dragon skeleton rises before you. A deep, familiar voice, whispers inside your minds as it approaches, *"Welcome, treessspaaassseersss…"*

If the party speaks to Nixis, she explains that their coming here was her plan from the beginning:

Runecorpse swarm

"I was content with the deal with the Amberskins. Let them live in peace in return for the lifeforce of their dead. But then you came; you disrupted. The deal made no sense anymore, not with their plan to make peace, to bring others, to risk disagreement. They would want to break the deal. Vodgo said as much. So I harvested what was my due. And you… you have great power, and it is all mine by riiiiighhht…"

And then, without another word, she attacks.

The Fight with Nixis

Like the death that awaits everyone at the end, the dracolich was waiting at the end of your doomed trip, and now she spreads her full skeletal length ready to receive you.

Use map 5.4: Ossarium to run this encounter.

First Phase

The battle begins as Nixis finishes talking to the adventurers and rushes to devour them.

LAIR CONDITIONS

The battlefield is littered with corpses, and an oppressive feel permeates the area. The dark magic in the air is practically tangible.

Any creature with Taint must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw at the start of each of their turns or take 11 (2d10) necrotic damage and become Charmed by Nixis for the rest of that round.

THE FUMING CHASM

The jagged strait dividing the map from north to south is a bottomless chasm, varying between five and thirty feet wide, from which the fog seems to emanate and creep throughout the Great Mausoleum and out into Ossarium and the rest of the Catacomb Reaches.

MAP 5.4: OSSARIUM

It seems to physically pull at living beings with some magic force, making venturing across it an even more dangerous endeavor. To cross it, a creature will likely need to use magic or other effects that provide them the capabilities of flight or teleporting.

A creature can also attempt to cross the chasm and escape its pull by making a DC 23 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check as an action. The check gains an advantage if the character uses their full move as part of the jump. If the check succeeds, the creature reaches the other side of the chasm safely. If the check fails, the creature must succeed on a DC 23 Strength or Dexterity saving throw to grab the edge of the chasm or fall to certain death.

Nixis' Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

Nixis attacks the adventurers with no display of emotion, driven by her pure cold disdain of the living interlopers.

As soon as any party member takes an action targeting an egg clutch, Nixis spends her actions to attack that character.

Nixis has not yet summoned her undead horde by this point. Perhaps a single skeleton stirs, or a couple of limbs begin crawling toward her. But at this point, she fights the adventurers alone.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Two or more of the egg clutches (see "Nixis Exploits") have been destroyed.
- One of Nixis' body parts is broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, Nixis begins summoning her undead horde and casting wards to protect her eggs.

Second Phase

The battlefield starts filling up with Nixis' undead horde, and the air becomes thick with an evil sensation.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The bones across Ossarium shift, shaken from their rest. Then, the dead rise to fight you.

Nixis strengthens the necromantic aura pervading Ossarium. During this phase, the following conditions are active:

- All healing effects from abilities, spells, and similar sources are halved unless the target is in an area affected by protective magic, such as *death ward, globe of invulnerability, hallow, holy aura, or magic circle.*
- Nixis' undead horde (see the sidebar in her stat block at the end of this adventure) is now active and attacks.
- All attack rolls against egg clutches are made with disadvantage.
- Any creature with Taint must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw at the start of each of their turns or take 22 (4d10) necrotic damage and become Paralyzed until the start of their next turn.

Nixis' Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

Nixis' undead horde rises all around the battlefield and attacks, intent on slowing the party down or drawing their fire. Because of the undead horde's Swarm Area trait, if an adventurer tries to move toward Nixis or the eggs, this triggers an opportunity attack from the undead horde.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Five or more of the egg clutches have been destroyed.
- Three or more of Nixis' body parts are broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, Nixis begins to increase her necromantic aura further, empowering the horde and protecting her eggs.

Final Phase

The evil aura permeating the area becomes so oppressive that it makes some of the adventurers dizzy. The undead horde multiplies.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> More and more of the bones in Ossarium shift, stirred from their rest, until the massive horde threatens to overwhelm you. With mounting dread and growing weariness, you close ranks and prepare for an onslaught as a new wave of undead charges against you.

During this phase, the following conditions are active:

- All healing effects from abilities, spells, and similar sources are halved, even within the areas of effect of protective magic, and restoration spells no longer work on egg clutches.

- Any creatures that start their turn within 60 feet of an egg clutch take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.
- Any creature within 60 feet of an egg clutch suffers disadvantage on all of their ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws.
- Nixis' undead horde remains active and attacks.
- Any creature with Taint must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw at the start of each of their turns or lose 22 (4d10) points from their hit point maximum and become affected by Nixis as though she has successfully cast the *dominate person* spell on them until the start of their next turn. Nixis doesn't need to concentrate to maintain this effect.

Nixis' Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

Nixis' undead horde becomes so numerous and thick that the entire battlefield counts as difficult terrain.

Phase End

The encounter ends when Nixis is destroyed. This requires fulfilling one of the following conditions:

- All egg clutches have been destroyed.
- Five or more of Nixis' body parts are broken.

Conclusion

The last of the eerie lights inside of Nixis dies out, and the ancestral dracolich crumbles to the ground and shatters like a toppled statue. And just as their mistress did, each and every undead creature in the battlefield collapses as well, their animating force gone.

This will remain a cursed place for generations to come, the death that spread through it lingering for centuries, but it's no longer filled with such dark power. Now, it is just a dead, quiet place.

With Nixis' dark power finally defeated, the party may now reactivate the warsled and use it to return to the League and warn them that the Cleave, or the Catacomb Reaches in general, is not a good place for mortals to settle. Or perhaps, now that Nixis has fallen, it is.

NIXIS, THE VEILBREAKER

The darkest denizen of the Red Moon, the undead dragon Nixis oversees her own domain of bones and death, well away from the territory of the other azhurma. There, she plots and prepares the rituals necessary to breed her unnatural offspring: dragon hatchlings, undead from birth.

The fight with Nixis can be the hardest or the easiest in this collection, depending on how well prepared against the undead and necromancy your adventurers are.

Nixis Exploits

The following exploits can be used to take advantage of Nixis during the battle if the characters discover them.

Control of the Horde

Targeting Nixis' undead horde, once she has summoned it, may distract her temporarily. If Nixis' undead horde is destroyed, or a creature affects the horde with a harmful condition, Nixis immediately loses 2 actions from her current action pool.

Eggs of Power

Nixis' lair is littered with the eggs she has stolen from other dragons to perform her necromantic rituals. Nixis' egg clutches (AC 18; hp N × 20) are marked by large circles on map 5.4: Ossarium. Any creatures that begin their turn within five feet of the eggs take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Destroying these eggs severely weakens Nixis. A character may target one of the clutches with their attacks or spells. Any character that attacks or threatens an egg clutch becomes the target of Nixis' next attack.

The egg clutches have already become undead, but powerful restoring magic such as *greater restoration, resurrection,* or *heal* spells can reverse their state. If a character successfully targets an egg clutch with such an effect, the dragon eggs are restored to their pristine living condition. For the purposes of the battle against Nixis, this counts as destroying the egg clutch.

If an egg clutch is destroyed, Nixis immediately takes 21 (6d6) force damage to each of her body parts, and the runes on one randomly determined body part are disrupted until Nixis restores them.

Runes of Power

The body of Nixis is marked with runes that amplify her magical power and sustain her unlife. Each of Nixis' body parts has a specific set of runes protecting it.

If the runes on one of Nixis' body parts are disrupted through the erasure or destruction of a part of the writing, Nixis suffers disadvantage on her spell attack rolls until the end of her next turn, all saving throws against her spells gain advantage until the end of her next turn, and that body part loses its damage reduction until Nixis restores it.

A creature may specifically target a body part's runes by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the attack deals any damage after overcoming Nixis' damage reduction, the runes on that body part have been disrupted until Nixis restores them.

A creature that is within 5 feet of one of Nixis' body parts may also disrupt the runes on that body part as an action by succeeding on a DC 26 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check. If the check succeeds, the runes on the targeted body part are disrupted as above.

If the runes on four or more of Nixis' body parts are disrupted, all necrotic damage from Nixis' attacks and abilities, including her undead horde, is halved. If five or more of Nixis' body parts have their runes disrupted, all the costs of Nixis' special actions increase by one. These two effects persist until Nixis restores enough runes so that the conditions listed above are no longer met.

Weak Living Beings

Nixis' certainty that she is superior to living beings can be used to goad her into attacking a specific creature. Any creature may attempt a DC 22 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to draw Nixis' attention. If the check succeeds, Nixis will focus all of her attacks on that creature until her next upkeep.

NIXIS, THE VEILBREAKER

Gargantuan dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class see "Nixis' Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Nixis' Body Parts"
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	17 (+3)	23 (+6)	28 (+9)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +12, Con +15, Int +18
Skills Arcana +18, Deception +12, History +18, Perception +14, Persuasion +12, Religion +18
Damage Reduction 6
Damage Resistances cold, lightning, and necrotic
Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 24
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Arcane Runes. Nixis has runes embedded on her body that fuel her magical abilities. Disrupting these runes weakens Nixis (see "Nixis exploits" above).

Drakhan Resistance. Nixis has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the maze spell.

Innate Spellcasting. Nixis' innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 26, +18 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells at will, without requiring any components, once each per round, by spending the corresponding actions from her action pool.

0 actions: *cause fear, chill touch, false life, inflict wounds.*
1 action: *bestow curse, blindness/deafness, ray of enfeeblement, vampiric touch.*
2 actions: *blight, contagion.*
3 actions: *circle of death, eyebite, finger of death, harm, magic jar.*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Nixis fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Weapons. Nixis' weapon attacks are considered magical.

Nixis' Undead Horde. Nixis' Ossarium is littered with the bones of her past enemies, allies, and experiments. Starting when the battle enters its second phase (see "The Fight with Nixis" above), she can animate these bones with her mere presence. A massive swarm of undead remains active in the area, fighting for Nixis and attacking all of her enemies. The undead horde covers the entire battlefield, attacking as a single creature.

Nixis' Undead Horde

Gargantuan swarm of undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 12 (armor remnants)
Hit Points N × 88
Abilities Str 16 (+3), Dex 10 (+0), Con 10 (+0), Int 3 (–4), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 1 (–5)
Saving Throws Wis +1
Damage Resistances cold
Damage Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages –

Swarm Area. Nixis' undead horde occupies the whole battlefield and is adjacent to all grounded potential targets at the same time.

Undead Tactics. Guided by Nixis' central consciousness, the undead horde attacks as a single creature. Every attack from Nixis' undead horde is made with advantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Overwhelming Force. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., all chosen targets within the swarm's reach. *Hit:* 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage and 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.
Swarm. When Nixis' undead horde is at half its hit point maximum or lower, its melee weapon attack bonus is reduced to +5 and its damage is halved.

ACTIONS

Upkeep

During Nixis' upkeep, she replenishes her action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and she may take any of the following actions.

Combat Analysis (0 Actions). Two target creatures suffer disadvantage on all of their attack rolls against Nixis until her next upkeep.

Undead Horde (0 Actions). Nixis' presence causes undead creatures to rise from her Ossarium. Nixis' undead horde, if she has already summoned it, regains 21 (6d6) hit points. If Nixis' undead horde had been destroyed, it instead rises again with N × 21 (6d6) hit points.

Shake (1 Action). Nixis can shake all of her body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Nixis' body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw (DC according to body part) to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and becomes prone.

Restore (2 Actions). Nixis restores the disrupted runes on one of her body parts. The runes on that body part are no longer disrupted.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of her upkeeps, Nixis heals one body part that has not been reduced to 0 hit points. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum.

Melee Actions

Draining Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage and 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, plus Nixis regains 21 (6d6) hit points to one body part of her choice. Any creature mounted on Nixis' arms must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the arms' Shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake upkeep action.

Tail Lasso (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 20 ft. one target. *Hit:* 28 (6d6 + 7) slashing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 24). Any creature mounted on Nixis' tail must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake upkeep action. A creature that fails to escape the grapple on its next turn is thrown 30 feet away from Nixis, taking an extra 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and landing prone.

Wing Skewer (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 20 ft, one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) piercing and 7 (2d6) slashing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 24). If Nixis' wings receive 25 or more damage from a single source, any grappled creature is freed.

Draining Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 7) piercing damage and 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, plus Nixis regains 21 (6d6) hit points to one body part of her choice. Any creature mounted on Nixis' head must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's Shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake upkeep action.

Necrotic Drain (4 Actions). Nixis makes one Tail Lasso and two Wing Skewer attacks. After these attacks, each grappled target takes an additional 21 (6d6) necrotic damage, and Nixis recovers 21 (6d6) hit points to a body part of her choice for each grappled target. Any creature mounted on Nixis must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they're mounted on, as per the Shake upkeep action, unless they succeed on their saving throw from Nixis' Tail Lasso attack to remain mounted on her tail. Nixis must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps if she wishes to use this ability again.

Breath Weapons

Dragonfire (2 Actions). Nixis breathes fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a success.

Flaming Orb (2 Actions). Nixis breathes a 30-foot sphere of black flame. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) necrotic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a success. Necrotic resistance or immunity only apply to damage from this breath weapon if the target is also immune or resistant to fire. Nixis must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Death Cone (3 Actions). Nixis breathes toxic fumes in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw, taking 45 (10d8) necrotic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. For each creature that fails the save, Nixis regains 21 (6d6) hit points to a body part of her choice. Nixis must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Deathfire (5 Actions). Nixis emits a 100-foot radius cloud of blue-black methane fire and sulphur. The cloud spreads around corners. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw, taking 72 (16d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success. Necrotic immunity only prevents damage from this breath weapon if the target is also immune or resistant to fire. Nixis must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Special Actions

Dark Fumes (1 Action). Nixis summons magical darkness from her mouth in a 90-foot cone. Everything in the area is heavily obscured for all creatures except Nixis and her undead horde.

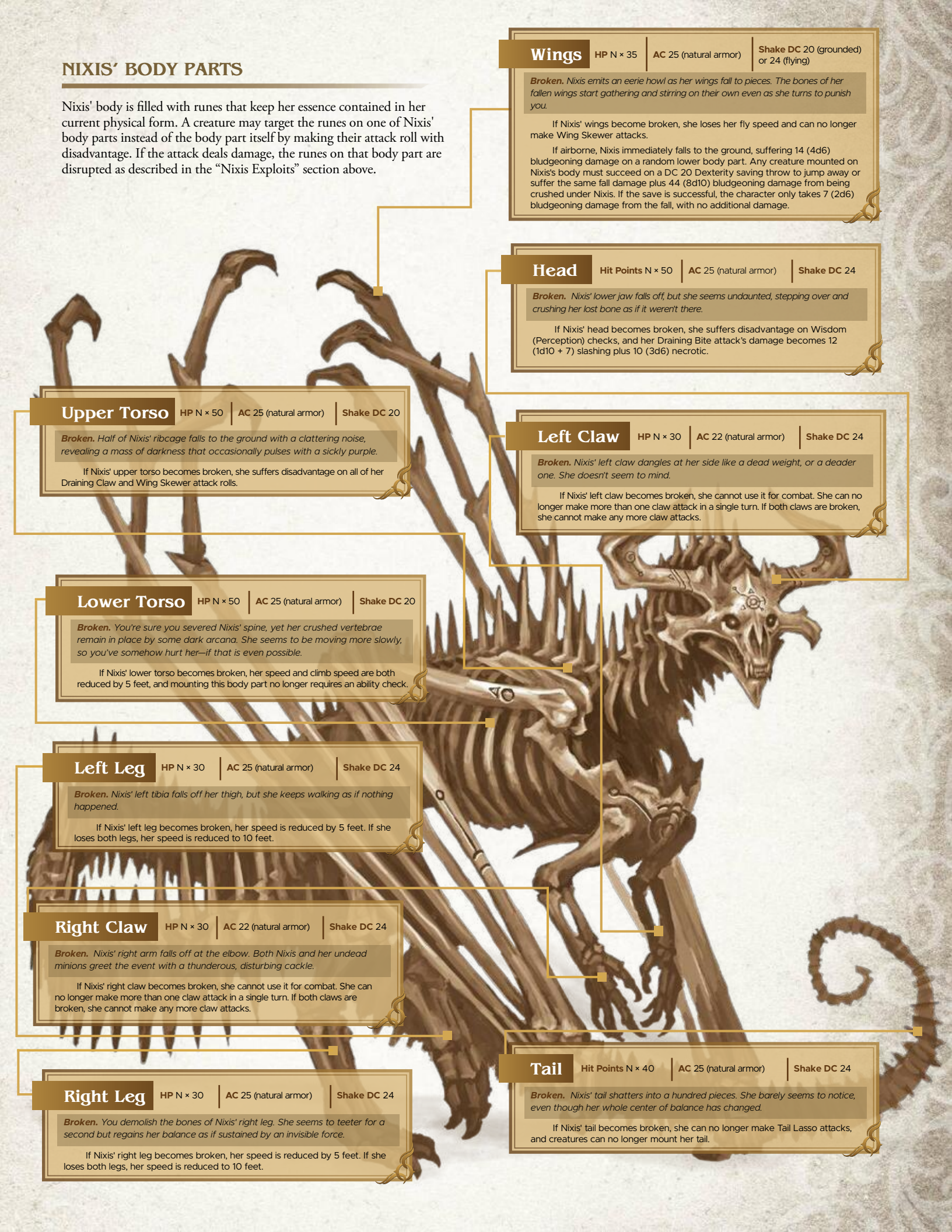
Life is Overrated (1 Action). A single living target within 90 feet of Nixis must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) necrotic damage and become poisoned until the end of the encounter. A creature may attempt the saving throw again at the start of every turn to end the condition on itself.

Weaken (3 Actions). Nixis makes a single Draining Bite attack, and, in addition to taking the damage dealt, the target's hit point maximum is also reduced by an amount equal to the total damage taken. Only an effect that cures disease can restore the target's maximum hit points.

Mistress of Death (6 Actions). Nixis summons her power to crush her opposition in a wave of negative energy. All living creatures within 100 feet of Nixis must make a DC 23 Constitution save or suffer 54 (12d8) necrotic damage, taking half as much damage on a success. For every creature that fails the save, Nixis's undead horde, if she has already summoned it, regains 42 (12d6) hit points. Nixis must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps to use this ability again.

NIXIS' BODY PARTS

Nixis' body is filled with runes that keep her essence contained in her current physical form. A creature may target the runes on one of Nixis' body parts instead of the body part itself by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the attack deals damage, the runes on that body part are disrupted as described in the "Nixis Exploits" section above.



Wings

HP N × 35 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20 (grounded) or 24 (flying)

Broken. *Nixis emits an eerie howl as her wings fall to pieces. The bones of her fallen wings start gathering and stirring on their own even as she turns to punish you.*

If Nixis' wings become broken, she loses her fly speed and can no longer make Wing Skewer attacks.

If airborne, Nixis immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Nixis's body must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Nixis. If the save is successful, the character only takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall, with no additional damage.

Head

Hit Points N × 50 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Nixis' lower jaw falls off, but she seems undaunted, stepping over and crushing her lost bone as if it weren't there.*

If Nixis' head becomes broken, she suffers disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, and her Draining Bite attack's damage becomes 12 (1d10 + 7) slashing plus 10 (3d6) necrotic.

Upper Torso

HP N × 50 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *Half of Nixis' ribcage falls to the ground with a clattering noise, revealing a mass of darkness that occasionally pulses with a sickly purple.*

If Nixis' upper torso becomes broken, she suffers disadvantage on all of her Draining Claw and Wing Skewer attack rolls.

Left Claw

HP N × 30 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Nixis' left claw dangles at her side like a dead weight, or a deader one. She doesn't seem to mind.*

If Nixis' left claw becomes broken, she cannot use it for combat. She can no longer make more than one claw attack in a single turn. If both claws are broken, she cannot make any more claw attacks.

Lower Torso

HP N × 50 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *You're sure you severed Nixis' spine, yet her crushed vertebrae remain in place by some dark arcana. She seems to be moving more slowly, so you've somehow hurt her—if that is even possible.*

If Nixis' lower torso becomes broken, her speed and climb speed are both reduced by 5 feet, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Left Leg

HP N × 30 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Nixis' left tibia falls off her thigh, but she keeps walking as if nothing happened.*

If Nixis' left leg becomes broken, her speed is reduced by 5 feet. If she loses both legs, her speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Right Claw

HP N × 30 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Nixis' right arm falls off at the elbow. Both Nixis and her undead minions greet the event with a thunderous, disturbing cackle.*

If Nixis' right claw becomes broken, she cannot use it for combat. She can no longer make more than one claw attack in a single turn. If both claws are broken, she cannot make any more claw attacks.

Tail

Hit Points N × 40 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Nixis' tail shatters into a hundred pieces. She barely seems to notice, even though her whole center of balance has changed.*

If Nixis' tail becomes broken, she can no longer make Tail Lasso attacks, and creatures can no longer mount her tail.

Right Leg

HP N × 30 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *You demolish the bones of Nixis' right leg. She seems to teeter for a second but regains her balance as if sustained by an invisible force.*

If Nixis' right leg becomes broken, her speed is reduced by 5 feet. If she loses both legs, her speed is reduced to 10 feet.

THE SCENT OF CREEPING DEATH

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

You will never see her coming. Damn, you will never HEAR her coming. The size of a mountain, the stealth of a breeze. You won't even realize the sands are shifting until they explode under you.

In fact, not many living people are even aware that she exists.'

—Taya, Nwoda hunter

The Shrilling Sands are dominated by fear, as is most of Drakha. Rawraxxa, the Apex Huntress, has claimed them as her hunting grounds, daring all other dragons and lesser beings to cross them at their own peril.

The adventurers are part of a caravan of escapees, desperately trying to reach the Orphans' Crags. Meanwhile, a crazed tribe of Exor dragonkin dogs their footsteps under Rawraxxa's orders.

Will the adventurers be able to survive the call of the hunt?

INTRODUCTION

The Scent of Creeping Death" is a gauntlet, plain and simple. It's intended as a taxing journey to reach what a group of escaped Valernians hope is a refuge from the grueling environment of Drakha and the merciless oppression of the dragons ruling over it.

As such, the adventure's tone is that of a frantic race across the desert dunes and low rocky hills, trying to lose both a dragonkin warband that is making every effort to capture as many Valernians as possible and an unseen enemy that continues to thin their own and their pursuers' numbers with each lightning fast strike.

While this adventure assumes the characters are captured Valernians on the Red Moon of Drakha, the background can be altered to adapt the story into an ongoing campaign.

Running the Adventure

"The Scent of Creeping Death" is an epic adventure meant for three to five player characters that will start at 17th level. During the course of the adventure, the player characters will advance to 20th level using milestones before engaging in the final battle against Rawraxxa, the azhurma dragon Lady of the hunt.

This adventure is set on Drakha, also known as the Red Moon, a world ruled by dragons and their kin. For more details on this setting, consult the "Drakha, the Red Moon" section at the start of this book.

The "Adventure Background" section below tells you everything you need to know to understand this adventure's immediate setting. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run, giving you a broad sense of the events involved and how they should unfold throughout the adventure.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.

The Shrilling Sands

This hostile desert expanse is Rawraxxa's undisputed domain and the Red Moon's largest sea of dunes, extending for millions of square leagues. The sands are broken up by rocky outcroppings, deep crevices, and low, jutting stone hills, which provide the only shade from the unyielding rays of the sun and shelter from the sudden sandstorms. Water is almost nonexistent in the Shrilling Sands, save for a few pools inside abandoned, wurm-dug tunnels underground.

Special Rules

Use the following special rules when running any adventure within the Shrilling Sands. These are intended to complement the special rules detailed in the "Magic on Drakha" section at the start of this book and supersede the standard 5e rules where relevant.

MAGIC IN THE SHRILLING SANDS

- Spells like *create food* or other effects that create any kind of nourishment simply don't work anywhere inside the Shrilling Sands. With Rawraxxa being the Apex Huntress and the whole of the Shrilling Sands being her uncontested domain, all food needs to be found or hunted down.
- Spells and effects that create plant life, such as *plant growth*, always create thorny, brambly, blackened plants with little to no fruit or water.

TRAVEL IN THE SHRILLING SANDS

- When consuming food rations, presume water intake as well. But each time a player character consumes a day's worth of rations while in the Shrilling Sands, they must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom (Survival) check or waste one additional day's worth of rations, if available, representing extra water they need to consume.
- If a player character does not consume a full day's worth of rations during each period of twenty-four hours they spend in the Shrilling Sands, they automatically gain two levels of exhaustion.
- Ability checks made to hunt or forage within the Shrilling Sands have a DC of 20 and are made with disadvantage. Furthermore, a successful check finds only enough food, such as grubs or small animals, or water, such as a shallow pond or a desert plant, for one character. This does not prevent any other bonus of modifiers to hunting or foraging in a desert environment.

PREDATORY INSTINCT

- Rawraxxa rewards predatory instinct. Whenever a player character in the Shrilling Sands succeeds on a Wisdom (Survival) check made with advantage or deals piercing or slashing damage with a weapon attack made with advantage, they gain Inspiration if they don't have it already.

Adventure Background

The adventurers are part of a caravan of Valernian captives, recently abducted to Drakha after the latest Red Moon incursion.

Captured by dragonkin and led through the desert to be sold to dragons, the prisoners are largely unfamiliar with the inhospitable and nightmarish landscape surrounding them. Some of the refugees have spoken of the Orphan's Crags, a place in the far west of the Shrilling Sands desert. According to rumor, the Crags are only easily accessible to humanoids and are, thus, a promising haven against dragons for anyone able to escape and survive the journey through the unforgiving desert.

Fortunately, the prisoner caravan carries a map detailing various routes across a stretch of the desert leading to "the Rock of the Motherless," which could be a reference to the Orphan's Crags. The map includes notes referring to preparations for "the culling soon to take place," but that is largely irrelevant to hopeful prisoners, who want to believe these Orphan's Crags really exist. Thus, they plan to escape, gather what little equipment and few weapons they can scavenge and head west across the sun-scorched lands.

Unknown to the hopeful Valernians, the Tavixxlud, a minor, desperate dragonkin tribe who need the lifeforce of Valernians to gain the respect of Exor dragons, are on the prowl… hunting for Valernians.

Adventure Overview

The adventurers and the rest of the prisoners are trying to reach a fabled safe haven, based solely on hearsay, some scribbled notes, and a map taken from their former captors. This hard journey will soon become a race against time and death itself, with a band of bloodthirsty Exor dragonkin trying to catch up with the adventurers and an unseen assailant thinning the numbers of both expeditions.

"The Scent of Creeping Death" is divided into four parts. In "Resolve," after introducing the characters to the adventure, the story begins with the party following a prisoner train across the deadly Shrilling Sands, the worst desert on Drakha. After joining a rebellion against their dragonkin captors, the player characters start on a journey across the Shrilling Sands to find the Orphan's Crags, the mythical refuge for Valernian captives. During this part of the adventure, the party and their companions fight against heat, hunger, dehydration and the first signs of a dragonkin tribe stalking them.

In "Gloom," after entering an underground mountain pass that they need to proceed through to continue westward, the escapees stumble upon a tribe of ancient, forgotten plant creatures, who worship a massive plant colony and are none too happy about interlopers, be them Valernian or dragonkin. Escaping these bizarre creatures, the party crosses chasms, finds hidden sources of water, and finally exits out onto the sands once more, only to fall for a dragonkin ambush.

"Rancor" sees the party frantically making its way to the next rocky outcropping marked on the Exor's map, trying to keep a good distance between them and their Exor pursuers and watching in horror as their own numbers are picked off one by one by the mysterious, hidden assailant that has been hounding them since the beginning.

Finally, the adventurers reach the Orphan's Crags, only to realize that it is not the presumed haven but a trap, a cruel lure, set up by Rawraxxa herself to drag the most gullible, desperate prey right into her lair… and her jaws. In the end, those inspired by the unforgiving fierceness of the Shrilling Sands find themselves overtaken by their predatory instinct, fighting themselves all the while the dragon continues to prey on them.

Adventure Hooks

If the adventurers come from an established campaign, you can begin the adventure by telling them how their characters were captured by dragons, who took them to their world as slaves.

A Red Moon shone in the sky over the player characters' homeworld, and then a cloud of dragons descended upon the land, killing and kidnapping at their leisure. The adventurers, among the few survivors, were taken to Drakha, the Red Moon, to begin a new life as the dragons' captives.

RESOLVE

The adventurers are part of a prisoners' caravan, trudging through the desert near the Shrilling Sands, the most desolate region of the Red Moon. Their captors, a group of dragonkin of the Exor brood, intend to sell some or all of their prisoners to the dragons living on the rocky hills around the desert.

After being captured during a dragon raid on their homeworld, the adventurers were brought to the Red Moon of Drakha, stripped of their possessions and marked as livestock for dragons to trade among themselves.

The party was part of a group of captured humanoids given to a caravan of dragonkin, who intend to sell them at the Exor mountain lairs on the other side of a wide desert expanse.

The trip has been only a couple of days, but it feels like months, walking the blistering sands under the scorching sun and the whip of dragonkin taskmasters.

The dry waste stretches beyond your sight on either side, as if death had no end, as if everything under the sun was bleached and lifeless. For hours, all you have heard has been dragging steps, yours and those of two dozen other captives, forced to march across the hard, searing sand.

The dragonkin leading the caravan—bipedal, humanoid-size dragons—don't torture you or treat you poorly; they just don't seem to regard you at all. Even as they lead you across the desert to reach one dragon domain or another, they barely look at you or register you as sentient beings.

Without warning, the caravan stops at the signal of the scarred dragonkin you have come to identify as the caravan master. You still haven't gotten used to the crazy cycles of this moon, where daylight and darkness each seem to go on for a fortnight. These lizards just seemed to know it was time to rest; there was never any clear indication at all.

The caravan leading the adventurers has stopped in the middle of the desert, beyond sight of any landmark, terrain feature, or—it seems—any shade. As it stops, dragonkin along the full train's length make sure that their captives sit down and are properly fed and hydrated and then begin pushing them to sleep, despite the scorching sunlight above.

During their time as captives, the party has identified a few members of the prisoner camp: A gentle giant named Byrtan is a fisherman and whaler from the snowy lands of Ysval back on his homeworld, and his tough companion Ymareen is a no-nonsense woman that other prisoners seem to fear and respect in equal measure. There are also Kirkos, a mountain man with a sly sidelong glance, and two young twins, named Uttah and Umlyr, that seem unfazed by captivity and convinced that they are some kind of nobility. More detailed descriptions can be found in appendix A, and you can refer to the "Handling the Survivor Band" section for more detailed information on how to run these NPCs throughout the adventure.

The Rebellion

While the caravan continues setting up camp, Kirkos, the sly-looking one, winks at them and soundlessly mouths the word "tonight." Then, he lets the dragonkin push him down and covers his eyes with a cloth to sleep, or to pretend to.

Inform the party that there were rumors that Byrtan was planning an escape, but they remained just that: rumors. However, as the caravan is now camping out of sight from any dragon settlement, it seems the perfect time to try and escape. But of course, "tonight" is a relative term in a world with ten straight days of sunlight.

Let the party declare their actions and intentions. If they meekly go to sleep, Kirkos sneaks up to them while the dragonkin guards aren't looking and gives them some kitchen knives and bone clubs, after which he nods to Byrtan and the prisoners rise as one against their dragonkin captors. If the adventurers resist or make a scene before going to sleep, the other prisoners, aware of Byrtan's plan, assume the time has come and viciously join in. The escape attempt begins early.

Regardless of how the adventurers reach this point, they must face four **Exor dragonkin** (assume the rest of the guards are busy with the other prisoners). The party is unarmed and unarmored; however, if they waited for Kirkos and Byrtan to give the signal, their stolen knives and clubs are treated as improvised weapons. The dragonkin did not bind them, so they can also cast any spells that don't require material components.

During the battle, it becomes obvious that the adventurers are by far the best fighters among the prisoners, and it's only their presence which turns the tables in their favor.

If they survive the fight, the prisoners win. It was costly, with many NPC casualties besides any wounded party members, and they are now stranded in the middle of the desert. But they won. Read the following as the encounter ends:

> The clanging and pained hissing subside. A few of the tents are smoking wrecks while an intense fire viciously burns in another. The sands are wet with blood, and bodies dot the space once occupied by the camp of your dragonkin captors. It cost many Valernian lives, but now you all are free.
>
> Many of the freed captives begin scattering, but Byrtan the Ysvalian gets a few back in line, arguing that there is strength in numbers, especially in these wastes.

After the battle, Byrtan sets the survivors—including the party if they want to help—to burying the bodies and picking what supplies they can carry, burning the remainder.

Besides Byrtan, Kirkos, and the adventurers, the survivors include Ymareen, the twins Uttah and Umlyr, and two others: Orlga, a medicine woman from the Tyverian Empire, and Vyris, a middle-aged, gender-neutral dancer and performer from the Primalian Mountains.

The spoils from the caravan include several days worth of general supplies, camping tools, and some priceless water. There are also several breastplates and spears, enough for each adventurer to take one of each, that used to belong to the dragonkin guards, two tarps that are ten feet long and five feet wide that can still be used as protection from the elements, and one *sandseeker javelin* (described in Appendix B). If the player characters owned any gear previously, they find it here too. The only thing they don't find, even if they had them already are rations. After sharing what food and water the caravan had among the survivors, there are only enough rations for five days per person.

Thus begins the adventure proper. The party has just escaped their dragonkin captors after a bloody battle, and they and the other survivors are ready to escape into the desert, two days into the Drakhan sunrise.

As the party deliberates what to do next, Byrtan mentions the Orphan's Crags:

> *"Old Gelma, light bless her, she mentioned this land where Valernians go to hide. It's supposed to be a place that dragons cannot reach, a hidden valley with narrow passes, unapproachable from the air. This will be our salvation. We can go there, hide, even establish ourselves there. They call it the Orphan's Crags, on account of everyone going there having been cut off from their homeworld."*

Then, Kirkos produces a map he and the healer Orlga found among the trunks and bags of the dragonkin. It details the area surrounding the camp with a clear note over the empty space representing the desert to the west, which reads "Claimed by She Who Stalks," and a circle denoted as "Rock of the Motherless" in a spot that should be six to eight days into the western desert, according to the dragonkin's notes on their current position.

The "Rock of the Motherless" reference, considering the group's current dire straits, is enough to hope that the map can actually lead them to the Orphan's Crags.

If the party searches the caravan remains on their own, a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals coded accounts of the dragonkin's prisoner train, indicating the location of dragon lairs in the vicinity—which the other captives agree to avoid—with some notes in Draconic referring to hopes of "finding somewhere to unload the cargo before the culling takes place."

The other survivors have decided to brave the desert and search for the Orphan's Crags, rather than returning to marked dragon territories. If the adventurers have doubts, Byrtan and Ymareen directly ask them to join the expedition. They are the best and most skillful in the group: "We honestly can't dream of succeeding without you." If necessary, Byrtan offers the party members power and leadership, as they cannot offer material rewards, once the group arrives safely at the Crags.

Once the player characters are, hopefully, convinced to travel with the survivors, the actual adventure begins. Keep track of each day the adventurers spend traveling. They should reach the "Rock of the Motherless" within the week, that is, before nightfall in Drakhan time. Refer to the "Special Rules" section at the beginning of this adventure for guidelines regarding travel and survival across the Shrilling Sands.

Handling the Survivor Band

This adventure assumes the player characters tag along with seven NPCs, with their own personalities and skills, during most of their journey. However, handling combat can become a chore with seven extra individual combatants in every fight, not to mention lopsided in the party's favor (although the NPCs' stats are intentionally low for this reason).

Thus, in every encounter during the adventure, you should assume that the listed number of enemies includes **only those faced by the player characters** and that the NPCs accompanying them are fighting their own, much smaller group of enemies "off screen."

You may describe the NPCs fighting their own separate battle a few feet away or just cheering the adventurers on, conveniently outside of the party's and their opponents' ranges and areas of effect, while not having to keep a record of their actions, hit points, or other such data. In every encounter, it is assumed that, if the player characters survive their encounter, the NPCs also survive theirs.

After each battle, describe how the NPCs only survived thanks to the party's intervention. Choose two or three NPCs to display grievous wounds from the battle, having lost 11 (2d10) hit points each, so that they feel like vulnerable companions, who need the party's protection to remain alive.

If this approach is too simplifying or unbelievable for you, and you would rather handle the NPCs as part of the party during encounters, simply have them act by the player characters' side on the same combat grid but impose disadvantage on their attack rolls so that they don't create an imbalance in the adventurers' favor.

Byrtan

Alternatively, you can declare them to be non-combatants and assume that they make the player characters do all the fighting. They tried to fight for their freedom in the caravan rebellion, but there's a reason they survived: Others gave their lives to protect them.

The NPCs

The Valernian survivors all hail from the northern regions of Valerna, mainly Ysval and Tyverian Primaliani settlements. They are desperate to reach the safety of the Orphan's Crags and dead set on not stopping until they do, no matter what.

The stats provided in herein assume improvised or scavenged weapons and armor of low quality. Change them accordingly if the party provides them with better equipment.

Ymareen

BYRTAN

An Ysvalian fisherman whose burly size belies his kind heart, Byrtan was trained as a whaler in his younger years, but he soon found that he didn't have the heart to hunt and settled for catching smaller fish.

BYRTAN

NG male human (Ysvalian)

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 32
Attack +5 to hit, 2d6 + 2 piercing damage

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15	12	15	11	15	15

YMAREEN

A feisty Ysvalian woman reputed to be the best bare knuckle fighter of her fjord, Ymareen is mostly cool headed but will take no abuse from anyone, and she is nothing if not determined.

YMAREEN

N female human (Ysvalian)

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 27
Attack +5 to hit, 1d6 + 2 bludgeoning damage

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14	13	13	12	13	13

KIRKOS

Kirkos is a Primalian nationalist, categorizing his loyalties as "Primalian first, Tyverian only if vampyri are within earshot." He is selfish and opportunistic, a "weasel of an individual" according to his fellow escapees, but as one of the mountain folk, he's quite adept at finding caves and safe passage through rocky heights. "I'll lead, and you may follow… if you can."

KIRKOS

CN male human (Primalian)

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 27
Attack +5 to hit, 1d8 + 2 piercing damage

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13	15	13	13	15	9

ORLGA

A frail, thin pint halfling "hospitalier," Orlga is an expert in first-aid medicine and can resort to low-level healing spells when things go so awry that simple bandaging won't do.

ORLGA

NG female halfling (Ysvalian)

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 22

Attack +1 to hit, 1d6 + 1 piercing damage

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7	13	11	11	16	10

Spells *cure wounds* 1/day (3d8 + 3)

UTTAH AND UMLYR

Teenage Tyverian twins, Uttah and Umlyr have a fixation on becoming nobles of their realm, as one of their ancestors was the head of a house that dissolved when it was assimilated by House Radjekul long ago. They are fiercely loyal to each other and anyone who comes to their aid when they are in great danger.

UTTAH AND UMLYR

LE female human (Tyverian), LE male human (Tyverian)

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 22 each

Attack +5 to hit, 1d8 + 2 piercing damage

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11	15	11	11	9	12

VYRIS

The oldest member of the band, Vyris is neither man nor woman but both at once, and they used this to become the most reputed Skol performer across the Ysvalian southern borders, as well as in more than a few of the "uncouth Primaliani homesteads."

VYRIS

N nonbinary human (Ysvalian)

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22

Attack +5 to hit, 1d8 + 2 slashing damage

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11	14	11	13	15	15

Cantrips *mage hand, prestidigitation, vicious mockery* (save DC 13) at will.

Tactics

Byrtan and Ymareen are frontline fighters, but Byrtan will hold his ground to allow Ymareen to perform necessary tasks such as bandaging allies or rescuing captives. Orlga is a support and healing character, only fighting when forced to. Vyris, Uttah, and Umlyr specialize in ranged attacks and harassing enemies. Kirkos prefers to stay out of sight, striking only when he has advantage and trying not to be a target.

Uttah and Umlyr

MAP 6.1: THE OUTCROPPING

Day 1

The adventure proper begins as the expedition enters the desolate wastes to the west, unsure of their success but steeled and gritty. After a few hours' march, the scouts, either the twins or any player character that has volunteered for the task, notice a rocky outcropping ahead, which should provide shelter or, at least, a bit of shade.

A half-mile before reaching the outcropping, however, the party notices a distant rumbling, a mix of wind ululating as it cuts through the rocks and the hissing of sand in the distance. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check recognizes these as the signs of a coming sandstorm. Byrtan and the others make a run for the outcropping, yelling for the party to do the same.

As the ululating wind grows louder, the adventurers finally reach the rock formation, which features a natural path between two irregular stone walls, ideal to hide in. The problem is that there is already someone there: a band of nine **Exor dragonkin** scouts who were also trying to hide from the sandstorm. Although they belong to the same brood, they have no association with the party's former captors, but they attack anyway, for unsupervised Valernians must be subdued or killed on sight.

If the fight goes on for 1 minute or more, the sandstorm hits. Every combatant, dragonkin and player character alike, must spend their next action to find shelter behind a rock wall, or else take 9 (2d8) fire damage plus 9 (2d8) piercing damage at the start of their turn for each round that they remain in the open.Furthermore, any non-dragon creature that takes damage from the Drakhan sandstorm must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or become Blinded for 1 round.

If the party survives the fight, they notice the sandstorm increases its intensity. Read the following aloud:

> Without warning, a massive, undefined form appears nearby, shadowed amidst the scorching winds. You can hear the muffled crunch of bones and then… silence.

But, when the storm lifts, there's nothing there, except for the remaining maimed bodies of the dead. Some are gone, however, as if vanished into thin air, and some show marks that something large and vicious ripped them to shreds quickly and ruthlessly. There are no other marks or tracks to follow or identify whatever did this.

If the party searches the remaining dragonkin's bodies, they find only three flint blades. Everything else was smashed to bits by the mysterious, colossal thing in the dust storm. The dragonkin's bodies shared a mark, a rune inscribed on each their left shoulders with the Draconic word *Tavixxlud*, meaning "culling."

Vyris, the old performer, mentions that they once heard the other prisoners talk about how the Exor dragonkin formed hunting bands and tested their skill against each other, with the best hunters and stalkers earning their dragons' favor. This mark must have been the one distinguishing this "hunting band."

The adventurers may take a long rest by the shade of the great rocks, or advance for a few more hours and take it later on the open. Regardless, the rest of the day passes without incident.

Day 2

After several hours of trudging across the dry sands, the party comes across a muddy water hole. The visible water seems barely enough for a single creature's rations for one day; however, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check can extract enough water for the whole party to gain one day's worth of rations.

Any spell, effect, or ability used to detect lifeforms during this day reveals that there are no living creatures nearby, but the party senses that there is something watching them, be it by gut feeling, trails of hidden magic, or their neck hairs rising. The nature of this presence cannot be determined by normal or magical means; the party senses only that it's there and that it follows.

> A few hours later, you notice bleached bones in the distance. As you walk nearer, you confirm these are dragon skeletons.

A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine or Survival) check confirms that the dragons were between young and adult age, and they killed each other with relatively few blows.

The skeletons offer decent shade for a long rest. However, if the adventurers do rest by the bones, they attract a flight of seven **dragonpeckers,** which fall upon them with relish for the unexpected meal. The dragonpeckers attack while the party is sleeping, so they gain surprise and, perhaps, even a few attacks on helpless targets, unless the party has a guard or an alarm system.

The meat of a single dragonpecker is enough for one day of rations, or two days with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check.

Day 3

After leaving the bleached bones and continuing west for a few hours, the adventurers find some tracks in the sand. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check confirms that the tracks belong to large, powerful creatures, smaller than dragons and probably herbivorous but heavy and bulky. Following the tracks requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check and leads the party to two **scalehorns**, aggressive and territorial desert creatures that attack anything that comes close.

The body of one scalehorn yields enough meat and blood (to drink) for five days of rations. A player character may pick the cuts and salt and dry the meat with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check, doubling the obtained days of rations to ten, or twenty for both scalehorns.

Later during the same day, the party notices a disturbance in the sand about 300 meters behind them. It's like a sand wave or something massive burrowing below. A ton of sand shifts like a living mountain and then levels again, with no other sign of life. Whatever caused it, it's gone. Or so it seems.

> Shortly afterward, you come across what seems to be a large boulder in the distance. As you approach, you notice it is actually a large creature, lying down in the sands. You gradually realize that it's an ancient Exor dragon… and it is dying.

If the adventurers attack the **ancient Exor dragon,** it defends itself, but it has only 111 hit points and is restrained during the entire battle, due to its wounded state.

If they heal the dragon, it shows its thanks by attacking all the same. Any healing removes the restrained condition and restores as many hit points as determined by the healing effect.

If the dragon is dying and the party approaches peacefully, it talks to them. Let them conduct the conversation and ask questions as they wish. The dying dragon's name is Axamathys, and he was deemed unfit to hunt beside Rawraxxa a few days ago. He's been left to die a slow death by starvation in the desert. He doesn't share any information with the adventurers about the Orphan's Crags or Rawraxxa, but he eagerly mocks them for seeking the "Rock of the Motherless."

As they converse with Axamathys, read from the excerpts below as parts of the dying dragon's replies.

> - *"Keh… heh… heh… hekkkKKh… And here is yet another brave band of… *hakh* morsels, daring the wastes for their— heh hek, their part in the cycle of life and death."*
> - *"Could I move, I would kill you for blocking the sun… But come closer, and I'll give you the honor of being— being my— my last meal, heh heh hekkk…"*
> - *"What happened to me? Heh heh hekh, that's good. What happened to me? She happened. I was found wanting and left to dry. Not even worth the killing blow. Come closer; I'll show you."*
> - *"The Rock of the Motherl… Hah hah heh heh keh keh kekh!"*

If the party survives the encounter with Axamathys, they may continue west.

After their next long rest, the party encounters the underground mountain pass marked in the Exor dragonkin's notes. According to the map, passing under these mountains should lead the group to the vicinity of the Orphan's Crags. There is a dark entrance into the mountain amidst a valley of crags and rocks.

Rewards

Upon entering the cavern, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

GLOOM

The party has entered an underground cave network below the Shrilling Sands. They must cross it to come out safely into the last stretch toward the Orphan's Crags. The Exor's map doesn't show what's inside the tunnels or how to reach the exit on the other side; that's up to the party.

> The first thing you feel is humidity. Ancient humidity. Then, the stagnant air, which compared with the dry, windy landscape you're leaving behind, feels like a dunk in cold, filthy water. Finally, the dizziness, as you can almost feel your pupils expanding to adjust to the sudden, sunless darkness.
>
> As you advance into these dark tunnels, you realize how silent the sands were. Here, every step makes an echo, and in time you perceive even the far drip of underground water sources.
>
> Water. There's water here, somewhere.
>
> But there's another smell. Something musty, unhealthy. Something older.

The Mountain Pass Tunnels

The tunnels have no sources of light. So the adventurers need torches, lanterns, light-casting spells, or darkvision, or else they will wander through blinded. All of the tunnels also have a tendency to slope downward, almost imperceptibly, meaning the more one advances, the deeper underground one goes.

Use the map 6.2: **The Mountain Pass Tunnels** to guide the party through this area.

MAP 6.2: THE MOUNTAIN PASS TUNNELS

A. Entrance

This tunnel is a marked, sloping descent of irregular cavern rock.

> You descend into the dark tunnels, helping yourselves along with hands and feet. Soon, you have gone far enough underground that the scorching light from outside is but a dim reflection, and all you can hear is the echo of your footsteps.

By analyzing the type of soil and erosion marks on the rocks, a character may attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to conclude that there is water somewhere in these tunnels.

B. Old Bones

This small cave is a few feet below the entrance tunnels, requiring a small drop down to enter.

> Further down, amid columns of falling sand, there's a low drop into a small grotto.
>
> There, you see old, broken crates and cracked, scattered leather packets.

This smallish cave apparently served as a stop for Valernian escapees and dragonkin smugglers, as there are easily recognizable signs of both species' presence. Still, it looks like it has been long abandoned.

There is nothing useful among the broken tools, save for a bone marked with some Valernian engraved in Ysvalian sea-signs. The bone has a crude map of the underground tunnels, marking the exit with an X and noting a "dangerous area" in the middle. The exit includes a note in the Common tongue: "From here, mild dunes for five days on a locked rudder until, in the horizon, rises the Rock of Mothers Lost."

C. Crossroads

> This large cave has several tunnels coming out of it. You hear strange, unidentified sounds in the tunnels' echo.

If the adventurers have not taken a long rest in a while, suggest this cave as a suitable place to do so, with defensible exits and dry spaces for bedrolls and lights.

Whether they set up camp or not, they must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check, or else they draw **4 mydru** from the surrounding areas, which approach stealthily in turn. The party needs a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the creeping mydru.

D. Mydru Guard Posts

> From a perch on the wall above you peers a small group of large humanoids, their greyish, slumped forms covered with thorns and vines. They grunt among themselves with surprisingly shrill voices, considering their brutish frames.

These points are sentry posts for the tunnels' **mydru** plant-folk tribe. There are four mydru at each guard post, waiting on ledges over the tunnels for anyone to approach from below, ready to attack the intruders or run back to area E to warn the tribe. The mydru guards stand some 20 feet above ground level, requiring a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check to climb to their position.

If the party approaches the cave stealthily, a successful DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check allows them to spot the guards and leave unnoticed. Otherwise, the mydru attack.

After the first round of combat, one of the mydru emits a cloud of yellowish spores which quickly spread across the air. This is the mydru alarm system, which summons another four **mydru** to the cave after 1 minute.

E. Mydru Main Cave

> This vast, irregular cavern has many stalagmite-filled levels, slopes, and platforms, and its various corners, hollows, and cavities are filled with beds of thorns and refuse. You can perceive dozens of shapes shuffling around, just out of your sight range.

This cave is where most of the mydru population in the Mountain Pass Tunnels lives and gathers. Like the creatures from the Shrilling Sands above them, they are ruthless and voracious, living by Rawraxxa's rules of kill or be killed and attacking anything that moves.

If the adventurers succeed at a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check, they may pass by the cavern unnoticed. Otherwise, they must fight three **mydru,** with an additional three **mydru** arriving to fight every minute until the party is killed or flees.

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals five **Exor dragonkin** captives in area Ea, tied up with the mydru's thorny vines. Approaching these captives requires an additional Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid drawing the mydru's attention. Freeing them requires hacking at the vines, which needs no check but takes about one minute.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party manage to escape with the prisoners, the dragonkin will not join their expedition beyond area E, as joining forces with prey breaks Rawraxxa's law, but they will reward their saviors with the following information:

> We are of the Tavixxlud, the culling tribe. We roam the path to the Motherless Rock, to hunt the scaleless. The scaleless sometimes try to reach the Rock. We hunt them for sport and for respect. Rawraxxa teaches respect: respect for strength, respect for the kill.
>
> Our tribe waits for Valernians that come out the other side of the pass. They will wait for you. They will hunt you down. You will not reach the rock alive. We of the Tavixxlud are the strongest. Our brethren will slay you when you surface again.
>
> We hope you survive the tunnels. We hope to meet you back at the surface. We hope to hunt you proper.

The dragonkin don't say anything about the Orphan's Crags proper. They don't know what's beyond the "Rock of the Motherless." In any event, they are sure that their tribe will hunt the party down as soon as they surface again and are not afraid to boast as much.

Despite being thankful for their rescue, no amount of convincing will make the dragonkin join the group, but they defend themselves if attacked.

F. Underlake

> You come to a ledge from which you can see an underground lake, some 30 feet below. The climb down looks easy enough.

This underground lake serves as the mydru's lifeline and the source of many underground streams in these mountains, which sustain the massive worms and burrowing insects that in turn feed and hydrate larger prey on the surface.

If the adventurers approach the lakeshore, they must fight two **salt stalkers** that lurk in the cave, fed and trained by the mydru to guard their water against dragonkin and other intruders.

The water of this lake has become stagnant and contaminated with the rotting vegetal refuse of the mydru, making it unsafe to drink. Anyone that tries to drink from this water must make a successful DC 23 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until their next short rest. For this reason, water taken from this lake does not add to the party's rations.

Exor dragonkin

G. Mydru Witch

Contrary to what you've encountered so far while exploring these tunnels, this cave requires you to ascend rather than descend to approach the entrance. The pungent, dry fumes of unknown fungal or plant matter reach you and even sting your eyes before you reach the cave itself.

This is where the witch of the mydru tribe lives. If the party managed to cross area E without raising the alarm, they find the witch here, unaware of their presence. If it notices the adventurers, it attacks immediately. They will have to then fight the **mydru witch** and three **weedwraiths.**

If the adventurers let their presence be known in area E, the witch has already left for area H to prepare against the interlopers.

The cave's walls are lined with shriveling, thorny vines. There are niches carved in the stone, containing a wide variety of dried plant-based components, including both plant and fungal concoctions, poisons, and dusts. Any of these reagents may be used, at your discretion, as a component or focus for druid or ranger spells.

H. Ritual Cave

This chamber is a crude altar, where the mydru commune with the Root, the colony that gives them life and nourishment. Only the central platform and the bridge leading to it are at ground level; the rest is a pit some 100 feet deep, with jagged rocks at the bottom.

You enter another large cavern, with both the floor and ceiling equally distant from the entrance and filled with sharp rock formations.

There's a high natural platform at the center of the chamber, with a crude stone bridge spanning the hundred-foot-deep abyss between it and the entrance. What seems to be a gnarled tree or gigantic plant sprouts from the platform.

The Root is a colony of thousands of desert plants which grew and clustered underground, far from the dry surface of the Shrilling Sands, and gained sentience through the millennia, creating a vast network of tendrils and stems beneath the soil.

The mydru believe their people come from the Root and worship it as their all-encompassing ancestor. However, they fear this chamber and steer clear of it, save for their witch, who conducts the sacrifices and communes with the Root.

From the platform at the far end of the bridge sprouts a clump of black, thorny vines, roughly twelve feet tall. From the vines hang the bodies of several creatures—dragonkin, humanoid, desert beasts, and other unidentified carcasses—all offered as sacrifice or food to the Root. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine or Perception) check reveals that one of the victims, an Exor dragonkin, is still alive.

If the adventurers were seen while crossing area E, the mydru witch is here, beseeching the Root for succor.

Salt Stalker

As soon as the adventurers approach the bridge, the witch summons the Root for aid, causing it to pierce the walls and ground of the cave, reaching out for intruders everywhere inside and filling up the chasm under the bridge with a writhing mass of coiling stalks and thorns.

The party must fight the **mydru witch,** plus six **weedwraiths**. In addition, at the start of each of their turns, every party member must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d6) piercing damage from the Root's vines and thorns writhing everywhere. These vines stop, receding back into the rock walls again, if the witch is defeated or if the clump of vines on the far platform is destroyed (AC 22; hp 135; lightning immunity, bludgeoning resistance, fire vulnerability).

If the party left area E unnoticed, they find this cave empty, and the Root is dormant. The adventurers may even destroy the root clump on the platform without the Root resisting.

If the adventurers cut the dying dragonkin down from the vines, it feebly gives this warning: "Valernians… don't return… to the surface… Hide… Hide deep… The culling has been ordained… It's a trap… It's all a traaap…" At which point the prisoner dies or, if the adventurers heal it, falls unconscious. If saved and questioned further, the dragonkin knows only the following:

- Rawraxxa set the Tavixxlud dragonkin after the party.
- She has sent one of her dragonkin tribes after every party and individual that sets out west toward the Orphan's Crags.
- None have survived. Rawraxxa gets every last one in the end.
- Rawraxxa does this for sport. She uses the dragonkin harriers to rattle the prey, to test her victims and determine whether they are worthy of her.
- Nobody has been proven worthy of Rawraxxa before. They all die at the hands of dragonkin hunters, or the desert itself, before reaching the Crags.
- But if Rawraxxa deems prey worthy, if she joins the hunt, then whoever tries to reach the Rock of the Lost Mothers will have to face the Apex Predator herself.

If asked their thoughts on this, the NPCs accompanying the party, especially Byrtan and Ymareen, remain steadfast in their goal to reach the Orphan's Crags or die trying, for what other hope is there for Valernians on this forsaken moon?

I. Chasm

This chasm is the only place where it is possible to cross the great underground canyon that cuts through the tunnels.

> You come across a wide, gaping chasm. You'll have to climb, or fly, to go on.

The underground canyon is about 160 feet deep and 50 feet wide. The wall is irregular enough that climbing presents no challenge, but it's slow and arduous work, requiring about 10 minutes to climb down one canyon face and 20 to climb up the other. A character may climb at a faster pace (half their normal speed) by succeeding on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check for each chasm wall, but if the check fails, the character falls mid-climb from a height of eighty feet, taking 28 (8d6) bludgeoning damage.

If the party revealed themselves to the mydru back at area E or killed the mydru witch, there's a band of vengeful mydru on their heels; if the adventurers don't climb down and out the Chasm quickly, the mydru catch up with them. When the party is halfway down the first canyon wall, twelve **mydru** raiders arrive. Immediately, four begin making ranged attacks at the adventurers from above while four climb down the canyon face, attempting to converge on the party from all directions as they climb, and the remaining four climb all the way down the wall at top speed and wait for the party at the bottom of the chasm.

While climbing, a character has disadvantage on all weapon attack rolls and Strength and Dexterity checks and cannot use two-handed tools or weapons. They may climb a maximum of 10 feet up, down, or sideways during their move, and they may not Dash or Disengage. A character may attempt a DC 19 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to move their full speed during their turn, falling off the chasm wall on a failed check.

A character that uses any spell or effect that allows them to cross the chasm through the air risks coming across underground gas pockets from cracks in the cave ceiling, roughly at the height of the chasm's ledges. A successful DC 21 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check allows a character to notice the gas pockets before crossing.

A character that wants to fly or otherwise travel through the air across the chasm and doesn't specifically declare that they are flying low must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw against the poisonous gas or fall unconscious mid-flight, potentially ending their flying effect and causing them to plummet the entire 160 feet down to the chasm floor.

Any player character that successfully crosses the chasm by climbing down one side and up the other must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion for the grueling effort.

J. Stream

This small underground creek comes down from the lake in area F, which in turn is sourced from the springs at the top of these mountains.

You come across a small, winding stream carrying what seems to be clear and fresh water, running some 60 feet below your position.

Being far enough away from the mydru's rituals, the water in this stream is clean and safe to drink, but climbing down the slippery rocks here requires a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. A failure causes the creature to fall, taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage as the stream partially cushions the fall.

Vyris

Any character that manages to reach the stream may fill their canteen and other containers with clear drinking water, effectively gaining two days of rations.

K. Exit Tunnel

This wide passage leads out of the tunnels and back to the scorching, dry Shrilling Sands. The sunlight shining through becomes blinding long before approaching the exit itself.

"There!" Kirkos shouts back at you, his voice broken and panting with excitement. "We're almost out… of these damned… tunnels!"

Mustering your strength, you make your way past the rocks and see the exit into the bright daylight reflected by the red sands of the western desert.

"At last," Ymareen mutters, wheezing. "…Ahh, perhaps we should not celebrate getting back out there, right?"

The last stretch of the tunnel is a narrow pass under the open sky with high cliff walls, just wide enough for two humanoids to walk abreast.

A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that there's an ambush of thirteen **Exor dragonkin** waiting for the party just outside the tunnels. Let the payers decide how to handle the situation, but if they wait more than 10 minutes before leaving the tunnels, a group of eight **mydru** find them and run at them from behind as the dragonkin cut off their advance.

If the adventurers leave the tunnels or are attacked by the mydru, the dragonkin attack them from the outside. The pass doesn't allow for more than four Medium creatures to engage the party in melee, two from the front and two from behind, and the other attackers cluster behind their companions, causing ranged attacks to be made at disadvantage because of the cluttered, cramped fighting conditions.

If the adventurers survive this battle, they may finally come out into the desert again, ready to continue their journey toward the fabled Orphan's Crags.

Rewards

Returning to the Shrilling Sands marks a milestone in the adventure. Award all player characters an advancement to their next level.

RANCOR

The party and their companions have returned to the desert for the last part of their journey to the Orphan's Crags, with a tribe of Exor dragonkin on the warpath behind them. This last part of the adventure is a race for survival against both their pursuers and the instigator of the hunt, Rawraxxa herself.

The Sea of Dunes

As the party walks out into the sun again, having defeated the dragonkin in ambush outside the tunnels, they have a moment to take a breather and read the map. According to the dragonkin's notes, they have reached the "Sea of Dunes" mentioned on the map and should be a few days away from the entrance to the valley marked as the "Rock of the Motherless," hopefully another name for the fabled Orphan's Crags.

While Byrtan and the adventurers read the map, the Tyverian twins Umlyr and Uttah, if they are still alive, advance a bit to scout the expanse ahead. Read the following aloud as the party studies the map:

> Then there's a blast of sand, flying into the sky and falling back on the ground, accompanied by a deep, low growl. And where Umlyr and Uttah stood a second before, now there is only a ripple in the sand moving away and dispersing into the ground, then only the silence of the Sea of Dunes.

It happened too fast to fully take in, but something massive came up from below the dunes and devoured the twins, returning below the ground almost in the same movement. Search as they might, the adventurers find no trace of their companions, the thing that killed them, or their equipment. The twins have disappeared. The rest of the NPCs are speechless.

While the group deals with the shock, they hear what sounds like many more dragonkin coming down from the mountains behind them. If the party questioned the captured dragonkin in the tunnels, they should know that these are more Tavixxlud fanatics, sent by Rawraxxa to harass, test, and hunt down anyone foolhardy enough to press on toward the Orphan's Crags, which is what Byrtan and the other NPC companions insist on doing.

Ymareen suggests that they "cry for the twins later and get going, fast," lest the dragonkin tribe overtake them. The adventurers have proven their mettle, but in enough numbers even they would be overwhelmed.

The race

The last part of the adventure requires the party to advance faster than the Tavixxlud, unless they want to be swamped by a hundred furious dragonkin, and reach the Orphan's Crags before their pursuers do.

As an added complication, Rawraxxa has now become interested in the party. Few of her prey have made it as far as crossing the Mountain Pass Tunnels, and she will be personally picking off any members of the adventurers' team that fall, get separated, or lag behind, as demonstrated with the hapless twins.

Instead of measuring this last part of the adventure in days, use map 6.3: **The sea of dunes**. Each hex on the map covers about 2 miles. These lands are harder to traverse than mundane terrain; by keeping a moderate pace, the adventurers can travel 16 miles of rocky sands in 8 hours every day, adding another 2 miles for each hour after that for which they force their march, risking exhaustion as per the standard rules.

If the adventurersforgo one or two long rests, they risk additional exhaustion, but they could be making the Orphan's Crags within two or three days. The dragonkin follow at a steady 16 miles per day, camping just within sight of the party's own camp, unless the adventurers move fast enough to make the dragonkin double their travel pace too.

This last part of the adventure is intended to add stress to the adventurers, forcing them to watch their provisions, striking a balance between moving quickly enough to outrun their pursuers and pacing themselves to conserve their strength. Fly and other such movement spells and effects can help them travel more quickly but don't help with the heat, starvation, or thirst. They also risk leaving some characters behind. Play the limited durations of travel spells for all they're worth, making the characters exhaust their resources and letting them glimpse a few dragonkin in the distance whenever they intend to set up camp. Don't be afraid of pushing the party too far. This is the way of the Sands, the way of Rawraxxa.

If at any time the adventurers decide to stand their ground and face their pursuers, they must fight three consecutive groups of fifteen **Exor dragonkin** each, with the third group led by an **adult Exor dragon** in addition. But let the players know it's better to flee, and allow them to escape if they wish to.

NIGHTMARES

The first time the party takes a long rest during the chase, read the following aloud:

> In the distance, you can see the dragonkin slowing down too. There must be fifty of them, at least, and there are two dragons with them.
>
> As you finish your frugal meal and are preparing to rest as best you can, you all see that the dragonkin have stopped their advance and are setting up small, practical tents.
>
> Soon enough, you all drift into slumber and, inevitably, the dreams begin…

All of the adventurers dream of running with shadows lurking at every corner, stretching toward and trying to reach them. One by one, each of their companions is dragged into the darkness until finally, each of the adventurers is alone, trying to outrun the encroaching, jagged darkness.

The party awakens, with every character, including the NPCs, breathing heavily and sweaty, having shared the same dream. A successful DC 21 Intelligence (Arcana) check confirms that it's an effect of Rawraxxa's power over the desert sands. Everything that lives here shares a bit of her thoughts, and in her thoughts, everything is prey.

In the distance, the dragonkin camp is nowhere to be found. "We should hurry," says Kirkos, and everyone begins quickly packing up camp.

1. The Barrier

This place is marked on the adventurer's map as "rock of shelter," but it's much larger than a simple rock, rising above the level sands like a jagged hilltop.

> As you approach the outcropping, you are all stunned by its real size. What you initially thought of as a low line of jagged rocks, turns out to be a sixty-foot tall natural barrier, filled with footholds, tiny terraces, and narrow hollows across its eroded surface.

There is a small cave where the entire party can fit. The interior is a bit cramped, but the single entrance, and its position a couple of yards above ground level, make the hollow defensible.

MAP 6.3: THE SEA OF DUNES

And its cool, shaded interior is a much needed relief from the unyielding sun. It would be an ideal place to set up camp, if the party needs to.

A successful DC 19 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a well-hidden, narrow path at the back of the cave, leading out to the other side of the rock wall and back into the desert.

If the party takes a long rest here, they manage to sleep undisturbed, but the next morning a small advance party of dragonkin have reached the rock, threatening to trap them in their cave. As they wake up, they hear falling gravel along the sides of the rock, just above the cave entrance, and excited chittering outside. The advance group of dragonkin are already climbing or perched on the wall above the entrance, preparing for another attack, hoping to take the party by surprise and corner them in the cave they used to pass the night.

If the adventurers found the tunnel out of the back of the cave, they may use it to escape; otherwise, they must fight their way out, facing fifteen **Exor dragonkin.**

At this point Orlga, the Tyverian healer, breaks down in panic and runs out of the cave mouth and into the desert sands. If the group tries to stop her, they must face the enemies outside. If any player chooses to let Orlga die, grant them Inspiration if they didn't have it already. Rawraxxa rewards ruthlessness. However, it's not the ambushing dragonkin who attack Orlga. It's a shadow coming from above, unseen from inside the cave, which picks Orlga off and disappears, leaving only a dark red spot of quickly drying blood.

Whether the adventurers fight their way out of the cave or escape through the narrow passage at the back, they find that the other side of the rock is a gulch below ground level, which requires climbing down to continue westward. The gulch wall is thirty feet tall and very steep, requiring two successful DC 19 Strength (Athletics) checks to climb down and back up the other side. If the adventurers did not defeat the dragonkin advance group, they catch up with the party here, climbing and leaping over the gulch just after the first adventurer finishes the climb.

After 1 minute of battle, a shrill cry sounds over the gulch, drawing the dragonkin's attention. Suddenly the high-pitched sound turns into a guttural, continuous growl, and the dragonkin turn tail, jumping down or across the gulch, and hasten to rejoin the main hunting party. If the party lets them go, half the fleeing dragonkin disappear in a blast of sand as they try to run. Soon the adventurers and their remaining companions are alone atop the gulch's ledge, the low growl ringing in everybody's ears.

2. Outcropping

This small boulder provides shade and shelter if the party wishes to take advantage of it. If the party chooses to rest here, there are no surprises from the dragonkin pursuers, who remain at a safe distance after what happened at the rock gulch.

They don't let up on the chase, however; it seems these creatures won't stop until they have hunted down the party and their remaining companions or die trying.

3. The Ridge

This great peak is visible long before the adventurers reach it.

> In the distance to the north, you see a high ridge and many rocky spikes jutting out of the shifting sands of the lower slopes. It looms over you as you go around it to continue north, offering many spots of both welcome shade and unknown danger.

As the party passes the ridge, whether they stop there to rest or not, the howling wind seems to scream in the adventurers' ears, and the sand suddenly swirls in front of them, rising up as an amorphous, living thing. They must battle this **silicraw** before leaving the area.

4. The Salt Expanse

> *"See how the wind shifts the sands,"* Byrtan directs you as you push forward through the endless, level white sands. *"Now notice how the heat makes the air and dust wave over the surface."*
>
> As the Ysvalian fisherman speaks, you see it is true. The slow, hot winds running over the sand dunes carry fine dust with them, but the dust quickly overheats, forming clouds that undulate for a short while and then disperse, thus creating a haze only noticeable from a distance.
>
> *"That is how we will tell when the unseen stalker is coming,"* Byrtan continues. *"As it speeds under the sand, it breaks the surface, and the wind carrying the dust no longer moves the same way as it does across the rest of the desert. As the beast's movement pushes the colder sand upward, the haze is disrupted."*
>
> The tall Ysvalian falls silent, but you can see him holding his long spear so hard, his knuckles turn white. You think you hear a low, guttural growl in the distance, then silence.

When crossing this vast section of featureless terrain, regardless of their speed or means, the party needs twice the rations to survive every day. There are no living things or any water sources to be found anywhere in this region. If the party runs out of rations, Kirkos begins suggesting killing one of the group to feed the others.

If the party rests in this area, they have a second nightmare, again inspired by Rawraxxa's power over the sands:

You close your eyes and your body weighs you down, pulling you into the blur of a dreamscape and setting you down on a twilit pathway, where you find yourself running, jumping, trying your best to go over every obstacle as silently as you possibly can. The feeling of dread is now gone, and all you can think of is to keep moving, to breathe in the hot air and find traces of your assailant, this unseen creature lurking in the corner of your eye.

You can hear it moving. You can hear it breathing slowly, almost noiselessly. It is trying to elude you, but it is now too late for that. You have locked your senses on it. You can't see it yet, but you know where it will be next, and with a surge of speed that sets your muscles on fire, you run for a short distance and then leap into the air.

Everything is blurred around you, but you know the unseen will be exactly in front of you when your feet touch the ground again. You are ready to strike, and as expected, the unseen reveal themselves.

They are your companions, all of them frantically trying to outrun you, to escape you, pathetically unaware of their proximity to each other. They outnumber you. But you laugh, and your laughter is wind and storm and roar.

It is somehow the same dream. Only now each dreamer was the hunter, not the prey.

After the rest, the party notices that Ymareen is nowhere to be seen. She either ran away, like Orlga, or the unseen stalker caught her. Or both.

5. The Sinkholes

This area is another minor rock formation, which should offer both refuge against the sun and good defensible positions, with enough nooks and crannies to stage a defense against any attacking dragonkin.

You finally reach another outcropping. Never had you realized the value of a commodity as humble as mere shadow.

After what happened to the rest of your companions, you have done your best to stay together; however, you suddenly realize that Byrtan and Kirkos are nowhere in sight.

If the adventurers choose to press on and ignore their missing teammates, grant them Inspiration if they don't have it already. Whether the group searches for the missing people or not, they find Byrtan behind a boulder, butchering a dead dragonkin. Behind him, several dragonkin bodies lie mutilated. They must have tried to split from the main group again, and this time, the unseen stalker caught them in advance.

Byrtan is busy taking flesh off the dragonkin and offers the adventurers a chunk, grimly stating that "The hunters shall become the hunted." Any character that accepts the raw meat gains Inspiration if they didn't have it.

Read the following if the party asks Byrtan about Kirkos:

"He gave me the idea," the Ysvalian says, pointing at the butchered dragonkin and chewing on raw meat. *"But the unseen stalker got him first."*

As the players decide what to do, a shadow falls over them, and two **young Exor dragons** land amidst the party, carrying a total of four **Exor dragonkin** on their backs. As did their predecessors, they chose to break out from the main hunting party and attack the party before they escaped, relentlessly and brutally.

During the battle, a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check reveals that the sands are still unsettled from the unseen stalker recent attack. If the battle lasts 1 minute or more, the entire area around the party and their enemies caves in, causing all combatants to fall into a sinkhole. Each combatant must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw to roll with the landslide and reach the bottom unharmed, or they take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and become incapacitated for 1 round.

The fight continues underground. If the adventurers survive the battle, they find themselves in a network of underground tunnels. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check uncovers that these sinkholes were dug by gargantuan worms many ages ago, and the recent passing of the unseen stalker caused the soil above them to collapse.

If Ymareen was still alive, she dies during this battle, either in the cave-in or due to the dragons' breath weapons. Her body is mutilated enough that no magic can bring her back, unless the caster uses *resurrection* or *true resurrection* and also spends Inspiration to make the spell work.

The adventurers may consume the flesh and blood of the dead dragonkin instead of spending rations for today. The meat has a sour, lingering aftertaste but is otherwise harmless. Any character that decides to do this gains Inspiration if they didn't have it.

But neither Byrtan nor his body are anywhere in sight. If the characters search the sinkhole, they find Kirkos' corpse, half-buried under the falling sand, with a huge chunk of flesh bitten off his neck and chest; bitten off by human teeth.

At this point, any player character with Inspiration no longer feels nervous. They now feel tense, aware of their surroundings and attentive to signs of weakness in their companions.

There's nothing else to do here, and the party may now climb out of the sinkhole to continue their journey. If the players have doubts about pressing forward, Vyris suggests that reaching the Orphan's Crags is no longer a goal; it has become a necessity, for there is no way the party can survive if they go back now.

6. The Crystal Rise

This low slope is filled with natural crystal formations, which reflect the sunlight in myriad ways.

> As soon as you spy it in the distance, you realize why this area was marked as "The Crystal Rise" on the map. Its low elevation is covered in protruding crystal clusters, which dazzle the eyes with sharp spotlight reflections. You'll have to travel over these to continue westward.

As the party crosses the Crystal Rise, a **sycalid swarm** comes out of the crystal formations to attack and devour the adventurers. Distracted by the light reflections all around, the adventurers must succeed on a DC 24 Wisdom (Perception) check made with disadvantage to notice the approaching sycalids, or else be surprised at the start of combat.

After the battle, the adventurers are splattered with a viscous, bluish, sap-like substance that carries a faint, sickly sweet odor. Characters with Inspiration notice that not only is the musk bearable, but it even excites them a bit, makes them hungry.

If consumed, the sycalids taste like salted honey, with notes of mushroom or shrimp. Any character that partakes of sycalid meat gains Inspiration if they didn't have it already.

Rewards

As the party leaves the Crystal Rise and approaches the Crag's Gate below, it marks a milestone in the adventure. Award all player characters an advancement to their next level.

7. The Crag's Gate

> At long last, you see the high rock wall blocking the Orphan's Crags, and getting a bit closer, you notice the many cracks, too narrow for any dragon, which would allow you to step beyond.
>
> As you involuntarily quicken your pace within sight of your goal, a guttural, primal scream echoes through the cliff wall, followed by a hissing howl. It sounds disturbingly like Byrtan's voice.

As the party approaches the entrance to the Orphan's Crags, they come across Byrtan, fighting madly against the last two surviving Tavixxlud dragonkin. The Ysvalian has become the picture of brutal, predatory efficiency as he twists and turns, skewering one of the dragonkin while kicking the other to the ground.

As the fisherman jumps to finish off his enemy, he looks up at you. "Wha? This is survival. This. Survival. This!" But he manages to say nothing else. A deep growl and the hiss of sand, quickly pushed up and aside, precede the dusty explosion as a gargantuan figure erupts from below the desert floor and releases its triumphant roar as it devours Byrtan's mangled form.

Rawraxxa, the Apex Huntress, has finally revealed itself, pleased with the quarry that has made its way into her lair in the middle of the Shrilling Sands and at the foot of the Rock of the Motherless. She was the Motherless. This was always her lair.

If the party fought the sycalid swarm, the Great Wyrm seems eager to strike but starts circling around the party. Have the adventurers make a DC 21 Wisdom (Insight or Survival) check. A success reveals that the Apex Huntress finds the sycalid musk clinging to their bodies deeply revolting. A failed check simply assumes that it is still toying with them for its twisted pleasure. Then, Rawraxxa burrows into the sand again, waiting for the party to lower their guard before striking from below.

And thus, the final battle begins.

MAP 6.4: RAWRAXXA'S HUNTING GROUNDS

The Fight with Rawraxxa

> The wind blows across the Shrilling Sands as you gingerly face the dread stalker of the Red Moon, the most terrible predator in existence: Rawraxxa, Apex Huntress.

If the party tries to leave the area, either toward the Orphan's Crags or in another direction, Rawraxxa strikes at them from below the ground.

First Phase

This phase begins after the first surprise attack from Rawraxxa, who attacks the adventurers with her Burrowing Ambush followed by one of her breath weapons.

> Before you know it, the sand explodes, and all is heat, noise, and pain.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> This may be the driest, most inhospitable landscape you've ever visited. It looks impossible that anything living may grow here, yet there are withering bracken, tumbleweeds and sun-bleached skulls to challenge that idea, and Rawraxxa, of course.

This is where the party begins to pay the price for giving in to their predatory instinct during the adventure.

When Rawraxxa disappears from sight, any character with Inspiration must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or give in to their predatory instinct and attack the nearest living creature they can see, be it an NPC or one or their companions. The affected character uses only weapon attacks. The effect ends if the character spends their Inspiration to end it. The effect also ends automatically when Rawraxxa appears again, or it can instead be removed by *calm emotions* or any other spell or effect that removes emotion effects.

Rawraxxa's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

After making her first attack, Rawraxxa tries to use her Burrow special action again, keeping the party on their toes by disappearing and reappearing again to strike with her Burrowing Ambush and breath weapons, until she feels threatened.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Rawraxxa enters her Hunter, Hunted state once.
- One of Rawraxxa's body parts is broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, Rawraxxa uses her Burrow special action and disappears.

Second Phase

This phase begins like the first one: with Rawraxxa hidden, waiting for the right moment to strike at the adventurers by surprise.

While Rawraxxa hides in waiting to begin the fight again, the party may spend all of their Inspiration to take a short rest or get their bearings instead of attacking each other.. They may also use this time to set up snares (see "Rawraxxa Exploits" below). Each character can use this short rest to set up one snare at their leisure without disadvantage on the ability check.

Meanwhile, each of Rawraxxa's body parts that hasn't been broken is healed to its hit point maximum.

After about an hour, Rawraxxa has healed, and the group has set up their snares, if they wish. The fight then begins anew.

> Suddenly Rawraxxa leaps out of the earth again. The furious winds have made it almost impossible to shoot at her.

LAIR CONDITIONS

Rawraxxa begins the fight with a Burrowing Ambush, followed by the strongest breath weapon her action pool allows.

Due to the blowing winds, all ranged weapon attacks are made with disadvantage.

When Rawraxxa disappears from sight, any character with Inspiration must now succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or give in to their predatory instinct and attack the nearest living creature in sight, be it an NPC or one or their companions. The affected character uses only weapon attacks. The effect ends if the character spends their inspiration to end it. The effect also ends automatically when Rawraxxa appears again, or it can instead be removed by *calm emotions* or any other spell or effect that removes emotion effects.

Rawraxxa's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

Rawraxxa begins using her special actions more frequently, trying to finish off her opposition as quickly and underhandedly as possible.

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- Rawraxxa has entered her Hunter, Hunted state at least four times since the beginning of the encounter.

- Three of Rawraxxa's body parts are broken and Rawraxxa has entered her Hunter, Hunted state at least twice since the beginning of the encounter.

When one of the above conditions is met, Rawraxxa uses her Burrow special action again, even if her broken body parts would otherwise prevent her from doing so, and disappears.

Final Phase

Rawraxxa is no longer hunting; she has become prey. This is a fight for survival, as she brings all of her powers to bear against her would-be slayers.

If Rawraxxa can still burrow, this phase begins as the other two did, with Rawraxxa hidden, waiting for the right moment to strike at the party by surprise. While Rawraxxa hides, the adventurers may again spend all of their current Inspiration to take a short rest instead of attacking each other, and set up snares (see "Rawraxxa Exploits" below) as during the previous phase. Again, each of Rawraxxa's body parts that hasn't been broken is healed to its hit point maximum.

After about an hour, Rawraxxa has healed, and the group has set up their snares, if they wish. The fight then begins anew.

> The winds and sands themselves seem to raise and shift at Rawraxxa's command, getting in your way and biting at your skin.

LAIR CONDITIONS

The sands and winds strike at the characters almost directly. At the start of this phase, each member of the party must make a DC 22 Constitution saving throw, suffering one level of exhaustion on a success or two levels of exhaustion on a failure.

Again, Rawraxxa begins the phase by using her Burrowing Ambush followed by the strongest special action or breath weapon her action pool can afford.

All ranged attacks are made with disadvantage, and the entire map counts as difficult terrain.

When Rawraxxa disappears from sight, any character with Inspiration must now succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or give in to their predatory instinct and attack the nearest living creature in sight, be it an NPC or one or their companions. The affected character uses only weapon attacks. The effect ends automatically when Rawraxxa appears again, or it can be removed by *calm emotions* or any other spell or effect that removes emotion effects. The effect also ends if the character spends their inspiration to end it.

Rawraxxa's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 5

PHASE END

The encounter ends when Rawraxxa is killed. This requires fulfilling one of the following conditions:

- Five or more of Rawraxxa's body parts are broken.
- Four or more of Rawraxxa's body parts are broken, and Rawraxxa has entered the Hunter, Hunted state at least four times since the beginning of the encounter.

Conclusion

Rawraxxa takes a few more defiant swings at the air and then cumbersomely slumps to the ground, raising a dusty, whitish cloud.

Almost immediately, sand begins to cover her body, burying her first in a few clumps, then gradually caking her in a rough coat of white sand. It looks as if the wind and desert themselves had spent ages waiting only to bury her, to consume her as they consumed every creature she ever killed.

The Shrilling Sands are indeed a hungry place.

After the battle, nothing stops the party from crossing over to the Orphan's Crags, which are nothing but a predator's barren lair, filled with the bones and other remains of Rawraxxa's thousands of hopeful victims across the eons.

Vyris, if they are still alive, sighs at the sight, but turns to the adventurers with a quizzical look.

For now, with Rawraxxa's death and the grip of her dark power slowly vanishing from these dry sands, you may still turn the tables of hunter and prey one last time. You may still make this place into the haven it was always believed to be.

RAWRAXXA, APEX HUNTRESS

The predator of the Red Moon, Rawraxxa sees her domain as hunting grounds. She roams the Shrilling Sands in search of prey or, simply, lifeforms to toy with and surpass, because for Rawraxxa, every hunt is a challenge, one she always wins.

To challenge Rawraxxa is to become the prey in her sick, ancestral game. To beat her, one has to turn the tables and become the hunter.

Rawraxxa Exploits

The following exploits can be used to take advantage of Rawraxxa during the battle if the player characters discover them.

Worthy Challenge

The adventurers can issue a challenge to Rawraxxa by succeeding on a DC 22 Charisma check. If the check succeeds, Rawraxxa focuses her attacks on the challenging creature until one of them dies.

Survival of the Fittest

Surviving in the desert is difficult. Those that show no mercy to their opponents gain favor with Rawraxxa. Rawraxxa does not target any character with inspiration, unless all potential targets have inspiration. She has no qualms about catching such characters with area attacks if necessary, however.

Perfect Weapons

Being the embodiment of the hunt and the challenge, any Legendary weapon made to hunt or that grants advantage on attack rolls made with it ignores Rawraxxa's damage reduction.

Snares

There are several spots on map 6.4: Rawraxxa's hunting grounds suitable for setting up snares or traps against Rawraxxa. As an action, a character may locate a spot in the landscape where Rawraxxa may be led into a trap, by succeeding on a DC 25 Wisdom (Survival) check made with disadvantage. If the check is successful, write down the die roll result. The identified area occupies roughly 30 square feet.

If Rawraxxa enters an area that the character identified as a natural snare, she must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against the result of the character's check when setting up the snare. If her save fails, Rawraxxa is restrained – trapped in a passage, stuck on sand, buried under rocks or other such effect – until her next upkeep.

Hunter, Hunted

For a perfect hunter like Rawraxxa, being in the position of prey is unnatural. Savvy adventurers can exploit this to their advantage. Putting Rawraxxa in positions normally associated with prey will deeply disturb her, as she has never known actual fear.

If a creature manages to surprise, trick, or impair Rawraxxa, this triggers a Hunter, Hunted state in her, which makes Rawraxxa feel desperate and furious. Each time a creature damages Rawraxxa with a weapon attack that was made with advantage, successfully lures her into a snare (see "Snares" above), or manages to inflict the Restrained, Grappled, or Incapacitated conditions on her, she enters her Hunter, Hunted state.

While in the Hunter, Hunted state, Rawraxxa won't use her breath weapons or special actions, save for her Burrowing special action, and all of her actions will focus on freeing herself from any condition affecting her or attacking the creature that caused it. The Hunter, Hunted state lasts until Rawraxxa's next upkeep. The character that caused the Hunter, Hunted state on Rawraxxa gains Inpiration if they didn't have it.

RAWRAXXA

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class see "Rawraxxa's Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Rawraxxa's Body Parts"
Speed 60 ft., burrow 60 ft., climb 60 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
27 (+8)	19 (+4)	22 (+6)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +18, Dex +13, Wis +14
Skills Acrobatics +13, Athletics +18, Intimidation +13, Perception +14, Stealth +22, Survival +14
Damage Reduction 6
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., tremorsense 120 ft., passive Perception 24
Languages Draconic, Common
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. Rawraxxa has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the maze spell.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Rawraxxa fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.
Magic Weapons. Rawraxxa's weapon attacks are considered magical.
Master Burrower. Whenever Rawraxxa begins to burrow, she becomes invisible to the creatures on the surface, and any creature within 10 feet of her must succeed on a DC 25 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone from the force of borrow and move 5 feet away from Rawraxxa.

While Rawraxxa is burrowing, creatures can only detect her position by magical means or with tremorsense.

Creatures that are mounted on Rawraxxa when she begins burrowing and succeed on the saving throw above to avoid being knocked down become restrained, as they are buried in the sand with her but remain mounted on her body until she resurfaces. Any creature mounted on Rawraxxa while she burrows for a number of rounds higher than the creature's Constitution modifer falls to 0 hit points and is dying. The suddenness of Rawraxxa's burrowing and the resulting sand cloud prevent the creatures from holding their breath. Creatures with a burrow speed of their own may move away from Rawraxxa by their own means and hold their breath for 5 rounds before surfacing.

Sneak Attack. Each of Rawraxxa's melee attacks deals an additional 10 (3d6) slashing damage when she has advantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Upkeep Actions

During Rawraxxa's upkeep, she replenishes her action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and she may take any of the following actions.

Sandstorm (0 Actions). Once during her upkeep, Rawraxxa may raise a dust devil around a single creature of her choice that she can see or sense. The target must make a DC 22 Constitution saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) slashing damage and becoming Blinded until Rawraxxa's next upkeep on a failed save. A successful save halves the damage and negates the Blinded condition.

Sudden Sand (0 Actions). Once during her upkeep, Rawraxxa may create a column of sand arising from a target point she can see within 90 feet. Any creature within 10 feet of the chosen point must succeed on a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning and 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Shake (1 Action). Rawraxxa can shake all of her body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Rawraxxa's body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw (DC according to body part) to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and becomes prone.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of her upkeeps, Rawraxxa heals one body part that has not been reduced to 0 hit points. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum.

Melee Actions

Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d8 + 8) slashing damage, and the target takes 5 slashing damage at the start of each of their next turns. The target may attempt a DC 23 Constitution saving throw after taking the damage to end the effect. Multiple instances of this ongoing effect do not stack, limiting the total damage that it can inflict on each affected target to 5 slashing damage per turn. Any creature mounted on Rawraxxa's arms must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the arms' Shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake upkeep action.

Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d8 + 8) piercing and 13 (3d8) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Rawraxxa's head must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake action.

Tail Fan (1 Action). All creatures in a 20ft. cone behind Rawraxxa must succeed on a DC 25 Dexterity saving throw or take 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Rawraxxa's tail must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's Shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake action. As part of this action, Rawraxxa may attempt to burrow (see "Special Actions" below) without spending any additional actions.

Wing Flap (2 Actions). All creatures in an area of 20 feet around Rawraxxa must succeed on a DC 25 Strength saving throw or get pushed back 40 feet, take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and fall prone. A successful save halves the damage and negates the prone condition. Any creature mounted on Rawraxxa's wings must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's shake DC to avoid falling, as per the Shake action. As part of this action, Rawraxxa may attempt to burrow (see "Special Actions" below) without spending any additional actions.

Burrowing Ambush (4 Actions). Rawraxxa may only attempt this ability if she is burrowing (see the "Burrow" special actions below). Rawraxxa surfaces at any point on the map and immediately makes two claw attacks and one bite attack with advantage on all three attack rolls, dealing her listed sneak attack bonus damage with each attack. In addition, any creature still mounted on Rawraxxa must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the DC of the body part they're mounted on or fall from the dragon. Rawraxxa must spend 1 action during her upkeep if she wants to use this ability again.

Breath Weapons

Sand Cloud (1 Action). Rawraxxa breathes a 60-foot cloud of scorching sand. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) fire damage and become Blinded until Rawraxxa's next upkeep. Rawraxxa must spend 1 action during her next upkeep to use this breath weapon again.

Dragonfire (2 Actions). Rawraxxa breathes fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 45 (10d8) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a success.

Scorching Cone (3 Actions). Rawraxxa breathes a 90-foot cone of sirocco winds. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) fire and 27 (6d8) slashing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a success. Every creature that fails the save is Blinded until Rawraxxa's next upkeep. Rawraxxa must spend 1 action during her next upkeep to use this breath weapon again.

Heated Shards (5 Actions). Rawraxxa superheats her sand breath to create a barrage of glass shards in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) fire and 18 (4d8) slashing damage. A successful save halves the damage. A creature that fails the save takes the damage again at the start of their next turn.

Special Actions

Burrow (1 Action). If Rawraxxa isn't already burrowing, she may immediately burrow underground, moving freely through the ground up to her full burrow speed.

Sand Wall (2 Actions). Rawraxxa raises a dust cloud around her. Any attack rolls made against Rawraxxa suffer disadvantage until her next upkeep.

Heatwave (3 Actions). All creatures within 20 feet of Rawraxxa must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) fire damage.

Mirage (3 Actions). Rawraxxa gains a non-magical effect until her next upkeep. While this effect remains active, Rawraxxa has advantage on all melee attack rolls, and hence, deals her listed sneak attack bonus damage on all melee attacks, and all attack rolls made against her suffer disadvantage. Rawraxxa must spend 1 action during one of her future upkeeps in order to use this ability again.

Sand Trap (3 Actions). Rawraxxa creates a sinkhole in an area no larger than a 30-foot cube, centered on a point within 90 feet of her. Any creature in the targeted area must succeed on a DC 22 Strength saving throw or fall Prone and become Restrained. An affected creature remains Prone and Restrained by the sinkhole until they use an action to perform a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check to escape its pull.

End of Life (5 Actions). The area around Rawraxxa becomes incredibly hot and dry. Any creature within 60 feet of Rawraxxa must make a DC 25 Constitution saving throw, taking 31 (7d8) fire and 31 (7d8) necrotic damage and suffering two levels of exhaustion, or half that damage and one level of exhaustion on a successful save. Creatures that fail the save also lose all of their potions, water, and liquid items as they dry up instantly. Any plant or water-based creature suffers disadvantage on this saving throw and takes double the listed damage on a failed save, or full damage on a success. Using this ability causes Rawraxxa to suffer one level of exhaustion.

RAWRAXXA'S BODY PARTS

Wings

HP N × 25 | **AC** 22 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21 (grounded) or 25 (flying)

Broken. *Rawraxxa's mighty wings are punched through with holes all over and hanging flaccidly in various parts. She cannot move them anymore and drags them around like a broken kite.*

If Rawraxxa's wings become broken, she loses her fly speed and cannot use her Wing Flap any longer.

If airborne, Rawraxxa immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Rawraxxa's body must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Rawraxxa. If the save is successful, the creature only takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and no additional damage.

Head

Hit Points N × 45 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 25

Broken. *Rawraxxa's jaw seems dislocated. The fins on her head have fallen off, and one of her eyes blinks uncontrollably. She defiantly licks the blood off her own face.*

If Rawraxxa's head becomes broken, she suffers disadvantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks, and her bite damage is reduced to 13 (3d8) slashing damage.

Upper Torso

HP N × 60 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *Rawraxxa's chest bleeds from dozens of holes and punctures. Where does she keep that much blood?*

If Rawraxxa's upper torso becomes broken, she has disadvantage on her claw and Wing Flap attack rolls, and all of her breath weapons cost 1 additional action to use.

Tail

Hit Points N × 35 | **AC** 26 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 25

Broken. *Rawraxxa tries to move her tail but only manages to roar in frustration as it snaps instead of swinging.*

If Rawraxxa's tail becomes broken, she can no longer make tail fan attacks, her burrow speed is eliminated, she cannot use her Burrow special action, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Right Claw

HP N × 30 | **AC** 24 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 25

Broken. *Rawraxxa's right claw hangs limply. She touches it with her nose, then looks daggers at you.*

If Rawraxxa's right claw becomes broken, she cannot use it for combat. She can no longer make more than two claw attacks in a single turn. If both claws are broken, she can no longer make claw attacks or use her Burrow special action.

Lower Torso

HP N × 55 | **AC** 24 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 20

Broken. *Rawraxxa drags her lower body like a wounded dog, but she ignores it. She focuses on punishing the ones guilty for her indignity.*

If Rawraxxa's lower torso becomes broken, she can no longer use her Burrow special action. Additionally, her speed, burrow speed, and climb speed are all reduced by 20 feet, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Left Leg

HP N × 50 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 25

Broken. *Rawraxxa's left leg bends at an unhealthy angle, and she roars in pain as she steps on it.*

If Rawraxxa's left leg becomes broken, she loses 10 feet from her speed, burrow speed, and climb speed. If both of her legs are broken, her speed is reduced to 10 feet, her burrow and climb speeds are eliminated, and she can no longer use her Burrow special action.

Right Leg

HP N × 50 | **AC** 25 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 25

Broken. *Rawraxxa's right leg coils and hangs like a tumor. She won't be running away this time.*

If Rawraxxa's right leg becomes broken, she loses 10 feet from her speed, burrow speed, and climb speed. If both of her legs are broken, her speed is reduced to 10 feet, her burrow and climb speeds are eliminated, and she can no longer use her Burrow special action.

Left Claw

HP N × 30 | **AC** 24 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 25

Broken. *Rawraxxa's left claw is now little more than a coiled stump at her side. She coughs and chokes, more in surprise than in pain.*

If Rawraxxa's left claw becomes broken, she cannot use it for combat. She can no longer make more than two claw attacks in a single turn. If both claws are broken, she can no longer make claw attacks or use her Burrow special action.

THE CRYSTAL HAUNTS

A four-session adventure for 17th-level characters

"...Thus it only makes sense that there would be no beauty without pain. All else is dull, senseless, boring. Only sheer horror is perfect ecstasy."

—Excerpt from The Gorgomagnigrimmon by Sivax Magnifex

In search of a fabled artifact—a myth, perhaps—a group of daring adventurers must enter Paradis, the lair of Sivax, the Azhurma of Brood Magnifex and lord of art and beauty.

Like its master, Paradis is a deadly, deceptively beautiful region, with quicksilver causeways and crystalline, maze-like corridors. Here, our treasure-seekers face the various dangers waiting for them in the quicksilver canals and will come to understand the extent of Sivax's twisted, chilling notion of "great beauty."

INTRODUCTION

The player characters have found a map to a wondrous treasure. However, this treasure is located in one very specific place: a bismuth pool somewhere deep inside Paradis, the territory claimed by Sivax, the Prince of Perfect Ecstasy and head of the Magnifex brood. Finding the item will require the party to enter one of the darkest, most forbidden places of Drakha and come face to face with the many horrors awaiting within.

Running the Adventure

"The Crystal Haunts" is an epic adventure meant for three to five players that will start at 17th level. During the course of the adventure, the adventurers will advance to level 20 using the milestones system before entering the final battle against the Azhurma Sivax Magnifex, the Prince of Perfect Ecstasy.

This adventure is set on Drakha, also known as The Red Moon, a world ruled by dragons and their kin. The humanoid races of Valerna are scarce here, and most of the native creatures are unfriendly—when not actively hostile—to them. You don't need to know everything about the Red Moon to properly run this adventure, as most of the places and situations, as well as NPCs and creatures, will be detailed throughout the following pages.

The "Adventure Background" section will tell you everything you need to know to set up the adventure. The "Adventure Overview" section describes how the adventure is expected to run and gives you a broad sense of the events and how these should unfold throughout. The adventure proper will follow that overview. Finally, the appendices will provide you with all the additional information regarding NPCs and magical items, and the maps provided will give you a better sense of the special locations described below.

Before Playing at the Table

Before you start to play, consider the following and let the players adjust accordingly:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you want to highlight or even change to better fit your narrative style. Read through the nonplayer characters to know how they would act and react off script if your players do something different. Prepare any handouts you want to include and read through the encounters and the creatures' stat blocks.
- If your players are making new characters for this adventure, ask them to provide you with their character details, making sure to provide them the necessary information for their characters to fit the adventure with an appropriate backstory and motivation for the setting.
- "The Crystal Haunts" relies on some body horror and fantasy portrayals of mental conditions. It is necessary that you talk with your players regarding consent and safe environments before running the adventure, so you can adjust to make sure everyone is having a good time. If no middle ground can be agreed upon, do not worry. There are other adventures in this book, sure to fit every taste.

Paradis

The Magnifex domain, Paradis, is one of the few dragon territories where most of the structures lie underground, as most of the Magnifex dragons use

the vast tunnels and caves—collectively known as the Crystalline Maze—extending throughout the Fountains of Magnificence as their living quarters. The vast maze-like city is crowned by the uppermost levels of Sivax's palace, the only structure clearly visible aboveground.

Where dragons of the other broods have libraries, workshops, or laboratories, the Magnifex have troves and exhibitions, where they collect and display the most beautiful objects in their possession, and quite a few truly commit themselves to the toil of creating more beautiful pieces to be revered and envied—whether in secret or, better yet, openly—by their peers.

Special Rules

Use the following special rules when running any adventure within Paradis. These are intended to complement the special rules detailed in the "Magic on Drakha" section at the start of this book.

- The *cure wounds* and *regeneration* spells or any similar effects replace the injured flesh with a strange crystalline crust when used in Paradis, which imposes a disadvantage on all of the target's Constitution saves and Charisma checks. Only spell effects that remove poison or disease, such as *restoration* and *heal*, can remove this effect.
- Shapechanging spells such as *alter self* and *polymorph* are extremely dangerous to cast in Paradis. In addition to the spell's effects, the target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or take 4 (1d8) necrotic damage per spell level, as the effect twists their form in horrible, painful ways. Furthermore, the target's body retains patches of a strange crystalline crust, even after the effect ends, which impose disadvantage on all of the target's Constitution saving throws and Charisma checks. Only spell effects that remove poison or disease, such as *restoration* and *heal*, remove this effect.
- Each time a non-dragon creature becomes frightened in Paradis, they also gain one short-term madness effect, as described in the 5e rules for madness, reflecting the crawling horror and madness that invade all minds that stay too long in this twisted realm.
- The first time a non-dragon character reaches Exhaustion Level 2 or higher while in Paradis, they gain one long-term madness effect.
- The first time that a non-dragon creature already under the effect of a long-term madness effect becomes frightened while in Paradis, they gain an indefinite madness flaw.

Adventure Background

On the outside, Paradis is a realm of amazing vistas, striking beauty, and alien sounds. It is a place steeped in legends of luxury and lavishness, where the adventurers' senses can truly be overwhelmed and few other living creatures have visited with their minds intact. But Paradis has a heart that is darker still, and it is there that the party must journey.

The Prince of Perfect Ecstasy, Sivax Magnifex, has many treasures waiting in and around the Gallery of Beguiling Hideousness, his most private lair under the Palace of Opulence at the heart of Paradis. These treasures, which for Sivax have no other value than their beauty and rarity, have lured countless thieves and interlopers to their doom in the labyrinthine caves surrounding the azhurma's vaults.

The Architect of Paradis

Gifted as he is, the Magnifex azhurma did not build the Gallery himself; instead, he gave the task to a dragon architect of incredible power and exquisite skill. The Architect, their true name forgotten by history, created the beautiful scintillating hallways, and flowing canals surrounding the Gallery, and an exquisitely detailed golem to watch over it all. It is said that the Architect, pleased with their magnum opus, went on to further projects, although none so far can rival the artistry displayed in Sivax's lair. Or at least, that's the official version.

The truth is that a dragon architect named Mutroz completed the task and intended to get on with their life, but first they had one last meeting with a very pleased and excited Sivax. After this meeting, the Architect went missing, never to be seen again. Perhaps jealous of Mutroz's talent, perhaps fearing that they could make something better for someone else, or perhaps just as an artistic experiment to make the artist one with their work, Sivax entombed Mutroz within one of his vault's crystalline formations. And thus the Architect has remained imprisoned for millennia.

The Architect's fate was forever kept secret, and their myriad notes for future projects and plans became abandoned by servants and apprentices when their master did not return. These notes passed between hands for centuries, without anyone ever taking up the mantle of the Architect, and a lifetime of artistic endeavors became a collection of lost, dispersed dreams.

Enter Some Meddlers

During their past missions, or as a consequence of completing one of them, the adventurers came into possession of a beautifully crafted cylinder, with runes in

perfectly etched Draconic which allegedly contain codes to open vaults and hidden corridors found in the lowest levels of the Crystalline Maze. Inside the cylinder, the adventurers find a series of parchments detailing the process for creating a legendary artifact, the *Cloak of Evershifting Skins*. While most of the ingredients required are somewhat easily accessible elsewhere, one in particular, known as everflux quicksilver, can only be found in a pool located somewhere within the Fountains of Magnificence, home to the Magnifex brood. Refer to appendix B for details about the cloak.

The author of the parchments, which of course was none other than the Architect, briefly mentions a specific location, the Gallery of Beguiling Hideousness, near the center of Paradis, where Sivax, the Azhurma of the Magnifex Brood, spends most of his time working on his creations and artistic explorations, as the most likely place where an everflux quicksilver pool could be found.

The last parchment is a crude, rather vague map with mentions of "the Architect's Lament," "Entity's Retreat," and "Halls of Laughter and Grinding of Teeth" are quickly scribbled. In the middle of it all, Sivax's rune denotes the location of the azhurma's secret gallery.

With this information, the adventurers head to Paradis, where the secret to crafting the legendary cloak awaits, along with several other, far darker secrets.

Adventure Overview

The party begins the adventure traveling through the Drakhan wastes to reach the Fountains of Magnificence, from which they can make their way into the tunnel network and locate the pool near its center; a process that might come at great cost to their sanity.

"The Crystal Haunts" is divided into four parts.

"An Item of Note" serves as a prologue to the adventure. The party discovers a beautifully engraved cylinder made of polished bone and lined with gold and platinum. How they came across it is up to you and the needs or current events of your campaign.

An Item of Note

The cylinder contains the instructions to craft a legendary artifact that allows the wearer to bend reality around their person. However, one of the required ingredients only exists inside the Crystalline Maze, the underground tunnel network below Paradis.

The party reaches the first of the shining canals outside the Maze in "The Unseen Reflection" and commandeers a skiff to begin their journey toward the place where the pool is marked in map 7.1: The Crystalline Maze. As the adventurers deal with the first challenges in the quicksilver dungeon, something begins following them, making its presence known as a speeding shadow behind the adventurers' reflections on the crystal walls, with the sounds of low snickering or whimpering coming down the corridor, or through a rush of air carrying whispered gibberish and barely intelligible words.

In "Artistry, at What Price?", the adventurers have made it past the outer structure and are now in the canals closer to the Gallery of Beguiling Hideousness. Still haunted by the unseen presence, the party makes its way through the Crystalline Maze's caves and chambers, making gruesome discoveries in each of them, allowing them a glimpse into Sivax and his dragonkin servants' obsessions and… rampant madness.

"The Architect's Lament" sees the party meeting Stonecutter, the golem housing the last spark of the Architect's personality, and the Entity stalking them reveals itself at last. After dealing with both the golem and the Entity, the party finally makes it to the everflux quicksilver pool, right inside Sivax's vault.

Adventure Hooks

In the event that you want to include this adventure as part of your particular campaign setting not taking place on Drakha, you can assume one of the following:

- The adventurers find the cylinder in the course of their adventures and discover that it contains not only the instructions to craft an artifact, but also a scroll with a spell that allows them to travel to Drakha. The scroll is a one-way trip, however. They will need to secure the means to return once there.
- A red moon appeared one day in the sky of the adventurers' homeworld. Shortly thereafter, a swarm of dragons invaded their world, snatching mortals and taking them to Drakha, intending to use them as food or slaves for the other dragons of the Red Moon. The adventurers managed to escape after landing on Drakha, but dragonkin hunters chased them to a cave near the entrance to the Crystalline Maze. There, the adventurers found both the cylinder and a path into the Paradis underground.

THE UNSEEN REFLECTION

An Item of Note

As barren and lethal as it may seem to both Valernians and the dragons of various broods cursed to rule over and inhabit it, Drakha also hides many secrets and haunting vistas of raw, unadulterated beauty and coarse splendor.

One such vista is that of the Fountains of Magnificence, a rocky hill said to be covered in stunning bismuth formations and quicksilver lakes, which cover the landscape in shimmering colors for many kilometers. It is the domain of the vain and beautiful Magnifex dragons and their Azhurma Sivax, the self-proclaimed Prince of Perfect Ecstasy.

After finding an exquisitely crafted cylinder, you set out for the Fountains of Magnificence, following the map found within, for if the words contained within the cylinder are to be believed, deep within its tunnels awaits the final ingredient needed to build an artifact of cosmic power.

Describe the cylinder and its contents to the party, whether they are opening it for the first time or have already opened it before getting to the Fountains. The cylinder itself has an ancestral engraved code, alien and archaic even to ones that understand the Draconic tongue it's written in, indicating that it is ancient even by dragon standards.

Inside the cylinder are three rolled-up parchments belonging to one "Mutroz, Artificer and Alchemist," charged with a most important task by the azhurma of the Magnifex, Sivax himself. The first scroll is a brief account of Mutroz's recent life and artistic endeavors, which hints at their immense talent and magic power. The second document is a set of detailed instructions to process the various ingredients required to craft what Mutroz calls "the *Cloak of Evershifting Skins*, an artifact of incredible power that will allow its wearer to move beyond time and space, even in the world of dragons."

The final parchment presents a map with the location of the rarest and most important ingredient to make the artifact: everflux quicksilver, found only in the pools right

below Sivax's Palace of Opulence inside the Crystalline Maze. The map also indicates several notes personally left by Mutroz throughout the Maze while they worked on Sivax's project.

Armed with this information, the adventurers came to the edges of the Fountains of Magnificence, so far avoiding the dragon lords of Drakha and their dragonkin patrols. Or, depending on your chosen adventure hook, the party has serendipitously found themselves on the precipice of a great discovery, uncovering the cylinder as they fled from said dragonkin patrols.

> The road to the Fountains of Magnificence took some effort, but was mostly uneventful. As you crest one of the nearby hills, the sight before you amazes you beyond words.
>
> An enormous expanse of crystalline formations extends as far as your eyes can see, a few scintillating under the light of the setting sun and many others absorbing it to create marvelous, gigantic natural lamps directing the captured light inward toward underground halls.
>
> The metal-glazed hills are both beautiful and disturbing to behold. The cold wind rushes past you as you climb down the hill and into one of the entrances marked on the map. You notice there are a few patrols making their rounds at different sites across the territory, as well as a couple of dragons flying in the distance, but it's unlikely you'll come across them if you move fast.

The party reaches the first of the shining underground canals leading under the Fountains of Magnificence with no incident. Once near the mouth of the caves, they spy two boats tied to the river entrance. Both the boats and the bank are covered with a film of white dust resembling fine salt. There are six **Magnifex dragonkin** minding the boats. Commandeering one of the skiffs without incident requires a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check, with disadvantage on the die roll. If the check fails, the party must fight the dragonkin.

Once the adventurers are in control of one of the boats, each boat is large enough for the full party plus their equipment, they can row into the quicksilver stream, entering the underground caves beneath the Fountains of Magnificence.

The canal is filled with quicksilver, which makes rowing a lot more taxing but does not otherwise impede navigation. Two people are required to row so the boat maintains speed and direction. Every hour, these characters must succeed on a DC 22 Strength or Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

Let the party explore the outer caves as they wish, using map 7.1: The Crystalline Maze as reference and describing what the adventurers find in each area. The party begins their exploration in area 1.

The Outer Caves

As they explore the outer caves, the adventurers begin to hear strange noises coming down from the corridors and echoing around the canal bends. A successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a blurred silhouette that seems to dart behind the crystalline walls, sometimes going away, sometimes following the adventurers.

When the adventurers have explored **four or more areas**, the mysterious stalker begins making its presence known, be it as a speeding shadow briefly appearing behind the adventurers' reflections on the crystalline walls, or by making low snickering or whimpering sounds from a side tunnel. At this point, each adventurer must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of this presence for 1 minute, risking madness as indicated in the "Special Rules" section near the start of this adventure.

Nothing else is revealed about the Entity, its location, or its nature. Divination effects fail, as if the magic did not want to identify its target.

Swimming in Quicksilver

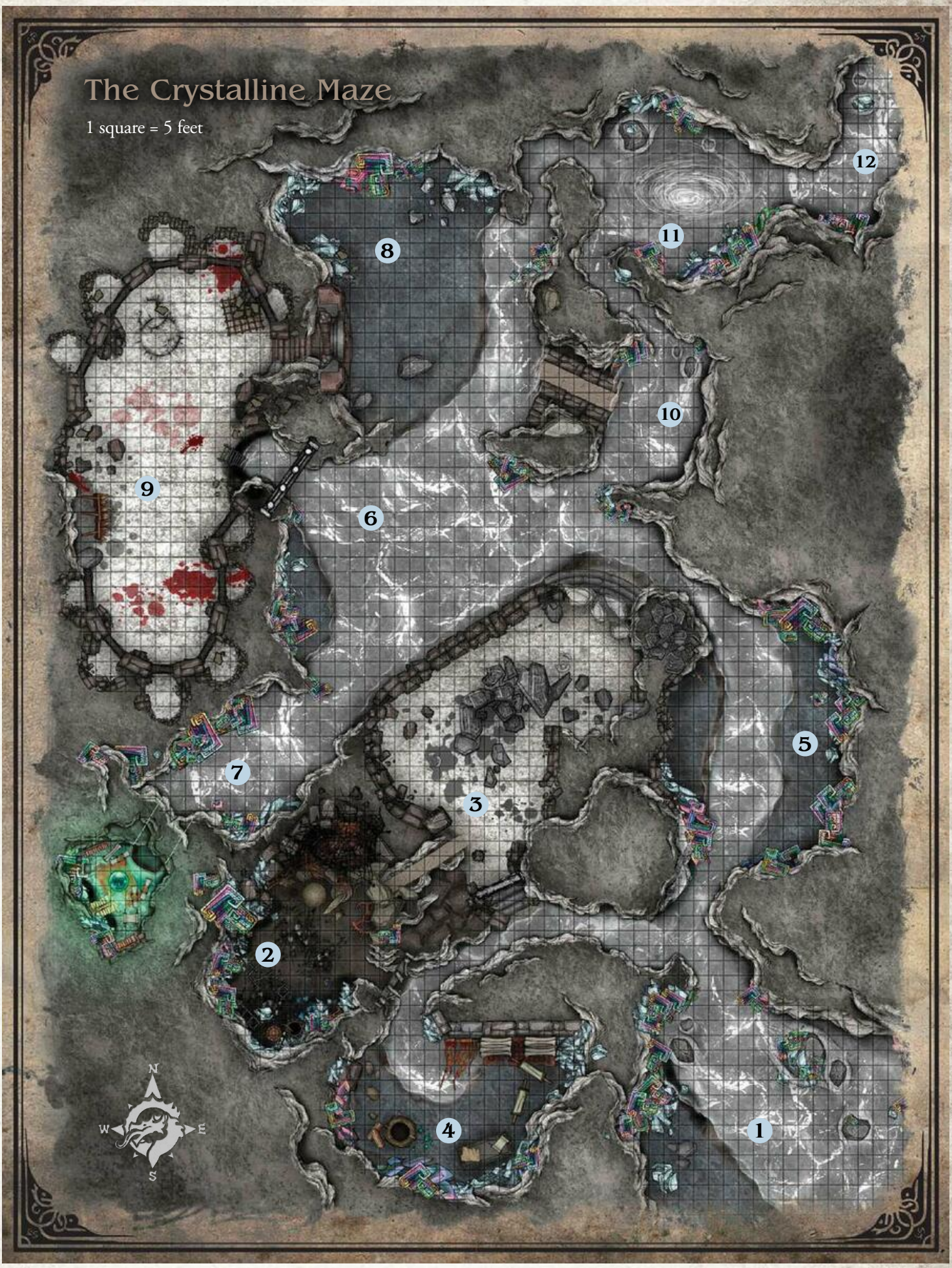
The outer caves and the area beyond them are mainly a network of quicksilver canals, and it is likely the adventurers will at least touch the liquid or fall into it if they're unlucky.

If a character enters the quicksilver current, they must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until their next long or short rest. If a character becomes submerged in the quicksilver current or remains in contact with the quicksilver for more than 1 hour, they must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or become Poisoned and Unconscious until the party's next long rest. If an unconscious or poisoned character remains in contact with the quicksilver for more than 1 hour, they develop a random indefinite madness flaw.

1. The Entrance

This wide tunnel is the entrance to the vast network of outer caves in map 7.1: The Crystalline Maze.

> You enter a dark cave. The mercury provides a smooth surface to drift on with the boat. The walls are covered in glittering bismuth that reflects even the faintest of lights. The chamber narrows toward the end, continuing into a smaller dark canal. Something in this chamber seems to both entice you and warn you off at the same time.



MAP 7.1: THE CRYSTALLINE MAZE

Through the entrance, the canal splits into two paths. The right canal heads to area 5. The left canal leads to area 3, which is accessible through a locked grate; area 2, which is on dry land through a broken and rusted grate; and finally to a landing in area 4, which used to serve as the Architect's study.

2. Storage

This is an open cave with dry ground, which the adventurers may reach by disembarking and walking down a few stone steps. The entrance used to include a door, but only half a rusted hinge remains now. Read the following aloud when the adventurers enter the chamber:

> You enter the dark room through a broken grate. Tools and materials lay rusted and devoured by the minerals growing along the walls and floor. It is hard to discern the tools from the bismuth formations.

The chamber contains dessicated, ancient tools that the Architect once used in their first jobs for Sivax. Most of the material has rusted into the stone walls and floor, buried under a coat of grime and rot. There are also stashes of empty crystal vials, caked with dust and cobwebs.

Searching the room reveals dragon-sized chisels, pliers, hammers, and other tools of otherworldly design, all deteriorated beyond use, among blackened wood planks and moldy stone. Closer inspection suggests that some of the tools seem more suited to carve flesh and blood than stone. Furthermore, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a chute behind some minerals which leads to area 3.

3. Junkyard

This is a cave along a dry shore. The door to enter is a bit stuck but still works, requiring a DC 14 Strength or Dexterity check to open. The cave floor is below ground level, accessible through a few descending steps. The chamber is littered with garbage and junk of all kinds and origins. Magnifex dragons and dragonkin have discarded their failures, refuse, and leftovers here for centuries. Read the following aloud when the party enters the chamber:

> This vast cavern is mostly occupied with what appears to literally be a dragon-scale garbage pile. The pile contains plenty of sharp and misshapen objects.

There are broken-off parts of unfathomable machines; moth-eaten canvas rolls with slashed paintings; twisted copper tubing pieces; mummified or stuffed creatures with unnatural shapes and uneven limbs; ripped-out faces half-preserved by mercury with countless scarifications across their skin; crystal jars with floating, withered organic blobs that may be preserved organs or discarded artwork; and bones of unidentified creatures, which seem to have been drilled, marked, or fused to metal scraps. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine or Perception) check suggests these body modifications happened when the creatures were still alive.

The junkyard seems to be scarcely visited, although it still sees some use. It is one of several refuse chambers in the Crystalline Maze, where garbage from junkyards in other levels and Magnifex labs is brought for final disposal under the quicksilver channels. The dragonkin in charge of the junkyard only visit it about once or twice every month, both to bring new garbage and to take out older heaps. A successful DC 22 Intelligence (Investigation) check while exploring the room reveals a chute that leads to area 2 and a secret stairway that leads up to area 6.

4. Old Study

This enormous cave is an abandoned, semi-forgotten lab that the Architect made use of while they worked for Sivax. The party needs to descend a short flight of stairs to reach it. Read the following aloud when the party enters the chamber:

> As you enter the cave, you notice large pieces of rotten parchment and many writings and etchings on the walls which look like maps and schematics for artifacts. Unfortunately the natural mineral has grown over most of the etchings, leaving them unreadable.

Several niches on the wall used to serve as placement for scrolls, notes, and experiments. Now, they contain only dusty litter and cobwebs. Nothing can be salvaged from these remains, but a successful DC 24 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a folded leather case stuck between two stone slabs. There are some runes inscribed on the case and on the parchment sheets inside it.

These are notes describing the building of *Um'Frêki*, a weapon intended to hurt Magnifex dragons. One of the notes reads, "In case Sivax does not come through, as he is oftentimes known to do." One of the sheets describes two pieces, a pole and a blade, and contains a spell required to bind them. With this spell and the missing two parts, the

adventurers can assemble *Um'Frêki* (see appendix B) and use it in the final battle against Sivax.

5. Outer Guard Post

This small cave serves as a guard post for the canal entrance to the Crystalline Maze. Since this route is rarely used, the guards here are not used to disturbances, but they react quickly and viciously if they detect any intrusion. Read the following aloud if the party enters the chamber:

> As you drift into the chamber, it widens, with two rock landings on either side. There are creatures on both sides, guarding this spot.

There are four **Magnifex dragonkin** inside this chamber. They immediately detect any intruder entering the chamber while on a boat. The party can swim and use stealth to suprise or avoid the dragonkin, if they wish. And if the characters arrive from area 6, they can use stealth even if they arrive on the boat, as the dragonkin are guarding the other direction.

6. The Promenade

Read the following aloud when the adventurers proceed into this area:

> The rock walls of this wide canal are marked with horrible motifs, depicting seemingly alien creatures and disturbing shapes. It's unclear whether the carvings are the result of natural erosion or made by the hand of an insane artist, but someone did enhance the already disturbing images with quicksilver lining.

Every time the party travels through this tunnel, each adventurer must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the murals until they leave the area, risking madness as per the "Special Rules" section. A successful save does not grant any immunity against future effects from seeing these murals.

This chamber is connected to areas 5, 7, 8, and 10 through small canals. It is also connected to area 3 through a secret door and to area 9 via a heavy grate, which can be dislodged with a DC 22 Strength check. Behind the grate is a ladder that climbs up 30 feet to the chamber.

Making too much noise or spending more than one hour in this room will cause the dragonkin in area 8 to notice the party and attack them.

7. The Hidden Stash

Read the following aloud when the adventurers enter the chamber:

> You reach a relatively small, tranquil quicksilver lake in a perfectly round chamber. The surface of the lake is flat, as polished and undisturbed as a mirror, and beautiful crystal growths line the rock walls.

This mercury lake has stood untouched for millennia, perhaps even before Sivax rose to be the azhurma of his brood. For uncounted eons, everyone has assumed the lake is nothing but a dead-end cave with beautiful crystal growths on its walls and shores.

However, there is a hidden tunnel beneath the liquid. Actively searching for the underwater tunnel requires a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check to dive through the mercury. The submerged creature must also succeed

Magnifex dragonkin

on a DC 24 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check, made with disadvantage, to find the tunnel. Be sure to follow the rules for quicksilver exposure in the "Swimming in Quicksilver" section.

The tunnel leads to an air pocket below the cave containing an ancestral, hidden treasure that not even Sivax knows of: a lost library. As any character enters the room read the following:

> As you surface you find yourself in an ancestral, damp chamber. At its center, a green floating sphere lights the room. The walls, although overgrown with bismuth, look incredibly old. You see old parchment rolls with golden and platinum rods, beautifully crafted and adorned; huge tomes, exquisitely bound and somewhat preserved; and horrifically beautiful sculptures and paintings that you want to stop looking at but somehow can't.
>
> The room seems to have once been part of a much larger chamber, but this is all that remains untouched by the ever-growing bismuth.

There are no clues as to who left it here. The library contains just under one hundred books covering every subject, including art, history, magic, aesthetics, and politics. The books are human-sized but written in Draconic and signed by countless authors of various species.

The calligraphy, illustrations, and materials of all of the books are exquisite. Whoever built this library was very careful with their selection. Some of the texts are leatherbound, and some are rolled-up parchment in scroll cases. The books themselves are nonmagical but may provide advantage on certain Intelligence (Arcana or History) checks if you allow it.

Each book, including its case or binding, is worth an average of 3,500 gp, and the full collection is worth about 300,000 gp and weighs a rough total of 450 pounds.

The green orb is a simple spell of *dancing lights* which was made permanent. It poses no danger and remains there unless dispelled.

An effect such as *detect magic* or a successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the fact that three of the scroll cases contain magic items. The first, a treatise on the power of art over emotions, counts as a *scroll of antipathy/sympathy*. The second, an essay on how to tap into an audience's hidden thoughts and fears as part of a performance, counts as a *scroll of weird*. The third case is empty save for an arrow of *Magnifex dragon slaying*. If used against Sivax, this arrow ignores his damage reduction and special defenses in addition to its standard effect.

Magnifex Songmaster

8. Inner Guard Post

Read the following aloud when the adventurers approach the chamber:

> You can hear low hisses and grunts, followed by the occasional Draconic phrase, long before approaching the entrance. There are many dragonkin here.

This is a guard post like the one at area 5. But, being closer to the gates, it has more guards, and they are far more alert. If the adventurers approach this cave, or make any kind of noise within 30 feet of it, they must face seven **Magnifex dragonkin** and one **Magnifex songmaster**. They have two boats with them and will follow the party if they flee to other areas, attacking their boat to sink it.

There is a ladder made of bone leading to a hole about 15 feet above the ground. The hole leads to the top of a steep ramp that connects down to area 10. This ramp has grease on it making it extremely slippery. If any character wishes to climb down it to see where it leads, they must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or slip and fall into area 10. This chute is used to dispose of bodies after experimentation.

There is also a heavy metal door that leads to area 9. It does not require a key but takes one minute to open, as it has many interlocking pieces to provide soundproofing, which must be removed before it will open. Because of the nature of this door, no amount of noise made in this chamber will alert creatures in area 9.

The canal running through this chamber leads to area 11.

9. Cells

This huge cave is on a higher level than the rest of the Crystalline Maze, requiring the party to ascend a staircase from area 8 to reach it or climb up the ladder behind the grate in area 6. As the adventurers enter the room, read the following aloud:

> Entering the chamber, you encounter a weird, vast cavern, with a thick bismuth growth over the rock walls on either side. Within the metallic growth are various air bubbles, or niches, at irregular intervals.
>
> There are people inside these niches, one or two individuals in each cell: humans, elves, dwarves, orcs, and halflings of all ages and genders, looking haggard and desperate, dressed in rags, and frantically glancing around. Their freedom is blocked by irregular, solidified bismuth drippings that function as cell bars. Some raise their heads and moan indistinctly when you enter the chamber, while others retreat further into their cells, frightened.
>
> A few of the prisoners seem relatively unharmed, but some have been horribly mutilated, with metal shards embedded in their bodies or replacing their limbs. A few have even been forcibly merged into the walls or floor of their cells.
>
> You have no time for a closer inspection of the chamber. Something huge lumbers down the hallway, with the sound of deep breathing and flapping wings.

The cells in this chamber hold prisoners intended for the Mindcarver, Fleshcrafter, and Boneshifter experiments in areas within the inner tunnels (map 7.2). Some have been subject to early tests, pending transport to the Magnifex laboratories. Before the adventurers can do anything in the room, they must face its guardians: two **adult Magnifex dragons** who attack right away, gleefully anticipating new subjects to torture or mutilate in the name of art. The door that leads to area 8 is soundproof, so if the party managed to arrive from area 6, the dragonkin there won't be alerted, no matter how noisy the battle is.

Once the adventurers have dealt with the dragons, they can approach the cells. While most of the prisoners are scared out of their wits or have had their humanity tortured out of them, some are coherent enough to ask for release. The dripping metallic bars on each cell were created by the dragon jailors' metal-shaping magic. The only way to free the prisoners is through similar magic (e.g., stone shape and such effects) or by force, which requires the adventurers to spend one hour breaking metal bars all over the chamber and draws the attention of a patrol of six **Magnifex dragonkin**.

There are twenty-three prisoners here, eight of which are in no shape to escape and whose bodies cannot be restored except by *heal* or *regeneration* spells, bearing the risk of deformity described in the "Special Rules" section.

If the adventurers free the prisoners, they tearfully thank their heroes, immediately head back toward the exit, and escape the tunnels, even if they need to wade across the quicksilver channels to do so, as it's unlikely the adventurers have brought enough boats to carry them back. They have nothing to give in exchange for their freedom, but they repay the party by telling them what they know:

- If the party arrived from area 6, they let them know there is a retinue of Magnifex guards in the chamber at the bottom of the staircase.
- The Mindcarvers, Fleshcrafters, and Boneshifters are three Magnifex art schools that practice mutilation as a form of art.
- They work on opposite ateliers somewhere beyond the second gate in the inner tunnels.
- That gate can only be opened from a cave near it.
- The dragon ateliers are the only way deeper into the maze. Trying to get past them is suicide, or worse, since your death will be slow, painful, and horrifying.
- There's an entity roaming the tunnels… a twisted, tortured thing, an old product of Sivax's experiments. It doesn't like to show itself, but it will if the intruders don't die of fright first. "My advice? Die of fright first."
- One of the prisoners used to be an adventurer, a daring treasure seeker. Now a shell of her former self, she only remembers she came to the Maze looking for an ancient stash of priceless records, supposedly hidden beneath a mercury lake nearby. She remembers nothing else, only that this stash was beneath a lake in the canals.

Despite their gratitude, the prisoners won't follow the adventurers any deeper into the caves, regardless of arguments or threats. They only want out.

10. The Flux's Cave

Read the following aloud when the party proceeds into this area:

> There is a strange echo in this widening chamber, but it otherwise looks like a natural cavernous formation.

This is the hunting domain of **the Flux**, a bizarre elemental creature that the Magnifex use as a natural garbage disposal system, waiting for the monster to feed to harvest the gems and other treasure that it doesn't digest.

If the adventurers pass through the center of the room, the Flux attacks them immediately. It fights until it is killed. If the party defeats the Flux, they may search its droppings for gems and half-digested jewelry worth a total of 33,000 gp.

There is an opening near one of the walls that leads to a ramp heading upward toward area 8. The ramp is covered in grease, making it incredibly difficult to climb. A successful DC 24 Strength (Athletics) check will allow any character to move to the top of the ramp, which overlooks into area 8. The canal flows through this room into area 11.

11. Whirlpool

This chamber can be accessed from area 8 and area 10, as both canals converge at the entry. Read the following aloud when the party enters this area:

> As you get close to the room, suddenly you feel the strength of a current in the quicksilver pulling you inside the chamber, where you see a whirlpool pulling the mercury toward its center with great force.

The inherent magic of the Crystalline Maze has caused a quicksilver whirlpool to form in this small cave. A successful DC 22 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that this is the first stage for the mercurial liquid to eventually become everflux quicksilver, the element the adventurers are looking for. Sadly, it will take years for this whirlpool to finally coalesce into true everflux quicksilver.

To safely paddle across this area, the adventurers must make two successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) checks to avoid being sucked into the whirlpool. If the party does not succeed on at least two of these checks, their boat can no longer advance beyond this point without the aid of magic.

If the adventurers have no magical or special means with which to move their boat, the only way to escape the pull of the whirlpool is by wading or swimming away from it, which requires a successful DC 24 Strength or Dexterity saving throw. A success on this save allows the character to escape the cavern in the same round. A character that fails the save takes 10 minutes to swim out of the whirlpool, and once they have escaped, they are considered to have been submerged in the quicksilver as per the "Swimming in Quicksilver" rules.

This chamber is the only way through to area 12 and the last portion of the outer tunnels.

12. Gate

Read the following aloud when the party proceeds into this area:

> You travel through a tight tunnel. Your path is eventually blocked by an ancient, sturdy-looking grate covered in bismuth growths. It has nine draconic runes protruding from its metal frame.

This short tunnel connects the outer caves with the inner tunnels. However, there is a strange and sturdy grate preventing the boat from proceeding further. The only clue on how to pass beyond this gate is a lock with a grid of nine draconic runes.

The runes in this grid must be pressed in the correct sequence to open the lock. A successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the runes on the lock correspond to those on the engraved cylinder. All the adventurers need to do is to press them in the same order as they appear on the cylinder's lid. Once they do, the lock's code is correctly input and the gate opens.

If the adventurers push the runes in the wrong sequence, each wrong input releases a magical warming effect, which raises the tunnel's temperature and causes the mercury canal to emit noxious fumes. Characters within 90 feet of the grate when this happens must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. A new saving throw of this type is required every time an incorrect rune is pressed, with the DC increasing by 2 each time. If a poisoned character fails their save again, they fall unconscious for 24 hours. If an unconscious or poisoned character remains within 90 feet of the warming runes for 1 hour or more, they gain an indefinite madness flaw.

If the adventurers spend more than 1 hour near the runes, they draw the attention of four **Magnifex dragonkin** and one **Magnifex acidbrewer**, who attack immediately.

Rewards

Once the party passes the gate in area 12, gaining entry to the inner tunnels, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

The Flux

ARTISTRY, AT WHAT PRICE?

At this point of the adventure, the party has made it past the outer canals and should have realized that something is following them. They are now inside the inner tunnels actually leading to Sivax's inner lair, in an area the Magnifex refer to as the Halls of Crafting. These tunnels used to belong to the Architect at the height of their work. They have since been variously occupied by Sivax's dragon protegés, dragonkin aesthetic scholars and Magnifex sycophants.

Currently, the Halls are home to three schools of Magnifex visual arts: the Mindcarvers, Boneshifters, and Fleshcrafters. All of these schools are based on the use of living beings as tools for artistic inspiration and pursuit. Sivax allows them to practice their art here, endorsing them as he has many other artistic movements throughout the millennia.

The Halls of Crafting

While still rough-hewn and refracting enchanting light through their mercury reflections and irregular stone walls, the Halls of Crafting show a bit more symmetry and intentional masonry than the outer caves, with carved arches, paved foyers, well-maintained doors, and the occasional crystalline lamp.

As the adventurers proceed through the inner tunnels, they can hear muffled cries and tortured moans echoing through the walls and passages. The Entity's unseen presence keeps haunting the party but still only lets itself be known very sporadically, through occasional glimpses at the edges of vision and unexpected noises, startlingly close to the adventurers.

If the adventurers still have a boat at this point, the Entity waits for them to cross the second gate (area 15, map 7.2). Then, as soon as the adventurers leave their boat unattended to explore a chamber, or for any other reason, it attacks the vehicle, not to actually damage it but for the adventurers to find scratches and other marks on it when they return. Any character discovering or observing this damage for the first time must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. A character that fails the save becomes frightened of the Entity's potential presence for 1 minute and risks madness as described in the "Special Rules" section.

The adventurers begin their exploration of the inner tunnels at area 13.

13. The Exhibition

Read the following aloud when the party enters this area (map 7.2: The Halls of Crafting):

> You approach an immense tunnel, which leaves no doubt you're entering an area where dragons live. However, the most eye-catching feature of the tunnel is not its size but the grisly display along its walls. You pass before a horrible assortment of disturbing constructs, most made of a shocking mix of the flesh and bone of dead humanoids intertwined with metal shapes.
>
> These pieces greet you as if in an exhibition, hanging from the cave ceiling by filigreed threads, nailed or merged into the walls through unknown and painful-looking processes, or standing on rock pedestals as if they were still living creatures, forever frozen in tortured postures or encased in spiked quicksilver.

This immense tunnel, wide enough for a dragon to comfortably glide through, displays the most recent art projects of the Mindcarver and Fleshcrafter alumni for all visitors to see.

Nondragons that travel the corridor must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the "art" until they leave the tunnel, risking madness as described in the "Special Rules" section.

14. The Chamber of Skulls

As the party approaches the door to this chamber, they notice a slowly rippling glow coming from underneath it. The door is closed, but unlocked. Read the following aloud if the adventurers enter the chamber:

> This large cave contains little over a dozen columns of different sizes, decorated with the encrusted skulls of various humanoid and dragonkin creatures. Natural light comes down in a series of crystal beams, illuminating the columns' interior. The light captured therein is released as a pulse through the skulls' sockets, nostrils, and mouths—those that still have their mandibles attached, that is—making them emit light of different colors, creating an eerie effect.

If the adventurers explore this room, the Entity stalking them becomes more restless and makes its presence more evident to the party, starting by casting long shadows from different corners of the room, with the gloomier and more unnerving ones seeming to come from somewhere above where the adventurers are standing. Still, despite its proximity to the intruders, the stalker remains unnervingly silent.

Then, the adventurers hear the sound of claws scraping the crystalline structures in the room, and the resulting cracks in some of the columns cause the light to bleed out of them. Have each adventurer make a DC 22 Intelligence saving throw to quickly turn away or cover their eyes. Each character that fails is Blinded for 1 minute.

Each blinded adventurer must then succeed on a DC 24 Strength saving throw or be shoved by an unseen force, taking 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d8) slashing damage and falling prone. The unseen force continues to graze and shove each blinded character in this manner every round until they leave the room or are no longer blinded. If at any moment there are no blinded characters in the room, the Entity stops its attack altogether and disappears.

As before, no ability check or divination spell effects can detect the creature or force it to show itself, as if

MAP 7.2: THE HALLS OF CRAFTING

light and magic itself were afraid of the creature's true form. However, any character who isn't blinded notices a faint blur in the air, a sort of moving darkness too indefinite to target or pinpoint with any action, attack, or effect, but undoubtedly present. A character that notices this blur must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened of it for 1 minute, risking madness as indicated in the "Special Rules" section.

A DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a niche at the base of one of the columns with a small box within. The box is of a sturdy yet light, unidentifiable metal. It has

a lock on top and a depression on one side the same size as the cylinder's width. If the cylinder is placed inside it, the lid pops open. The box contains more notes by Mutroz, documenting its greatest creation: a perfect, masterwork golem known as Vo'okhateth, the Stonecutter.

15. The Second Gate

Read the following aloud as the adventurers enter this area:

> You reach another grate, this one clearly newer and better maintained than the one before. The massive lock is controlled by a quarterstaff-sized metal cylinder which reaches into the wall. There is no keyhole, suggesting you must somehow move the cylinder to gain access.

Another grate impedes the adventurers' navigation beyond this area. A not-very-well-hidden cavity that leads to area 16 can be found through a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. Opening the lock from this area requires a DC 22 Dexterity or Strength check. Otherwise, the only way to unlock the grate is to push the locking cylinder by pulling the lever in area 16.

Beyond this area, the light starts to grow dimmer as the party goes further down the canals, and they perceive that the quicksilver current has become noticeably faster. A successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check reveals that the canals are going deeper underground after this point.

16. The Garret

The only entrance into this room is a rectangular cavity near the floor in area 15, requiring a human-sized creature to crawl through a small tunnel to enter.

The tunnel has a poisoned spear trap that can be deactivated by pushing a rock on the right-hand side. Anyone looking for traps can attempt a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check to find the trap and the mechanism that deactivates it. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher automatically finds the trap and how to deactivate it.

If the trap is not deactivated, the first creature crawling through the tunnel is targeted with a melee attack with a +11 bonus. If they are hit, they take 11 (1d8 + 7) piercing damage and 11 (2d10) poison damage. In addition, they must succeed on a DC 24 Constitution saving throw or be Poisoned for one hour.

Read the following aloud if the adventurers enter the chamber:

> This small cave, unusable to dragons and clearly meant for their dragonkin servants, is filled with abandoned, rusty workshop tools, from the artistic to the vicious-looking. A metal lever protrudes out of a stone wall to your right.

The room beyond the tunnel is filled with long abandoned tools, mostly used for carving crystals. A DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that some of the parts can be fit together to create a long shaft, obviously designed to hold a blade or axe head of some sort at its top.

A metal lever protrudes from one of the walls. Pulling it unlocks and opens the grate in area 15.

There is also a dusty leather satchel with another heap of parchments and a diagram of what seems to be the shaft of some kind of poled tool or weapon. One of the notes in the parchments reads, "As if blemish from close foulness could mean more harm to the azhurma than the deepest of cuts." This is one of the two parts of Um'Frêki, the Hooked Render, which the Architect intended to use against Sivax (see appendix B). If the adventurers find both parts of the weapon and the forging spell left behind by Mutroz, they can assemble Um'Frêki and use it during the last encounter with Sivax.

Column of Skulls

17. The Refuse Sluice

This room is found after a long winding tunnel to the left of the intersection after area 15. In this tunnel there is a readily apparent current coming from under one of the cave walls. Any character can attempt to swim through here against the current by succeeding on a DC 22

Strength (Athletics) check, arriving under a grate floor in area 20 where the current is less strong.

If the party follows the tunnel instead, they arrive at a landing outside a room which emits a sweet, slightly acidic smell. The wooden door is ajar, and spots of slimy matter can be seen under it.

When the party opens the door, a blast of warm, humid wind hits them in the face, enveloping them in the overwhelming reek of putrefaction. All characters must roll a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or become Incapacitated for 1 minute and Poisoned until their next short rest.

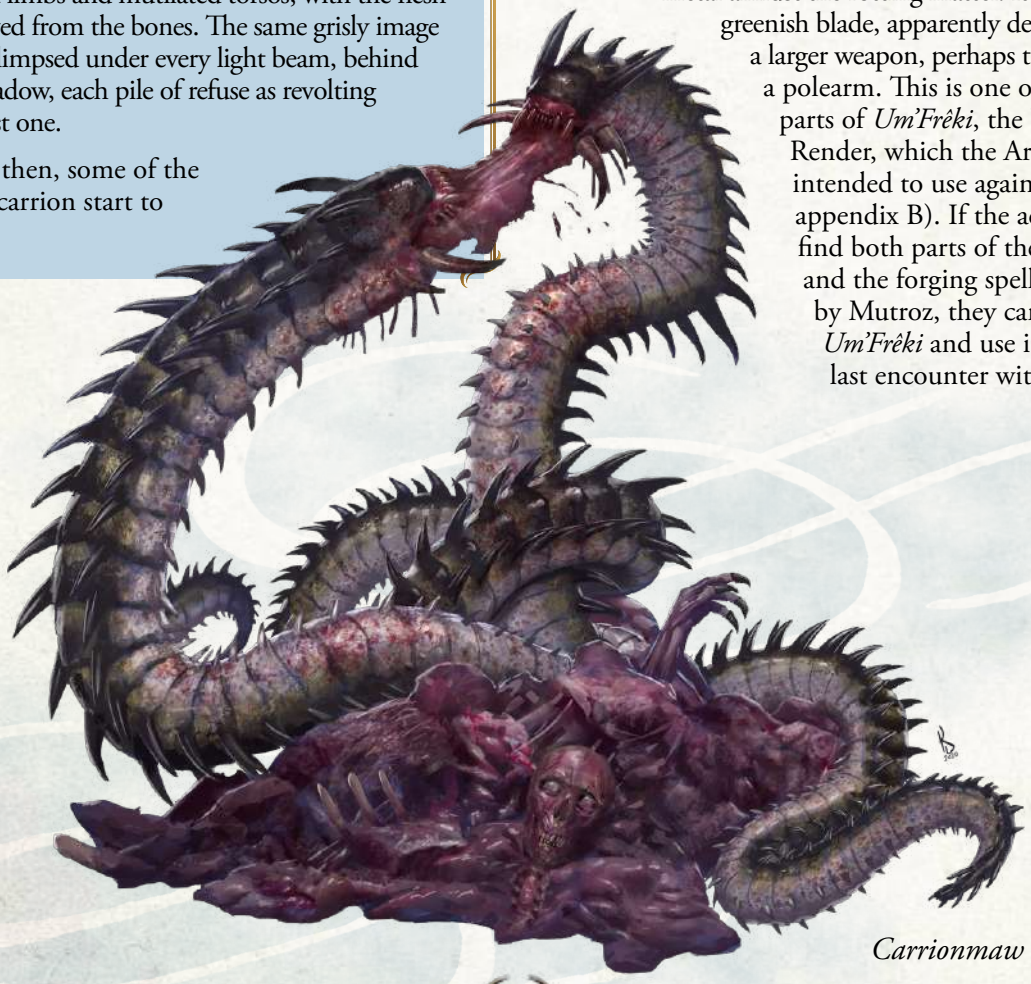
Read the following aloud if the adventurers enter the room:

> This rough cavern receives dim light from the outside, filtered through the murky crystals in the ceiling. What this weakened light reveals is enough to make one wish there was no light at all.
>
> The room is filled with dark shapes of varying sizes, masses that are blacker than the surrounding darkness. What little you can glean reveals that they are amorphous, haphazard mounds of shattered bones — offal and what seems to be body parts— chopped limbs and mutilated torsos, with the flesh half-carved from the bones. The same grisly image can be glimpsed under every light beam, behind every shadow, each pile of refuse as revolting as the last one.
>
> And then, some of the piles of carrion start to move.

The vision this room offers is revolting and disturbing. Any character with darkvision, and any character who dares to use a source of light to observe the room more clearly, must succeed on a DC 24 Wisdom save or become frightened by the piles of organic matter until they leave the room, with the corresponding risk of madness as described in the "Special Rules" section.

There are about a dozen mounds of offal in this room. Some of them wobble as the party inspects the chamber. If a character enters the chamber or disturbs the mounds in any way, two (1d4) **carrionmaw wurms** leap from the mounds to attack that character, trying to pull them into the offal and make them into their next food stash inside the mounds. Every character that walks within 10 feet of a mound, even if it's to help another character against the wurms, attracts two (1d4) **carrionmaw wurms** of their own, which specifically target and attack them. A character that is already targeted by one or more carrionmaw wurms does not attract additional wurms. There are a total of fifteen carrionmaw wurms in the chamber. They don't pursue targets beyond their rotting mounds; the encounter ends when the adventurers exit the room or defeat all of the carrionmaw wurms.

If the player characters search the room, they find one of the mounds contains a piece of undigested metal amidst the rotting matter. It is a sickly greenish blade, apparently detached from a larger weapon, perhaps the end of a polearm. This is one of the two parts of *Um'Frêki*, the Hooked Render, which the Architect intended to use against Sivax (see appendix B). If the adventurers find both parts of the weapon and the forging spell left behind by Mutroz, they can assemble *Um'Frêki* and use it during the last encounter with Sivax.



Carrionmaw wurms

18. The Miasma Crossroads

Read the following aloud if the adventurers enter this area:

> This is a junction of three tunnels symmetrically carved into the stone: the one you came from and a stone passage of solid ground to both your left and right. There is a sculpted dome in the ceiling, inlaid with hundreds of crystal prisms that reflect the few rays of light onto the shiny, silvery, and mercurial surface. The air is strangely stuffy and heavy here.
>
> If you continue this way, you'll have to leave the boat.

The mercurial vapors are strong in this area and directly attack the minds of travelers. All characters must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom or Constitution saving throw or begin suffering hallucinations related to their past failures and negative experiences. Besides each player's tailored hallucination, they all see something else in their minds, even those that succeed on the save. It seems to be a huge, fleshy figure, more like a shade than a solid creature, lurking in the background and looking at the characters' misadventures with a combination of joy and abject fear. When the hallucinations pass, after roughly 1 minute, the creature is nowhere to be seen.

To the left and right of the junction there are two opposing docks, each leading to a small atrium carved with strange hieroglyphs and extending for a couple dozen feet before ending at a huge wall. There is a set of heavy doors at the end of the atriums to the left and right, each leading to areas 19 and 20, respectively. Vague, muffled moaning sounds come from both directions.

19. The Soft Materials Hall

As the party enters the short, dark corridor that leads to this chamber, they are hit with the metallic smell of blood and a wall of sound, created by the nondescript wailing and moans of unseen creatures. Both the cacophony and rusty smell are unnerving yet bearable.

The balcony at the end of the corridor (marked with an A on map 7.2: The Halls of Crafting) stands 40 feet above the ground. The high ground and balustrade grant advantage on the player characters' checks to hide from the creatures on the floor.

The twin staircases leading down have narrow walls decorated with downward- pointing, beautifully engraved hooks and spearheads, all capriciously aligned but set in a way that they do not hurt anyone going down the stairs. Anyone can descend the stairs without trouble, but a Medium or larger creature coming up the stairs must succeed on a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw for every 10 feet of ascension or take 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

If an adventurer wants to peer over the balcony, they must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity (Stealth) check, made with advantage, to avoid detection. Read the following aloud as the character peeks at the scene on the ground floor:

> You witness a true chamber of horrors, where four Magnifex dragons, assisted by hordes of dragonkin dressed in gaudy robes, perform hideous mutilations and modifications on the bodies of captive, living creatures, and also on their own bodies, in what seems to be some type of demented aesthetic pursuit.

This is the main workshop of the Fleshcrafter and Boneshifter artistic schools, As their names imply, half the "artists" in the chamber pursue extreme flesh alterations, and the other half experiments with divergent repurposing of bones and osseous structures.

Any character witnessing this scene must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened of these activities until they leave the chamber, risking madness as indicated in the "Special Rules" section.

Fleshcrafter dragons wear the bloodcurdling results of their many projects in the form of trinkets made from skin and muscles stitched together and, in some cases, grafted onto their own bodies, morbidly clinging to spots where their dragonkin helpers removed some of their scales for this very purpose.

Boneshifters like to display their own bones, jutting out of their muscles or rib cages or with the bones and limbs of other creatures attached to them, with bizarre skeletal frames encasing their faces and shoulders. Their bodies are filled with bone piercings, and some peel part of the flesh off of their own skulls, creating works of art with their own exposed bones.

There are twenty experimental stations at the ground level, currently occupied with both dragonkin and Valernian victims in varying stages of "development," all connected to hoses and manned by dragonkin assistants. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals these hoses all connect to a central line that snakes to the back of the chamber and into a multifaceted, orb-like crystal.

A player may reach the orb unseen by walking down the stairs and succeeding on a DC 23 Dexterity (Stealth) check. A character with proficiency in alchemist's supplies or tinker's tools can take a close look at it, and if they succeed at a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check, without any need for using the actual tools, they discover that

this crystal is siphoning Vaala from the Valernians and redirecting it to the dragonkin being experimented upon. Any attack against the apparatus severs the hose, putting the victims out of their misery and alerting the dragons and dragonkin that something is wrong.

The adventurers must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity (Stealth) check to leave the area undetected. If they fail the check, or if they choose to face the so-called artists, they must fight **4 young Magnifex dragons** (the apprentice dragonkin don't fight), who are outraged at the interruption but delighted for these fortuitous, new subjects. For descriptive purposes, note that two of the dragons are Fleshcrafters, covered in gory flesh garments, and two are Boneshifters, their ribs, skulls, and joints revealed through their cleft flesh.

20. The Mindcarvers' Residence

The dimly-lit corridor leading to this chamber descends steadily as it progresses. If the party flees area 19 with dragons in pursuit, the dragons stop mid-chase, not daring to follow the characters here, but they watch the escaping party with a thrilled glint in their eyes.

Read the following aloud when the party enters the chamber at the end of the hallway:

Mindcarver Magnifex dragon

> The corridor leads into a wide chamber, where the scarce illumination reaching down from the high ceiling creates pools of weak light amidst the inky blackness.
>
> The room is lined with ashlar platforms and altar-like slabs, where strange crystalline contraptions and various alien-looking tools sit in disarray.
>
> As you enter the room, you hear faint chuckling, and a shrill voice says, *"So, you came here on your own free will. Fascinating. Let us see what crossed your minds to make you do this…"*

The party will now have to face the Mindcarvers, a strange school of advanced Magnifex "artists" who torture their victims to extract their thoughts of pain and fear. From these thoughts, Mindcarvers create glimmers, sensory experiences that the Magnifex brood regards as high art.

The party is immediately attacked by three **adult Magnifex dragons**. Mindcarvers prefer to use their illusion abilities to frighten and torture their targets before using their physical attacks or breath weapons. Any time these effects manage to cause a character to become Frightened, they risk insanity as described in the "Special Rules" section.

There is a heavy metal grate in the floor at the back of the room. Under it runs the mercury flowing from area 17 to area 21. If the party arrives here through this current, the Magnifex dragons do not notice them, and they can continue to move unimpeded to area 21 (map 7.3) through the current. The heavy grate can be opened with a DC 20 Strength check, moving a section of it out of the way and leaving it open for anyone else. Closing the grate after it is opened requires the same check.

If the adventurers survive the encounter, they may leave the chamber unimpeded, either back into area 18 or through the exit leading to area 21.

21. The Exit Tunnel

If the party hasn't carried their boat here, or if they arrived by swimming through the grated canal moving under area 20, they can only advance by wading through the quicksilver or by attempting to stay on the narrow ledges, which requires one successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Regardless of their choice, Mutroz's map ends here. From this point, the adventurers must find their way to Sivax's vault on their own.

Read the following aloud as the party decides what to do:

> As the quicksilver slides down the twilit canal, you hear another loud crash and a grating sound coming from somewhere further down the dim corridors, and now you are sure you are not imagining things, as a mad cackle and a long, sorrowful moan fill your hearts with fear.
>
> You see a rapidly crawling shadow projected onto the silvery surface. Then another one… and another…

At this point, the adventurers realize they've been followed. Their defeat of the dragon artists at the previous chamber did not go unnoticed, and there's now a throng of dragonkin guards and apprentices running after them, brandishing vicious-looking instruments of torture.

This is a mob of dragonkin and a deadly encounter to any party regardless of character level. Make sure to let the adventurers know that the numbers don't favor them at all; however, they have enough of a head start that escaping through the quicksilver canal remains an option.

Rewards

As they decide whether to flee or stand and fight, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

THE ARCHITECT'S LAMENT

This chapter begins with the party escaping or making a last stand against a mob of crazed dragonkin apprentices and art aficionados.

If the adventurers try to escape, let them try to run through the quicksilver or along the narrow ledges, but the dragonkin slowly gain on the adventurers unless they use magic to escape. If they choose to run in the canal, keep track of the effects of quicksilver poisoning. Regardless, the dragonkin eventually push them toward area 22 in map 7.3: The Bismuth Vaults. Once the party arrives, read them the following:

> The mercury canal ends here as the flow stops and gives way to a wide rocky chamber. The walls are all heavily lined with bismuth formations. At the center of the ceiling, a skylight rises, illuminating the room and showing how deep this chamber is.

Once the party is in area 22, they must face nine **Magnifex dragonkin**; the remaining dragonkin apprentices stay behind and outside of the fight. If the

players survive, the remaining dragonkin disperse and flee back through the canal. Something has scared them, thus ending the encounter.

Then, another loud, high-pitched sound fills the room, followed by a deafening crash, and a hole is knocked out of the East wall, quicksilver pooling around the debris. Through the opening walks a 12-foot tall crystalline construct of an alien yet immensely beautiful shape, with a huge mining drill mounted on its tail that looks like the maw of a worm.

If any dragonkin remain in the area, the construct shreds a couple of them to pieces before turning to the party.

"MUST. FIND. THE. ARCHITECT." It bellows in Draconic. "WHERE. IS. THE. ARCHITECT."

This is **Stonecutter**, the crazed golem that has haunted the Crystalline Maze for centuries, ever since Mutroz built it to guard Sivax's vault before their mysterious disappearance. For eons, its mind has been locked on a single directive: find its lost creator. The adventurers have a few seconds to act before it attacks them too.

If the party attacks, they must fight Stonecutter. If they survive the encounter, they find a glowing metallic rune in the golem's remains. It is Mutroz's rune of power. Together with the cylinder, it leads whoever holds it to the entombed body of the Architect. With both objects in their possession, the party may now follow the path across the tunnels to Sivax's lair, and the everflux quicksilver pool, unhindered by pursuers or enemies. Proceed to "The Last Stretch."

If the adventurers try to speak with the golem, it responds, surprised to find a lifeform willing to communicate with it after millennia of loneliness. It says nothing useful, however, simply repeating variations of its mantra: "MUST. FIND. THE. ARCHITECT. THE. ARCHITECT. IS. LOST."

If the party shows Mutroz's runed cylinder to Stonecutter, the golem stops cold. It recognizes the artifact. Its head comes closer to touch the cylinder; if the party allows it, the golem manages to tell part of its story:

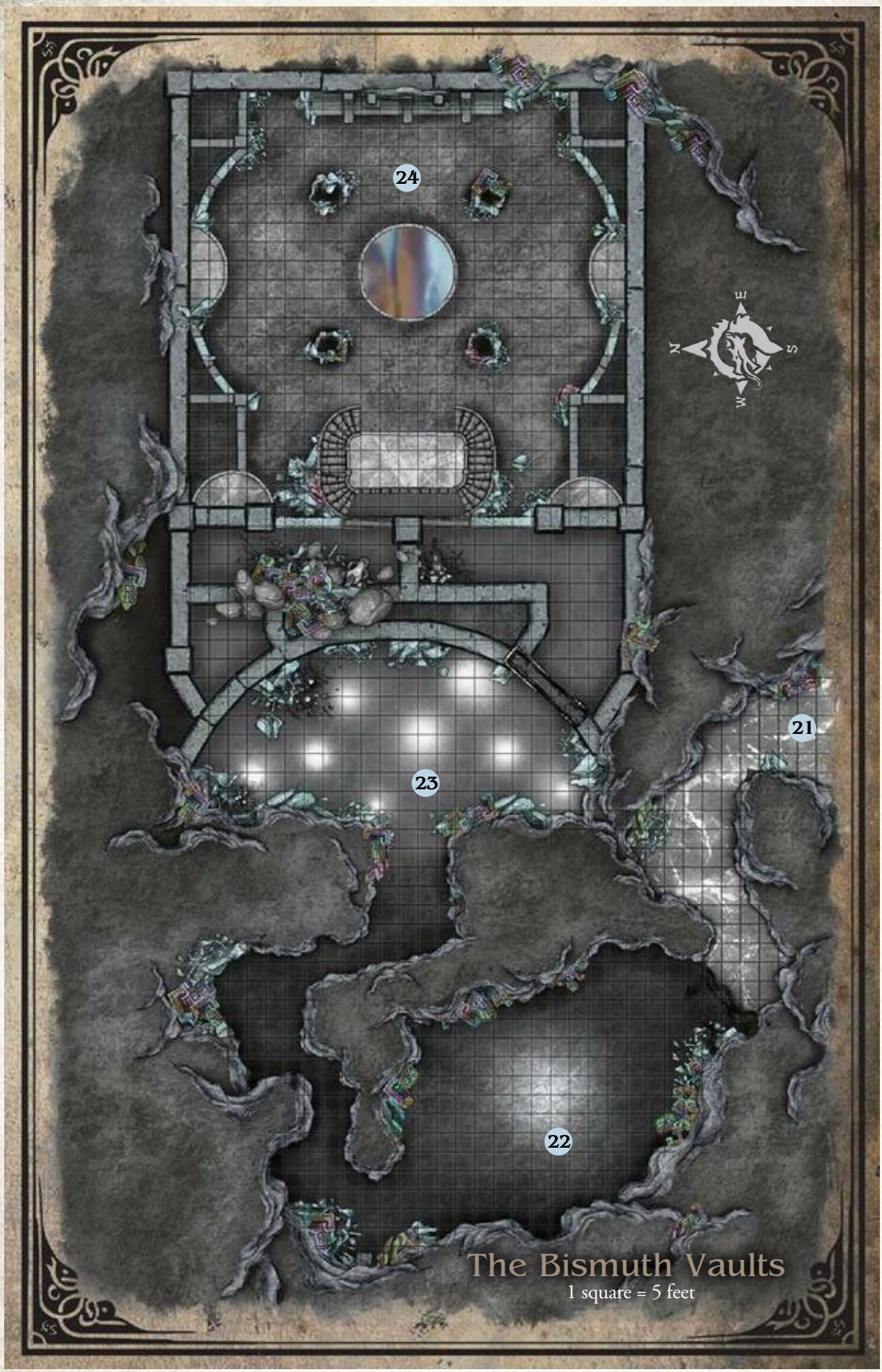
> *"THE. ARCHITECT. BUILT. SIVAX. BETRAYED. MUTROZ. ENTOMBED. FOREVER. BUT MIND. FREE. BUT. MIND. TRAPPED. FREE. TRAPPED. FREE. TRAPPED."*
>
> As it says these words, the golem smashes its own head in a futile gesture. Then, it grabs the cylinder. *"PATH. END. ENDLESS. SEARCH. AT. LAST. PATH. FOLLOW."*

If the party follows Stonecutter, it leads them in a straight line, smashing walls and bringing chambers down, to Sivax's lair. Proceed to "The Last Stretch."

The Last Stretch

Read the following aloud as the party navigates the Crystalline Maze and they enter area 23 (map 7.3), following either Stonecutter or its glowing rune.

Stonecutter



MAP 7.3: THE BISMUTH VAULTS

You walk the maze for what seems like hours, until you see a bright archway ahead. The arch leads into a semi-circular chamber with a very high, latticed ceiling, which breaks down the light and shadows into a stunning pattern.

A spasmodic cackle echoes throughout the room, and something comes out into the light. The huge, misshapen form of a dragon stands before you. It is completely scaleless, its scarred, violet and purplish skin uncovered. Its eyes are whited-out and swollen; its eyelids sewn back to its brow. Its frills are torn. Its wing membranes have been removed, and it winces under the light, trying to shield its useless eyes with maimed, unnaturally twisted claws. It keeps chuckling mockingly, however.

"Ah, light… So much the better to show them my beauty BEAUTY. They are not NOT supposed to come COME so far. Not to reach the inner sanctum NOT. Not. NOT."

The party recognizes the maimed dragon's voice. It is the Entity, the presence that has been following them since they entered the Maze and now has been forced to confront them so they don't reach Sivax's lair.

The adventurers must defeat the Entity before they continue their adventure. Forced to fight in the open, the Entity tries to avoid the areas of direct light, scurrying along the walls and tackling or shoving the adventurers into shadowed areas. If the party manages to goad the Entity into a spot of bright light, requiring a DC 21 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Charisma (Deception) check, all attacks against it are made with advantage until it moves away, out of the light.

If Stonecutter is with the party, the Entity attacks the golem first, saying things like "You are not supposed to find. Supposed to wander forever!" or "You should not NOT be restored. Not NOT you. I lost LOST myself. You YOU lost yourself. All ALL lose selves. You cannot find FIND. You you cannot!"

Stonecutter will defend itself and fight the Entity if it is attacked in this way.

Once the Entity is defeated, Mutroz's cylinder leads the party into the everflux quicksilver pool, two tunnels beyond this chamber.

If Stonecutter is still with them, it does not follow. Instead, it rams its way through another couple of walls, finally deactivating as it finds its original body, Mutroz's body, entombed within a crystal wall overlooking the everflux quicksilver pool.

As they enter the hallway read the following:

The giant golem destroys two solid walls that lead into a humid chamber, one that has probably remained sealed for centuries. Inside, there is a green tinted window into the Bismuth Vaults in all their splendor.

Opposite that wall is something even more impressive: a Magnifex dragon, its body completely merged with a bismuth wall making for an incredibly beautiful and dreadful image, as the dragon's expression of pain is still clearly visible on its face.

Rewards

After the party has defeated the Entity, award all player characters a milestone advancement to their next level.

The Fight with Sivax

Both the chamber with the architect or the hallway through the door at the back of the room lead to a magnificent bismuth sculpted door that leads to the top of a staircase in the Bismuth Vaults.

> The beautiful Bismuth Vaults, the greatest repository of art and beauty on Drakha, extends before you, their shimmering walls a work of exquisite craft themselves, overlooking stunning promenades amidst the everflux quicksilver pools. It's as if the entire chamber gloated over you, warning that the likes of you are not worthy of sullying its perfect interior.
>
> As you enter the magnificent halls, a pool of liquid mercury at the center bubbles and shifts, and a massive, gorgeous shape rises gloriously over the liquid mirror. *"Who are these beasts, come to marvel at the greatest forms of our universe? Tread lightly, for your presence offends beauty."*

First Phase

As the adventurers enter the vault (area 24, map 7.3), Sivax greets them with exaggerated surprise, and attacks right away.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> Around you rise iridescent walls of bismuth. The walls are full of mirrors, statues, and works of art. Reflections and colors abound and glimmer over the dragon's scales. There are eight doors along the walls, all shut.
>
> *"…How dare you place your impure, disgusting feet upon my collection? I'm tired of looking at you. Your blood will color my walls, like so many before."*

The adventurers have entered the chamber from the western gate near its center. They may traverse the map throughout the battle, unless Sivax impedes their passage with his Reshape Environment upkeep action.

Sivax's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 2

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- A number of mirrors (see the "Sivax Exploits" section) equal to or greater than the number of players have been broken.
- A number of doors (see the "Sivax Exploits" section) equal to or greater than the number of players have been opened.
- One of Sivax's body parts is broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, Sivax begins shifting his lair to threaten the intruders.

Second Phase

LAIR CONDITIONS

The floors and walls of the lair begin to shift and change unpredictably.

> Sivax warns you: *"My realm changes to my will. You will drown under the walls of my dominion."*

The entire battlefield in and around the Bismuth Vaults has become difficult terrain. Reaching a door, a mirror, or a wall requires a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

Sivax's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 4

PHASE CHANGE

The encounter continues in this phase until one of these conditions is met:

- A number of mirrors equal to or greater than N × 2 are broken.
- A number of doors equal to or greater than N × 2 have been opened.
- Three of Sivax's body parts are broken.

When one of the above conditions is met, the palace begins to tremble and change its shape even more violently than before.

Final Phase

The palace has become a dangerous, endlessly shifting landscape.

LAIR CONDITIONS

> The halls around you transform alternately into walls, pits, outcroppings, and terrible spikes. Sivax roars, *"My collection! My creations! You fools have destroyed everything beautiful. I must make it right, and your bones will replace my bismuth walls!"*

At the start of their turns, every creature in the area other than Sivax must succeed on a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) piercing damage and fall prone.

Sivax's Actions

Actions per Round: N + 5

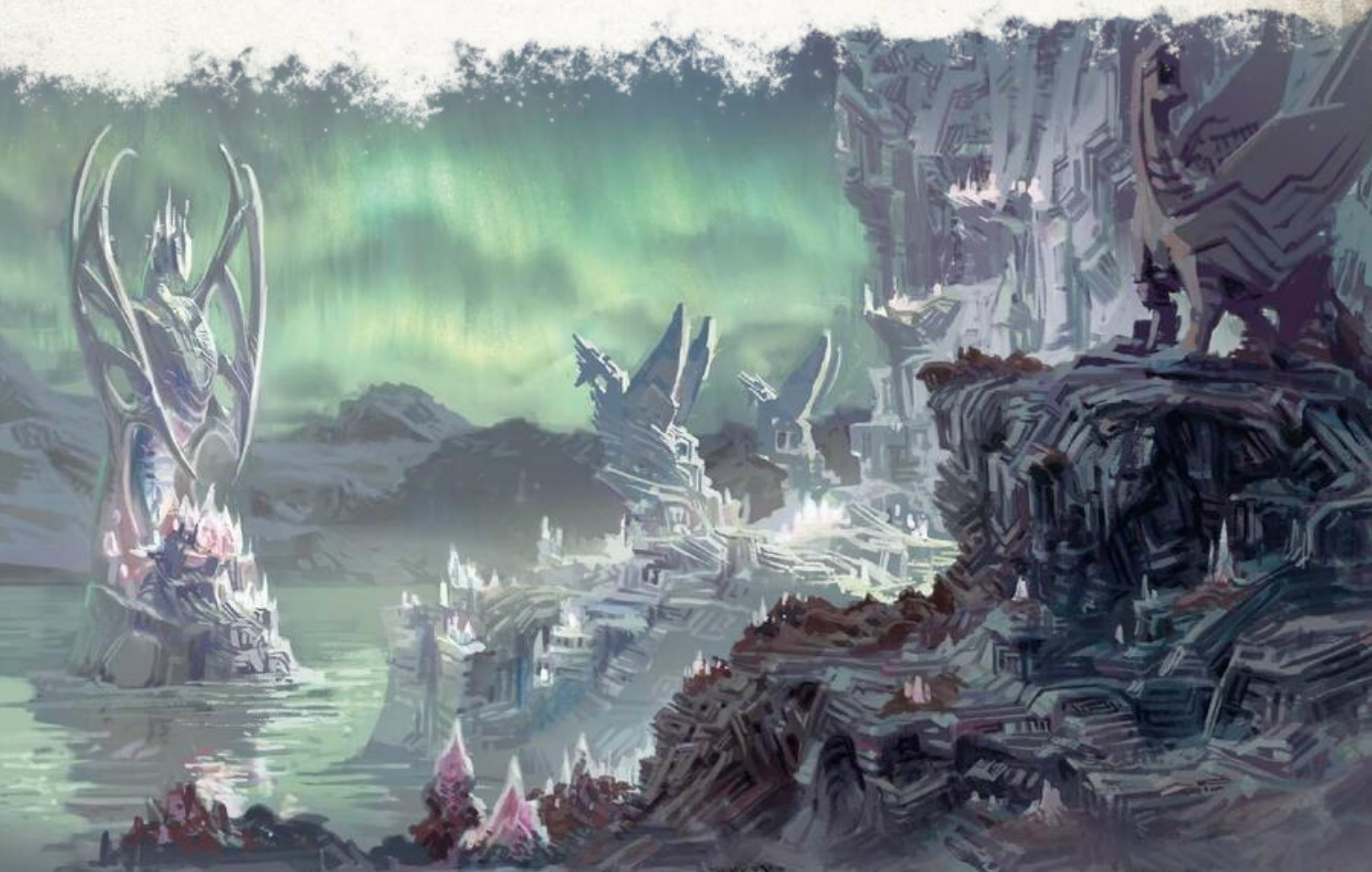
During this phase, Sivax can use his Reshape Environment upkeep action up to three times during each of his upkeeps, and the action cost of his Supreme Shift special action is reduced by 2.

PHASE END

The encounter ends when Sivax dies. This requires fulfilling one of the following conditions:

- Four or more of Sivax's body parts are broken, and the adventurers have broken at least N × 2 mirrors.
- Four or more of Sivax's body parts are broken and the adventurers have opened all doors.
- Six or more of Sivax's body parts are broken.

> Amidst the shifting chaos, the Great Wyrm seems overwhelmed. *"No!"* he screams. *"I can't— I can't control it anymore! Such deep grief will scar the universe with the disappearance of someone like me, who…!"*
>
> But the rest of Sivax's eulogy is lost under an avalanche of bismuth, rock, and liquid mercury as the vault crashes down around all of you. You'd better not stand looking, beautiful though the spectacle may be.



If the party wants to scoop up some everflux quicksilver, the time is now. They need only one drop to make the Cloak of Evershifting Skins, but they have a very short window to get it.

As the vault comes crashing down, the adventurers must succeed on a DC 24 Dexterity save or suffer 35 (10d6) crushing damage plus 35 (10d6) piercing damage from falling debris. A successful save negates all the damage. A player that stops to pick up everflux quicksilver as they leave the vault suffers disadvantage on the saving throw to escape and still takes half damage on a success.

Conclusion

If the adventurers survive the fight with Sivax, they may now escape the Crystalline Maze through the crumbling passages. No quicksilver stream blocks their path. No enemies run after them.

If they managed to snatch some everflux quicksilver from the vault, the adventurers may now use Mutroz's ritual to create the *Cloak of Evershifting Skins*, which allows them to leave Drakha, if they so wish.

SIVAX, PRINCE OF PERFECT ECSTASY

Of all azhurma, Sivax is the most vain, self-centered, and beautiful. He lives in a luxuriant hall, filled with mirrors and artwork, where Sivax can admire all beautiful things, particularly his own reflection.

To defeat Sivax, the party may also need to destroy his bubble of beauty and perfection.

Sivax Exploits

The following exploits can be used to take advantage of Sivax during the battle, if the characters discover them.

Beauty and the Beast

If any character shows Sivax an exceedingly beautiful artistic masterpiece (something created by an artist with a +6 or higher proficiency bonus), or something incredibly ugly (awful enough to require a saving throw to look at), they may spend an action to attempt a DC 20 Charisma check to distract Sivax with it. If the check succeeds, Sivax loses 2 actions from his current action pool. The same item cannot be used in this way more than once, and any further attempts to use this exploit in the same round have disadvantage on the Charisma check.

The Mirrors

Sivax's lair is full of mirrors where he can see his reflection. Breaking one and using it to deform Sivax's reflection will temporarily disturb the dragon. As an action, a character within 5 feet of a wall may break one of the mirrors. Doing so causes Sivax to lose 1 action from his current action pool. Sivax can lose no more than 1 action per round through this effect.

How Dare You Break My Body

Sivax likes beautiful things, and his body is the most beautiful thing in the universe. Every time one of Sivax's body parts is broken, he loses 2 action points from his current action pool.

The Rooms

Sivax is the most beautiful thing in the cosmos, but he still likes other beautiful things. The eight rooms around his central hall, located behind the doors in map 7.3: the Bismuth Vaults, contain his collections of artwork and masterpieces from various worlds and eras, including only the most precious and glorious artifacts in existence. And he keeps these rooms unlocked, as he wishes to see these works at his leisure.

As an action, a character within 5 feet of one of the doors marked around the main hall in map 7.3: the Bismuth Vaults, can open the door, causing the treasures inside to be accessible and vulnerable. Sivax won't use his breath weapons or his Wing Flap in the direction of an opened door.

If a creature enters one of the rooms, Sivax feels his collection is threatened, and he will spend as many actions as needed to remove that creature from the area or kill them inside the room, without using his breath weapons or Wing Flap. He will then block access to the room permanently by using his Reshape Environment upkeep action.

SIVAX

Gargantuan dragon,chaotic evil

Armor Class see "Sivax's Body Parts"
Hit Points see "Sivax's Body Parts"
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	18 (+4)	24 (+7)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	28 (+9)

Saving Throws Dex +13, Wis +13, Cha +18
Skills Deception +18, Perception +13, Persuasion +18
Damage Reduction 7
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 23
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. Sivax gains advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and is immune to the *maze* spell.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Sivax fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.
Magic Weapons. Sivax's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Upkeep Actions

During Sivax's upkeep, he replenishes his action pool up to its maximum for the current phase, and he may take any of the following actions.

Quick Cast (0 Actions). Reshape Environment (0 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Sivax can change the shape of his lair with a thought. A 10-foot square of open terrain in the map becomes a wall, or a 10-foot square of wall in the map becomes open terrain.

Can't Touch This (0 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Sivax can choose three creatures. The chosen targets cannot make sneak attacks or gain advantage on their attacks until Sivax's next upkeep.

Shake (1 Action). Sivax can shake all of his body parts. Any creature mounted on one of Sivax's body parts must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the shake DC of the body part they're holding onto in order to stay perched. On a failed save, the creature falls to the ground, takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and becomes prone.

E***nduring Masterpiece (1 Action).*** Any masterpiece previously activated by Sivax with his Living Masterpiece special action continues to fight for him, at least until his next upkeep. If Sivax doesn't use this ability during his upkeep, all previously activated masterpieces melt back into the walls and floor of his lair and must be individually created again with the Living Masterpiece special action.

Regenerate (3 Actions). Once during each of his upkeeps, Sivax can heal one body part that has not been reduced to 0 hit points. The chosen body part regains half of its hit point maximum.

Melee Actions

Claw (1 Action). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +16 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit*: 21 (4d6 + 7) slashing damage, and the target takes 5 slashing damage at the start of each of their next turns. The target may attempt a DC 24 Constitution saving throw after taking the damage to end the effect. Multiple instances of this ongoing effect do not stack, limiting the total damage that it can inflict on each affected target to 5 slashing damage per turn. Any creature mounted on Sivax's claws must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the claw's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Bite (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +16 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit*: 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing and 9 (2d8) slashing damage, plus any creature mounted on Sivax's head must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the head's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Tail Stinger (2 Actions). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +22 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit*: 21 (4d6 + 7) piercing damage, plus the target must succeed on a DC 24 Constitution saving throw or suffer an additional 21 (4d6) poison damage. Any creature mounted on Sivax's tail must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the tail's shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Wing Flap (2 Actions). Each creature in a 20-foot radius around Sivax must succeed on a DC 24 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 20 feet and take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage. Sivax can then move up to his flying speed in any direction. Any creature mounted on Sivax's wings must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw against the wings' shake DC to avoid falling as per the Shake upkeep action.

Assault (3 Actions). Sivax moves, or flies if possible, up to his speed and makes one claw attack and one tail stinger attack against one target.

Breath Weapons

Dragonfire (1 Action). Sivax breathes fire in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

Crystal Spray (2 Actions). Sivax spews bismuth crystals in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success. Sivax must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Crystal Cloud (3 Actions). Sivax spews a cloud of bismuth crystals in a 90-foot radius. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 24 Constitution saving throw or take 44 (8d10) poison damage and become poisoned until Sivax's next upkeep. A successful save halves the damage and negates the poisoned condition. Sivax must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Molten Bismuth (5 Actions). Sivax spews a stream of iridescent, molten bismuth in a line that is 120 feet long and 10 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) fire plus 22 (4d10) poison damage and become paralyzed until their next short rest, unless cured or removed by magical means. A successful save halves the damage, and the creature is only restrained, not paralyzed, until Sivax's next upkeep. Sivax must spend one action during one of his future upkeeps to use this breath weapon again.

Special Actions

Living Masterpiece (3 Actions). Sivax creates one masterpiece, a Large, dragon-shaped construct from the metal of his lair. The masterpiece acts on its own initiative, attacking Sivax's enemies to the best of its ability. All such masterpieces Sivax has created will melt back into the environment during his next upkeep unless he takes the Enduring Masterpiece upkeep action to maintain them.

Masterpiece

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50
Speed 30 ft.
Abilities Str 14 (+2), Dex 16 (+3), Con 10 (+0), Int 3 (–4), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 1 (–5)
Senses blindsight 60 ft.
Languages Understands the language of its creator but can't speak

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) piercing damage.

Flaws in your Defense (1 Action). Sivax chooses a target he can see. All of Sivax's attack rolls against that target are made with advantage until his next upkeep.

Way Ahead of You (1 Action). As a reaction, Sivax can use any melee attack or special action, paying the appropriate action cost, before the triggering action is resolved.

Ground Shift (2 Actions). Sivax manipulates the ground of his lair to move creatures where he wants them. One creature without a flying speed or the ability to hover that Sivax can see must succeed on a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone and be moved to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of Sivax.

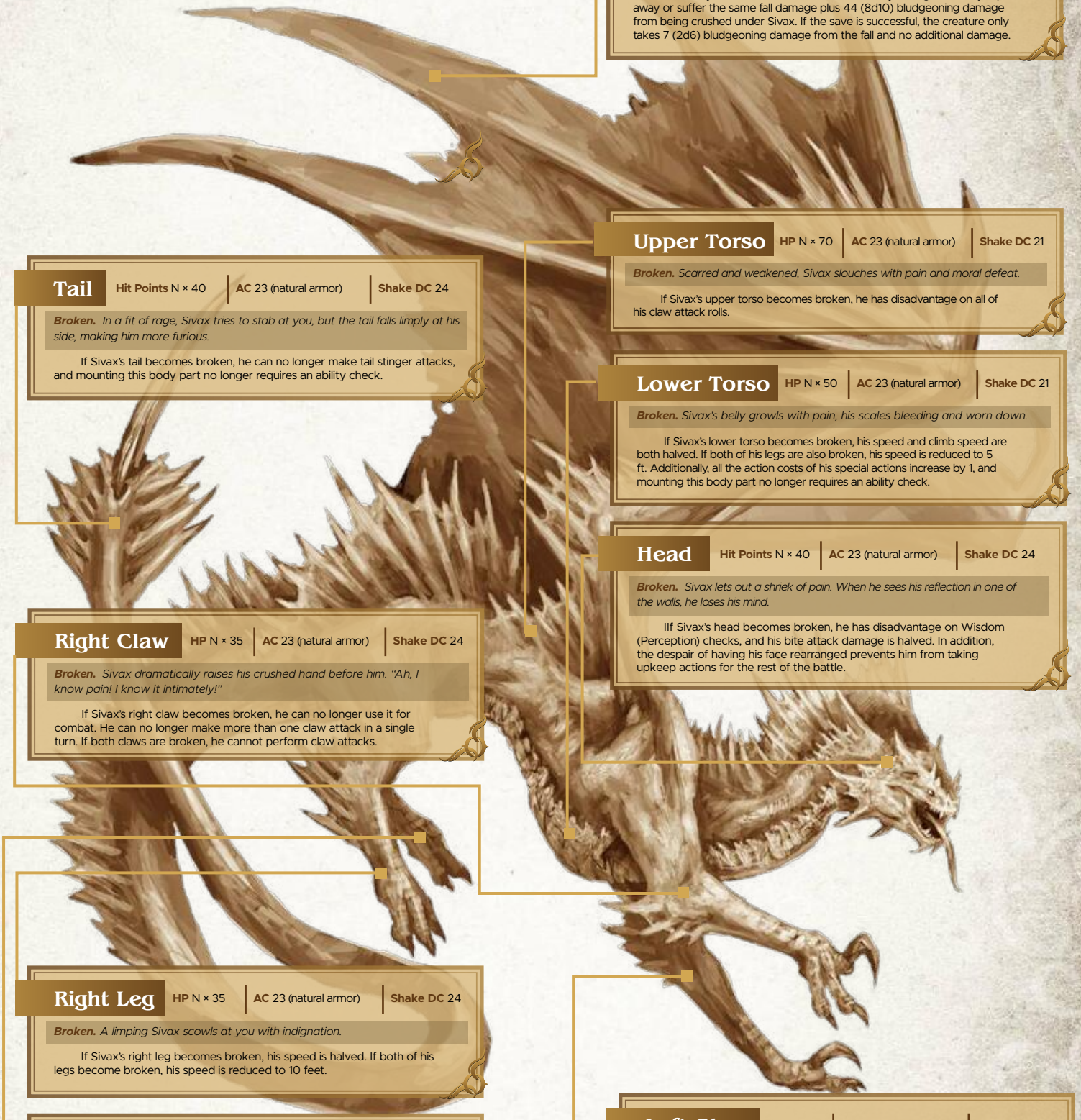
Looks Better This Way (2 Actions). One creature within 90 feet of Sivax that he can see must make a DC 26 Charisma saving throw. If the save fails, the creature's non-legendary magical and normal items, including weapons, armor, and miscellaneous items, are twisted, reshaped, and bent to Sivax's whim, rendering them useless until the start of Sivax's next upkeep.

Seen This a Hundred Times Before (3 Actions). As a reaction, Sivax can cause a spell of 5th level or lower targeting him to fail. If the spell is 2nd level or lower, this ability costs only one action instead of three.

Supreme Shift (6 Actions). Every inch of Sivax's lair sprouts long, sharp spikes and needles. All creatures who aren't mounted on Sivax's body parts must succeed at a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw or take 56 (16d6) piercing damage, taking half as much on a successful save. Sivax must spend 1 action during one of his future upkeeps to use this ability again.

SIVAX'S BODY PARTS

Sivax is very fond of his perfect body, and understandably horrified when something happens to it. Breaking any of his body parts immediately reduces Sivax's current action pool by 2, as per the "How Dare You Break My Body" section under "Sivax Exploits" above.



Wings

HP N × 40 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21 (grounded) or 24 (flying)

Broken. *Sivax tries to rise away from danger, but his torn wings keep him hindered.*

If Sivax's wings become broken, he loses his flying speed and cannot use his Wing Flap any longer.

If airborne, Sivax immediately falls to the ground, suffering 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a random lower body part. Any creature mounted on Sivax's body must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw to jump away or suffer the same fall damage plus 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage from being crushed under Sivax. If the save is successful, the creature only takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and no additional damage.

Upper Torso

HP N × 70 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21

Broken. *Scarred and weakened, Sivax slouches with pain and moral defeat.*

If Sivax's upper torso becomes broken, he has disadvantage on all of his claw attack rolls.

Tail

Hit Points N × 40 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *In a fit of rage, Sivax tries to stab at you, but the tail falls limply at his side, making him more furious.*

If Sivax's tail becomes broken, he can no longer make tail stinger attacks, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Lower Torso

HP N × 50 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 21

Broken. *Sivax's belly growls with pain, his scales bleeding and worn down.*

If Sivax's lower torso becomes broken, his speed and climb speed are both halved. If both of his legs are also broken, his speed is reduced to 5 ft. Additionally, all the action costs of his special actions increase by 1, and mounting this body part no longer requires an ability check.

Head

Hit Points N × 40 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Sivax lets out a shriek of pain. When he sees his reflection in one of the walls, he loses his mind.*

If Sivax's head becomes broken, he has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, and his bite attack damage is halved. In addition, the despair of having his face rearranged prevents him from taking upkeep actions for the rest of the battle.

Right Claw

HP N × 35 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Sivax dramatically raises his crushed hand before him. "Ah, I know pain! I know it intimately!"*

If Sivax's right claw becomes broken, he can no longer use it for combat. He can no longer make more than one claw attack in a single turn. If both claws are broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Right Leg

HP N × 35 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *A limping Sivax scowls at you with indignation.*

If Sivax's right leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both of his legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Left Leg

HP N × 35 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Sivax can't seem to put any weight on his left leg. He grimaces at every attempt.*

If Sivax's left leg becomes broken, his speed is halved. If both of his legs become broken, his speed is reduced to 10 feet.

Left Claw

HP N × 35 | **AC** 23 (natural armor) | **Shake DC** 24

Broken. *Sivax's perfectly sharpened claw is left mangled and pained at his side.*

If Sivax's left claw becomes broken, he can no longer use it for combat. He can no longer make more than one claw attack in a single turn. If both claws are broken, he cannot perform claw attacks.

Appendix A:

MONSTERS & NPCS

Carrionmaw Wurms

Filthy creatures born of the pain and torture of Magnifex laboratories, carrionmaw wurms are monstrous grubs that feed not only on the rotting flesh of the Magnifex's discarded victims but also on their last horrified thoughts, gaining strength and size from terror and madness itself.

Carrionmaw wurms live inside mounds of offal or rotting flesh, gnawing at the decomposing matter that also serves as their home. While they prefer dead flesh, they need to hunt to keep their mounds well stocked. If any living creature approaches a carrionmaw mound, the creature immediately lashes out, hoping to draw its victim into the rot to suffocate, after which it becomes a literal part of the wurm's lair.

Carrionmaw Wurm

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	3 (-4)

Senses blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Surprise Whip. A carrionmaw wurm has advantage on its first attack roll during combat.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 20) and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until its next long rest.

Smother. If the wurm is still in the space of its mound, one Medium or smaller creature grappled by the wurm is pulled into the space of the wurm's mound. The creature becomes blinded and restrained. It has total cover against attacks and other effects, and it begins choking on rotting matter. During each of its turns, the creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until its next long rest.

A creature may free itself and move out of the mound's space by escaping a DC 20 grapple, but the check is made with disadvantage.

If a creature remains inside the mound for a number of rounds greater than its Constitution modifier, it falls to 0 hit points and is dying, and it cannot regain hit points until it is taken out of the mound.

Any creature that escapes or is removed from a carrionmaw wurm's mound becomes incapacitated until its next short or long rest, as it becomes overtaken by retching and shaking fevers.

Cuicatl Dragon

A cuicatl dragon is only a magical illusion in the shape of a Coatl dragon, but they can easily injure and kill real creatures.

Cuicatl dragon

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 162 (13d12 + 78)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	23 (+6)	3 (-4)	5 (-3)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Mirage Flight. The dragon may use the Dash action as a bonus action if it only uses this extra movement to fly. This does not provoke an opportunity attack.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes three attacks: two claw attacks and either a bite attack or a tail lasso attack.

Mystifying Presence. Each creature that is aware of the dragon must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of it for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) psychic damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d6 + 6) psychic damage.

Tail Lasso. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is restrained until the end of its next turn.

Wing Flap. All creatures in a 20-foot radius around the dragon must succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 20 feet and take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

Mirage Fire (Recharge 5–6). The dragon breathes illusory fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 23 Wisdom saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much on a success.

Decapod

This mechanical monstrosity has ten snaking, fully articulated, 30-foot long arms and a central armored body, where its plaques of metal and crystalline rock move up and down, allowing it to better traverse any obstacle or overcome any hindrance it may find as it moves across a room.

Both an engineering marvel and a nightmare, the decapod is crafted with perfect symmetry and decorated with exquisite carvings. Its arms are mechanical, functional tendrils lined with studs, smashing or constricting rocks to break them, and end in pincers big enough to snap a humanoid in half.

Decapod

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 250 (20d12 + 120)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities fire, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Draconic but can't speak

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Magic Resistance. The decapod has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Limber Limbs. The decapod cannot be grappled and has advantage on saving throws against the incapacitated, paralyzed, and restrained conditions.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The decapod makes up to five tentacle attacks, each against a different target.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 21).

Crush. All creatures grappled by the decapod take 17 (5d6) piercing damage.

Drake

The Channelers are three old and blind Ehrlya dragons, whose use of draconic runes is second only to the Forge Queen herself, with the ability to transfer their consciousness to Va'ra-empowered constructs.

Va'ra drakes, both the product of the Channelers' masterful craft and an extension of their power, are animated constructs that can be controlled remotely by the Channelers' minds. Thus, despite being machines of crystal and metal, the drakes can think and react with the minds of their creators. Striking the drakes does not harm the Channelers, who are miles away from the battle in their own chambers far within the Kiln.

A Va'ra drake looks like an adult Ehrlya dragon, but it's entirely built of shining metal plates, patinated cogs, and crystalline incrustations with red eyes, claws, and teeth of gleaming Va'ra.

Va'ra Drake

Huge construct, true neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 200 (16d12 + 96)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +12, Dex +7, Con +11

Skills Arcana +10, Insight +10, Nature +10, Perception +10, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses blindsight 90 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages understands Common and Draconic but can't speak

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The Va'ra drake has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Magic Link. The Va'ra drake maintains their link with the Channelers through a magical necromancy effect (DC 20 to dispel). If the effect is successfully dispelled, the Va'ra drake falls unconscious for 1 round. If it is not destroyed after 1 round, the Channeler regains control. The Va'ra drake regains consciousness and returns to the fight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Va'ra drake makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution save or suffer 1 level of exhaustion.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Va'ra Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +10 to hit, range 100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 35 (10d6) lightning damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

Drakehaunt

An unusual type of undead creature commonly found only in the outer borders of the Catacomb Reaches and other Nix territories, drakehaunts are the disembodied essences of dead dragons. A drakehaunt appears when a dragon dies by dark magic and its essence is not possessed by a specific dark power but is, instead, left to roam aimlessly, with nothing but its tortured memories to bind it to the realm of the living.

A drakehaunt looks like a vaguely draconic wisp of sickly bluish mist or fog, easily mistaken for a wandering wisp of smoke until it twists and curls to strike the living.

Drakehaunt

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	5 (-3)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)

Damage Immunities acid, cold, necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages —
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Living Breath Weapon. When a drakehaunt is reduced to 0 hit points, it immediately explodes in a cloud of deadly mist. Every creature within 20 feet of the drakehaunt must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 54 (12d8) necrotic damage.

Incorporeal Movement. The drakehaunt can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The drakehaunt uses its Frightful Presence and makes two Mistclaw attacks.

Mistclaw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage.

Mistbite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage, and the target's maximum hit points are reduced by the same amount.

Frightful Moan. Each living creature within 120 feet of the drakehaunt which can hear its moan must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened and restrained out of sheer terror until the end of its next turn.

Dragonkin

Besides dragons, the Red Moon of Drakha is populated with dragonkin, lesser dragons of roughly humanoid size who walk mostly upright and use tools and gear to complement their lesser power and inferior status.

Dragonkin are not the actual kin of dragons but belong to several breeds and types. Each dragon brood chooses one dragonkin breed as its servants or followers, according to their physical or cultural similarities. Thus, every brood has its own class of dragonkin subjects. As a result, each dragonkin breed looks and behaves like a diminished reflection of their dragon masters, and of course, most dragonkin are utterly subservient to their dragons.

Some dragonkin are content with their lot, worshipping their dragons as almighty masters, while others grumble and dream vainly of freedom, and yet others are not even sentient enough to feel anything about their lesser status.

In combat, the attacks, tactics, and abilities of a dragonkin roughly resemble scaled-down versions of their corresponding dragon masters' power.

CHARRED CLAW ASSASSIN

The Charred Claw organization employs expert spies, assassins, and fighters, chosen for their ruthlessness, utter loyalty, and zealous hatred of Valernians.

Charred Claw assassins fight aggressively and to the death. They will use superior numbers against a single target in order to pin them down, overwhelming them in a flurry of slashing attacks before retreating or jumping to another vantage point and diving in again.

Charred Claw Assassin

Medium dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (scale armor)
Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +7
Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +7, Intimidation +3, Investigation +4, Perception +4, Stealth +8
Damage Resistances acid, fire, cold, lightning
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Knife Slide. Each of the Charred Claw assassin's weapon attacks deal an additional 7 (2d6) damage of its base damage type if the target is within 5 feet of another Charred Claw assassin.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Charred Claw assassin makes two weapon attacks.

Va'ra Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra blade's damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

Va'ra Dart. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra dart's

damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

COATL DRAGONKIN

Coatl are the best treated of all the dragonkin broods. They are seen as worthy research assistants by their dragons, who allow them to take part in experiments and listen to their advice, for even the smallest mind can sometimes provide an informative angle from which to study the biggest problems.

Coatl dragonkin resemble human-sized, two-limbed feathered serpents, with inquisitive eyes and reflective demeanors. They don't like weapons or armor but can often cast spells.

COATL WARRIOR

These are simple dragonkin soldiers, trained for armed combat, though they do have some of the Coatl's spellcasting ability.

They are surprisingly bad at complex tactics and prefer to strike quickly and decisively, but they complement their attacks with illusion magic to gain an advantage whenever possible.

Coatl Warrior

Medium dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 18 (breastplate + shield)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +5

Skills Acrobatics +7, Arcana +5, Nature +5, Stealth +7, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Enchantment Resistance. The Coatl warrior has advantage on saving throws made against enchantment spells and spell-like effects.

Magic Weapons. The Coatl warrior's weapon attacks are magical.

Magic Advantage. When the Coatl warrior makes an attack roll with advantage and hits, the attack deals an additional 7 (2d6) force damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become stunned until the end of their next turn.

Spellcasting. A Coatl warrior is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The Coatl warrior has the following wizard spells prepared:

cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, mage hand, minor illusion, prestidigitation.*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, color spray, fog cloud, silent image.*

2nd level (3 slots): *blur, invisibility, mirror image.*

3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, major image.*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Coatl warrior makes two spear attacks and can cast a prepared spell.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Shimmering Spray. The Coatl warrior breathes shimmering vapors in a 30-foot cone. Any creature in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated until the end of their next turn.

EHRLYA DRAGONKIN

While most dragonkin are regarded as inferior creatures by their dragon masters, Ehrlya dragonkin are treated with a modicum of respect and may even win a better station within their assigned workshops—which the Ehrlya call "farrieries"—if they prove themselves to be especially resourceful, inventive, or skilled assistants.

Though naturally mute, Ehrlya dragonkin have developed their own functional, if limited, language by clicking and tapping on metal. Most Ehrlya dragonkin will go to great lengths to earn their dragon superiors' validation and approval of their efforts. They hope to advance to a position closer to the best Ehrlya artificers' furnaces and to become reputed, dependable assistants, thus learning from their masters' artistry and gaining access to better and more beautiful materials.

Regardless of their resources, they work to craft their own basic creations, which they then proudly wear in an effort to achieve a greater station among their kind. These displays serve to further increase their superiors' reputations and their farriery's power, which then lead to better materials and improved crafts. Such is the way of the Ehrlya dragonkin.

Ehrlya Dragonkin

Medium dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 16 (+1 breastplate)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +2, Nature +2, Perception +5, Survival +5
Damage Resistances acid, cold
Damage Immunities fire
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Magic Weapons. The Ehrlya dragonkin's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Ehrlya dragonkin makes two weapon attacks.

Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

EHRLYA DRAGONKIN AIDES

These dragonkin are specialized to help around the forge, and it is they who may one day lead their own farrieries if they become skilled or prestigious enough.

Aides are not as effective in combat, but they are better artisans than most other creatures, dragonkin and humanoids included.

Ehrlya Dragonkin Aide

Medium dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 14 (+1 leather armor)
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +3, Heal +5, Nature +3, Perception +5
Damage Resistances acid, cold
Damage Immunities fire
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Magic Weapons. The Ehrlya dragonkin aide's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

EHRLYA DRAGONKIN ELITE

This category includes both elite guards and farriery leaders, as well as the assistants of Ehrlya forge masters and Dehrilya herself. They are burlier and tougher than other dragonkin, making them better suited for both manipulating metal and fighting.

Ehrlya Dragonkin Elite

Medium dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 16 (+1 breastplate)
Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +8, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +4, Nature +4, Perception +6, Survival +6
Damage Resistances acid, cold
Damage Immunities fire
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Magic Weapons. The Ehrlya dragonkin elite's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Ehrlya dragonkin elite makes two weapon attacks.

Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

EXOR DRAGONKIN

Like most dragonkin, Exor dragonkin are abject and servile, fearful of their masters and eager to earn their pettiest favor. To this end, they have trained to hunt and kill to better appease their leaders and often accompany Exor dragons on their hunts, serving as harriers, fetchers, carriers… or replacement prey if need be.

Exor Dragonkin

Medium dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +5

Skills Athletics +5, Nature +3, Perception +5, Stealth +6, Survival +5

Damage Resistances cold, fire, poison

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Bring the Prey Down. Once per round, the Exor dragonkin deals 7 (2d6) additional damage of the attack's first damage type when it has advantage on the attack roll.

Pack Hunter. The Exor dragonkin gains advantage on its attack rolls made against any target that is within 5 feet of another Exor dragonkin.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Exor dragonkin makes two dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

FANNAX

This mighty Fulgen warrior is the second sector general of the Golden City and one of the most renowned leaders in the city of Aureus. She dislikes and distrusts Valernians, believing that they don't have a place in the city and will eventually betray it. Fannax has overseen trials and purges against Valernians in high ranks, particularly against the Steelclaws and their descendants.

Through her allies, she discovered the objective of the Steelclaws' mission. Not understanding why the azhurma would send Valernians instead of her, she went mad with rage. So she began to plot and is waiting for the opportunity to take advantage of the situation presented by the adventurers' current mission.

Fannax

Medium dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 22 (+1 plate, +1 shield)

Hit Points 161 (19d8 + 76)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +10, Cha +9

Skills Athletics +10, Intimidation +9

Damage Resistances cold, lightning

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Fannax makes three melee or Va'ra spear attacks.

Va'ra Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution save or gain one level of exhaustion. A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra spear's damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

FULGEN DRAGONKIN

The dragonkin of the Fulgen brood are haughty and proud, like their dragon masters. They serve as guards and soldiers at the Golden City and in other Fulgen dominions with loyalty and discipline.

Fulgen dragonkin are bipedal, upright, and honorable. Their scales are metallic in color, ranging from iron or steel to silver or bronze. They often wear ornate armor and wield impressive golden weapons.

FULGEN GOLDCLAW

An elite version of Fulgen guards, assigned specifically to handle major disturbances. They are trained to subdue even dragons if needed.

Fulgen Goldclaw

Medium dragon, lawful neutral

Armor Class (+1 plate, +1 shield)
Hit Points 120 (14d8 + 56)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +9, Cha +6
Skills Athletics +9, Investigation +5, Perception +6
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Immunities fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Troop Training. The Fulgen Goldclaw gains advantage on all weapon attacks if there is a Fulgen guard or Fulgen Goldclaw within 5 feet of it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Fulgen Goldclaw makes three weapon attacks.

Va'ra Spear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra spear's damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

FULGEN GUARD

Fulgen guards are the perfect soldiers—utterly disciplined, fanatically loyal, and ruthless in battle. They always attack in formation, using massive halberds that they can easily wield in one hand and following tactics drilled into them throughout their life, which consists of nothing but fighting for their Fulgen lords.

Fulgen Guard

Medium dragon, lawful neutral

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +9, Cha +6
Skills Athletics +9
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Immunities fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Troop Training. The Fulgen guard gains advantage on all weapon attacks if there is another Fulgen guard within 5 feet of it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Fulgen guard makes two weapon attacks.

Halberd. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

MAGNIFEX DRAGONKIN

As Magnifex dragons are haughty and splendorous, so are their dragonkin sniveling sycophants, accepting any command or abject humiliation that comes from their masters. While most magnifex dragonkin walk on two legs, some have no hind limbs, and move by slithering on snake-like lower bodies.

Magnifex dragonkin fight with speed and agility, maiming and weakening their opponents before finishing them off. They are easily distracted by Charisma-based challenges, such as those made through deception, bluffing, or intimidation, as well as by shining things.

Magnifex Dragonkin

Medium dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +7
Skills Acrobatics +8, Stealth +8, Survival +3
Damage Resistances fire, slashing
Damage Immunities acid
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Draconic
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Voulge. Magnifex dragonkin carry vicious voulges into battle, which can maim or bleed a target to death. If a Magnifex dragonkin succeeds on a voulge weapon attack against any target that was already below their maximum hit points, the target loses 1d6 additional hit points after the attack.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Magnifex dragonkin makes two voulge attacks.

Voulge. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

MAGNIFEX ACIDBREWER

The expert alchemists of the Magnifex brood, acidbrewers can spit acid from their mouths and carry an array of dreadful acid bombs and poisons into battle.

Magnifex Acidbrewer

Medium dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Wis +6
Skills Knowledge (arcana) +7, Stealth +8
Damage Resistances fire, slashing
Damage Immunities acid
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Draconic
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Acid Pools. Some of the Magnifex acidbrewer's actions create acid pools. An acid pool is a circular area of acidic material with a radius of 10 feet that remains for the rest of the encounter. Any creature that enters the acid pool or begins its turn on it must make a DC 15 Constitution save, taking 14 (4d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Magnifex acidbrewer makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Acidstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take an additional 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Acid Bomb. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) acid damage. An acid pool (see above) is created within 5 feet of the target.

Acid Explosion. The Magnifex acidbrewer regurgitates a glob of its acidic bile at a point within 60 feet. Every creature within 20 feet of the target point must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) acid damage. An acid pool (see above) is created within 5 feet of the target point.

Acid Spew. The Magnifex acidbrewer spits acid in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) acid damage on a

failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. An acid pool (see above) is created within the furthest extent of the cone's reach.

MAGNIFEX SONGMASTER

An elite combat unit among Magnifex dragonkin, songmasters can sing in sibilant tones that inspire their kin and hurt the ears of humanoid creatures. Most dragonkin squads have at least one songmaster to coordinate the troops.

Magnifex Songmaster

Medium dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Cha +8
Skills Acrobatics +8, Performance +8, Persuasion +8
Damage Resistances fire, slashing
Damage Immunities acid
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Draconic
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Hissing Song. The outlandish songs of the Magnifex songmaster can disturb and even hurt the ears of humanoid listeners. Any creature that is not reptilian or draconic that begins their turn within 20 feet of the Magnifex songmaster must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom save or take 2d6 points of sonic damage and be incapacitated until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Coordinating Strike. The Magnifex songmaster makes one scimitar attack, and all dragon allies within 20 feet gain advantage on their next attack roll.

Galvanizing Strike. The Magnifex songmaster makes one scimitar attack, and one dragon ally within 20 feet regains 2d6 hit points.

Rallying Strike. The Magnifex songmaster makes one scimitar attack, and it can end any one condition affecting a dragon ally within 20 feet.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

MIGHT CULTIST DRAGONKIN

The Cult of Might, which worships raw aggression, bold action, and brute strength above all, fancies itself the brood of Baastherox, the strongest of all azhurma—a dragon so powerful that he has no brood. But the Cult of Might venerates Baastherox as their azhurma, even if he doesn't acknowledge them.

Despite coming from diverse broods, dragonkin of the Cult of Might have similar characteristics and combat tactics. They charge recklessly, focusing only on putting their enemy down and giving no thought to their own protection.

Might Cultist Dragonkin

Medium dragon, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 102 (12d8 + 48)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +8
Skills Athletics +8, Intimidation +4
Damage Resistances acid, fire, cold, lightning
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Draconic
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Raging Onslaught. The might cultist dragonkin has advantage on all melee attack rolls, and all attack rolls against the might cultist dragonkin have advantage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The might cultist dragonkin makes three melee attacks.

Serrated Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Spiked Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

RYELLUS, CHAMPION OF THE MIGHTY

The champion of the cult is also the epitome of its beliefs—a burly, fearless dragonkin that seems larger than he is due to his sheer muscle mass. He is ruthless and relentless in battle, weakening his enemies with every hit and shrugging off blows that would kill a creature several times his size.

Ryellus

Medium dragon, neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 210 (20d8 + 120)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +12
Skills Athletics +11, Intimidation +7
Damage Resistances acid, fire, cold, lightning
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Raging Onslaught. Ryellus has advantage on all melee attack rolls, and all attack rolls against Ryellus have advantage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ryellus makes three melee attacks.

Lightning Net. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) lightning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution save or become restrained and incapacitated. The target may attempt a DC 20 Strength saving throw at the start of each of its turns to lose the restrained and incapacitated conditions. While the lightning net is incapacitating a target, it cannot be used to attack any other target.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution save or be knocked prone.

NIX DRAGONKIN

Most dragon broods on Drakha have adopted a dragonkin species as their own. The Nix brood is not an exception, but their dragonkin are levied from corpses, not living creatures. They are little else but drones, yet they are crueler than such mindless creatures would have any reason to be and far more resilient than breathing dragonkin. Often they are not even referred to as dragonkin but Nix'udjar ("risen in Nix").

Nix dragonkin resemble corpses of legless dragonkin. Their bent spines support exceedingly large skulls, and their thin arms are disproportionately long. Their foreheads sport the rune of the Nix brood, which serves as a Nix'udjar tether to unlife and the source of their power. The skin on their bodies looks taut and dry, almost mummified, and reveals the broad, thick-boned rib cage underneath.

Nix'udjar dragonkin wield dull spears with broad, long blades and shortened shafts, which they can use as either short-ranged javelins or as swords to stab or slash. These creatures are notorious for their mindless but brutal demeanor and for cruelly disposing of their opponents if given the time to do so. They often carry the rusting remains of the armor they wore in life, but it is mostly useless in combat.

Lacking true ambition and devoid of any kind of personal drive, Nix'udjar can still prove to be crafty and tenacious, with a ruthlessness that often surprises and even horrifies other broods. Most dragons and their dragonkin regard Nix'udjar as nothing but horrors or even as simple extensions of the will of Nix dragons, who are, in turn, extensions of the will of Nixis herself.

Whatever it may be that gives form to their nightmarish existence, these ghoulish creatures remain the most vicious and relentless of all dragonkin, hunting down the living with a zeal that, lacking a true living mind, can only be explained by pure, deathless hatred.

Nix'udjar Dragonkin

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +8, Cha +1
Damage Resistances piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Nix Rune. All Nix'udjar are branded with a Nix rune on their oversized skulls, which is the source of their power.

A Nix rune may be dispelled with *dispel magic* (DC 19) or *antimagic field* or removed with *remove curse* or *greater restoration.*

A creature may target a Nix'udjar's rune with a weapon or spell attack by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the Nix'udjar is dealt damage by this attack, its Nix rune is disabled.

A Nix'udjar's rune is also automatically disabled if its body is entirely destroyed as per the *disintegrate* spell or similar magic.

If a Nix'udjar's rune is dispelled or disabled, its Rise Again trait no longer functions, and its multiattack no longer deals additional necrotic damage. If a Nix'udjar has its rune dispelled or disabled within one hour of having used its Rise Again trait, the Nix'udjar is automatically destroyed.

Rise Again. A destroyed Nix'udjar revives at full hit points if its Nix rune is empowered by placing, drawing, or casting another Nix rune within 5 feet of it for 1 minute. This means that a Nix'udjar rises again if one or more Nix'udjar or Nix dragons with active Nix runes remain within 5 feet of its body for 1 minute or longer. This ability doesn't work if the Nix'udjar's rune has been disabled.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Nix'udjar makes two spear attacks. If both attacks successfully damage the same target and if the Nix'udjar's rune is not disabled, that target takes an additional 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

NIX'UDJAR CORPSEMANCER

Some exceptional Nix'udjar display a stronger bond with their Nix runes and a greater affinity for necromancy. These special dragonkin are known as corpsemancers, and their dragons grant them limited control and authority over other Nix'udjar. Many corpsemancers can use necromancy on their own as a reflection of the power of their Nix dragons.

Nix'udjar Corpsemancer

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +9, Cha +5
Skills Arcana +5, Religion +5
Damage Resistances piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Draconic
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The corpsemancer's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *chill touch* (3d8 damage)
2/day each: *ray of enfeeblement*, vampiric touch
1/day each: *bestow curse*, *blight*

Necrotic Aura. Any creature that begins its turn within 5 feet of a Nix'udjar corpsemancer and at least one other creature with a functioning Nix rune takes 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Nix Rune. All Nix'udjar are branded with a Nix rune on their oversized skulls, which is the source of their power.

A Nix rune may be dispelled with *dispel magic* (DC 19) or *antimagic field* or removed with *remove curse* or *greater restoration.*

A creature may target a Nix'udjar's rune with a weapon or spell attack by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the Nix'udjar is dealt damage by this attack, its Nix rune is disabled.

A Nix'udjar's rune is also automatically disabled if its body is entirely destroyed as per the *disintegrate* spell or similar magic.

If a Nix'udjar corpsemancer's rune is dispelled or disabled, its Necrotic Aura, Rise Again, and Risen in Nix traits no longer function, its staff weapon attack no longer deals additional necrotic damage, and it may no longer cast spells. If a Nix'udjar has its rune dispelled or disabled within one hour of having used its Rise Again trait, the Nix'udjar is automatically destroyed.

Rise Again. A destroyed Nix'udjar revives at full hit points if its Nix rune is empowered by placing, drawing, or casting another Nix rune within 5 feet of it for 1 minute. This means that a Nix'udjar rises again if one or more Nix'udjar or Nix dragons with active Nix runes remain within 5 feet of its body for 1 minute or longer. This ability doesn't work if the Nix'udjar's rune has been disabled.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The corpsemancer makes a staff attack and casts one spell.

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage and 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.

Risen in Nix. The corpsemancer targets one destroyed Nix'udjar within 60 feet, whose rune has not been disabled. The target creature revives with full hit points.

DRAGONKIN SNOOP

Many dragonkin broods lend themselves well to stalking and shadowing others. Such "snoops" are in high demand in Drakha's largest population centers, particularly Aureus' Golden City.

Dragonkin Snoop

Medium dragon, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +5
Skills Acrobatics +8, Deception +6, Investigation +6, Perception +8, Stealth +12
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Invisible Movement. The dragonkin snoop may take the Hide action as a free action before or after it moves.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The dragonkin snoop deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragonkin snoop makes two weapon attacks.

Drakhan Knife. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

DRAGONKIN THUG

There are dragonkin rowdies of no specific brood all over Drakha, but mostly in Aureus' Golden City. They like to seek fights with anyone they come across, particularly Valernians.

Dragonkin Thug

Medium dragon, neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +5
Skills Intimidation +3
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragonkin thug makes two weapon attacks.

Drakhan Knife. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

DRAGONPECKERS

These parasitic draconic birds often ride atop Exor dragons, looking to share in the dragon's kills or drink the dragon's blood if it becomes wounded. Dragons barely notice a dragonpecker on their tough scales, attacking it if they do. This, however, doesn't deter the birds from their habits as the potential rewards outweigh the danger.

A dragonpecker looks like a mix between feathered dinosaur and flying reptile, with a big serrated beak and huge bulging eyes.

Dragonpecker

Medium dragon, neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)
Speed 30 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7
Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages —
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blood Scent. The dragonpecker gains advantage on all attack rolls against targets that are not at their hit point maximum.

ACTIONS

Swoop. The dragonpecker moves up to its fly speed and makes one beak attack and two wing claw attacks.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage, plus an additional 18 (4d8) piercing damage if the target is not at its hit point maximum.

Wing Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Ehrlya Dragons

The master crafters and artisans of Drakha, Ehrlya dragons prefer making treasure rather than owning it. They have an ancestral culture of dweomercraft, and the best weapons, machines, and magical artifacts all come from their forges at Nurazhirme, the volcano of the Obsidian Plains.

Ehrlya dragons are pragmatic, hard-working, and focused. They don't care for frivolities like vanity, morality, or compassion. Their reality is their work, and they dedicate themselves to it with an artist's zeal.

Adult Ehrlya Dragon

Huge dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 214 (16d12 + 110)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	12 (+1)	22 (+6)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +12, Con +11, Wis +7
Skills Arcana +6, Insight +7, Intimidation +6, Nature +6, Perception +7, Survival +7
Damage Immunities fire
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon uses its Frightful Presence and then makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d8) slashing damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Magma Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales magma in a 90-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Each creature within 20 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or take 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its fly speed.

Ehrlya Dragon Wyrmling

Medium dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +9, Wis +6

Skills Perception +3, Survival +3

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive **Perception** 13

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects and is immune to the *maze* spell.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Magma Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales magma in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Young Ehrlya Dragon

Large dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +9, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +5, Intimidation +6, Perception +6, Survival +6

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects and is immune to the *maze* spell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) slashing damage.

Magma Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales magma in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Elemental Drake

Primordial creatures of raw elemental energy, elemental drakes are given draconic form by the magic of Coatl dragons.

Elemental Drake

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 97 (13d10 + 26)

Speed 0 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	5 (-3)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The elemental drake uses its Wing Flap and makes one bite attack and one tail attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Wing Flap. All creatures in a 60-foot cone must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or take 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and fall prone.

Whirlwind Breath (Recharge 5–6). The elemental drake breathes a strong gust of wind in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 17 Strength saving throw or take 17 (3d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and fall prone.

The Entity

Several centuries ago, there existed a sophisticated and stunning Magnifex dragon whose appearance is rumored to have cast a shadow over Sivax's own. This led the azhurma to seek a private meeting, to ascertain whether it was possible for anything to be more beautiful than he was. Once there, Sivax was indeed surprised by the beauty before him and quickly devised a plan to subject the beautiful dragon to a series of "aesthetic explorations" to see if it could be further increased for all of Drakha to praise.

The dragon accepted, believing itself prime consort material, and with the opportunity to become the pinnacle of the Magnifex standards of beauty, it saw Sivax's offer as its best chance at ultimate triumph. Yet Sivax's vanity and pettiness led him to maim and hurt its subject beyond all possibility of repair, as was his plan all along, and he considered the excruciating and long process itself "a true exercise in the utmost, mind-shattering beauty."

Thus, the azhurma decided to leave his newest creation alive, allowing it to wander in the tunnels near Sivax's Gallery, in the region known as the Canals of Echoing Laughter. This, he reasoned, would both serve as a warning to all other dragons of his brood "to grow in their beauty, but be wary to not become too beautiful" and provide him with a guardian to keep the undesired away from his retreat.

So reduced to a mutilated, demented wretch, the Entity haunts the Crystalline Maze's causeways and corridors, preying on everything and everyone that comes along. Sometimes, however, it engages its quarry in strange, unfathomable mind games.

The Entity

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)

Hit Points 481 (26d20 + 208)

Speed 40 ft., climb 80 ft., swim 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	17 (+3)	27 (+8)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +11, Con +16, Wis +6, Cha +11

Skills Deception +11, Investigation +11, Insight +6, Perception +6, Stealth +19

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The Entity has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Entity fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Light sensitivity. The Entity becomes frightened while under direct bright light.

Open Wounds. Any creature that has taken slashing damage from the Entity takes an additional 7 (2d6) slashing damage at the start of each of its turns. This damage stops if the creature regains hit points from any effect or if it spends an action to staunch the bleeding.

Skulking Presence. The Entity can take the Dash, Hide, and Disengage actions as bonus actions, and it has advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks. The Entity can hide in plain sight, unless its entire body stands under direct bright light.

ACTIONS

Slash and Run. The Entity uses its Frightful Presence, makes one claw attack, Disengages, and Hides.

Multiattack. The Entity makes one bite attack and one claw attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw made with disadvantage or become frightened until its next short rest. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the Entity's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Mercurial Leak (Recharge 5–6). The Entity tries to use its breath weapon, which spills not only from its mouth, but from the leaks and gashes across its body. Each creature within 15 feet of the Entity must succeed on a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 72 (16d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. A creature that fails its save becomes frightened of the Entity and poisoned until the end of its next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The Entity makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Skulk. The Entity Disengages and Hides.

Frightful Presence. The Entity uses its Frightful Presence.

Tail Attack. The Entity makes a tail attack.

Esha

An Ocelinn scholar captured by the Coatl brood, who has been a test subject to numerous horrible experiments. Now, as part of Kuxcoatl's latest scheme, Esha has been placed as a sleeper agent who must ensure the adventurers go through the experiment to the very end; in exchange for her unquestioning assistance, she has been guaranteed her freedom.

Esha

Medium humanoid (human shapechanger), true neutral

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 93 (17d8 + 17)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +11

Skills Athletics +11, Deception +8, Nature +7, Insight +11, Survival +11

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Shapechanger. As a bonus action, Esha can shift into a partially feline Ocelinn form. While in her Ocelinn form, Esha loses her healing touch ability, but she gains advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, and she may use her claw and bite attacks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Feline Form Only). Esha makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

Claw (Feline Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Bite (Feline Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Healing Touch (Human Form Only). Esha touches another creature. The target magically regains 14 (2d8 + 5) hit points and may make an immediate saving throw against each condition affecting it that allows a saving throw.

Exor Dragon

Brood Exor are the hunters and stalkers of the Red Moon, the most dangerous predators on Drakha. They are dragons with the color of rock or sand and the cunning of born killers. They like to attack stealthily, hiding underground and springing upon their prey, unexpected and deadly.

Adult Exor Dragon

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 342 (22d20 + 110)

Speed 60 ft., burrow 60 ft., climb 60 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +14, Dex +9, Wis +10

Skills Athletics +14, Acrobatics +9, Intimidation +10, Perception +10, Stealth +16, Survival +10

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Burrowing. The dragon may burrow underground as a bonus action, moving downward or sideways at its full burrow speed. While the dragon is burrowing, creatures can only detect its position by magical means or with tremorsense.

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Sneak Attack. Once per round, one of the dragon's melee attacks may deal +10 (3d6) damage of the first damage type listed in the attack if it has advantage on the attack roll.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) slashing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Burrowing Ambush. The dragon may only use this action if it is burrowing. The dragon surfaces at any point of the map and immediately makes one bite attack and two claw attacks, with advantage on all three attack rolls. Any creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone from the force of the dragon exiting its burrow and be moved 5 feet away.

Sand Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales scorching sand in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 38 (11d6) fire damage plus 38 (11d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Sand Wall. The dragon may raise a dust cloud around itself as a bonus action. Any attack rolls against the dragon are made with disadvantage until the start of its next turn, and all of its melee attacks have advantage until the start of its next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Hunter's Sense. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check, and if a creature is hidden from the dragon, it's not hidden from it anymore.

Fast Burrowing. The dragon burrows up to its full burrowing speed or, if it was already burrowing, can use its Burrowing Ambush.

Frightful Presence. The dragon uses its Frightful Presence.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Each creature within 20 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 22 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 20 feet, take 14 (4d6) slashing damage, and become blinded until the end of their next turn. A successful save halves the damage and negates the blinded condition. The dragon can then burrow up to half its burrowing speed.

Ancient Exor Dragon

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 372 (24d20 + 120)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +15, Dex +10, Wis +11

Skills Athletics +15, Acrobatics +10, Intimidation +11, Perception +11, Stealth +17, Survival +11

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 90 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 22 (41,000 XP)

Burrowing. The dragon may burrow underground as a bonus action, moving downward or sideways at its full burrow speed. While the dragon is burrowing, creatures can only detect its position by magical means or with tremorsense.

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Sneak Attack. Once per round, one of the dragon's melee attacks deals an additional 14 (4d6) damage of the first damage type listed in the attack if it has advantage on the attack roll.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) slashing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Burrowing Ambush. The dragon may only use this action if it is burrowing. The dragon surfaces at any point on the map and immediately makes one bite attack and two claw attacks with advantage on all three attack rolls. Any creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and moved 5 feet away from the force of the dragon exiting its burrow.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Sand Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales scorching sand in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) fire damage plus 42 (12d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Sand Wall. The dragon may raise a dust cloud around itself as a bonus action. Any attack rolls against the dragon are made with disadvantage until the start of its next turn, and all of its melee attack rolls have advantage until the start of its next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Hunter's Sense. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check, and if a creature is hidden from the dragon, it's not hidden from it anymore.

Fast Burrowing (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon burrows up to its full burrowing speed, or if it was already burrowing, it can use its Burrowing Ambush instead.

Frightful Presence. The dragon uses its Frightful Presence.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack. All creatures within 20 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 23 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 20 feet, take 21 (6d6) slashing damage, and become blinded until the end of their next turn. A successful save halves the damage and negates the blinded condition. The dragon can then burrow up to half its burrowing speed.

Young Exor Dragon

Large dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 168 (16d10 + 80)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +10, Dex +6, Wis +7

Skills Athletics +10, Acrobatics +6, Intimidation +7, Perception +7, Stealth +6, Survival +7

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 90 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Burrowing. The dragon may burrow underground as a bonus action, moving downward or sideways up to its full burrow speed. While the dragon is burrowing, creatures can only detect its position by magical means or with tremorsense.

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Sneak Attack. Once per round, one of the dragon's melee attacks deals an additional 7 (2d6) damage of the first damage type listed in the attack if it has advantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Burrowing Ambush. The dragon may only use this action if it is burrowing. The dragon surfaces at any point on the map and immediately makes one bite attack and two claw attacks with advantage on all three attack rolls. Any creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and moved 5 feet away from the force of the dragon exiting its burrow.

Sand Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales scorching sand in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage plus 21 (6d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

The Flux

A bizarre byproduct of Sivax's magic, created by the strange forces that permeate the Crystalline Maze, the Flux is a concentration of quicksilver that achieved independent life and - very limited - sentience.

The Flux looks like a protoplasmic mass of iridescent fluid, attacking with amorphous pseudopods as its smooth, crystalline skin reflects the light in a dazzling array of colors.

The dragonkin guarding the maze have allowed the Flux to exist, for it helps clean the pools and filter interesting treasure, but it remains a danger for anyone, dragonkin or intruder, which wanders too near to its hunting grounds.

The Flux

Huge elemental, unaligned

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 253 (22d12 + 110)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	19 (+4)	21 (+5)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances acid, bludgeoning, piercing, poison, slashing

Damage Immunities radiant

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

Dense Form. All ability checks to escape the Flux's grapple or help another creature out of the Flux's grapple are made with disadvantage.

Mercurial Form. The Flux is immune to any magic or effect that changes its shape or composition, including *petrification* and *shape change.*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Flux makes four grab attacks.

Grab. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 21). Until this grapple

ends, the target is restrained and unable to breathe. The Flux can grapple up to four Large or smaller creatures at one time.

At the start of each of the Flux's turns, each target grappled by it takes 24 (4d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until its next short rest.

A character within 5 feet of a grappled target can pull the grappled creature free by taking an action and succeeding on a DC 21 Strength check.

Fulgen Dragon

Fulgen dragons are proud and haughty, convinced that they are the superior species on Drakha. They serve Aureus with zeal and ambition, hoping to distinguish themselves as special even among their privileged brood.

Adult Fulgen Dragon

Huge dragon, lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 227 (18d12 + 110)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Con +12, Wis +7, Cha +15

Skills Insight +7, Intimidation +12, Perception +7, Persuasion +12

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon uses its Frightful Presence and then makes three melee weapon attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Goldfire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales flame and molten gold in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Frightful Presence. The dragon uses its Frightful Presence.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (cost 2 actions). Each creature within 20 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or take 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

Khar'gura

Drakha is home to many monstrous horrors that would be nightmares in the mortal world but, for dragons, are mere pests. Such is the case of the khar'gura, or "blood wings," giant mosquitoes which swarm the nights of Drakha, hunting for dragon blood.

For dragons, these giant mosquitoes are a nuisance, and they swat them mercilessly. But like their lesser counterparts, khar'gura remain stubborn and unrelenting, always coming back for more. Khar'gura are not used to picking on smaller prey, but any source of blood can appease their endless thirst.

Khar'gura

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 65 (10d10 + 10)
Speed 20 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +5
Senses blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Nimble Flyer. While the khar'gura is flying, all weapon attacks against it suffer disadvantage.

Sting and Run. The khar'gura can take the Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until their next long or short rest.

Magnifex Dragons

This dragon brood holds aesthetic mastery, sensual pleasure, and ecstatic revelry not only as valued experiences but as the ideal state of being. Unlike most other dragon broods on Drakha, the Magnifex are used to remaining in close contact and even engage in open cooperation with each other, as they all need to flaunt their most recent creations and acquisitions among themselves to either gain or maintain prestige and standing within the brood. What good is it to be a true artist if there is no one to envy your talent? Nevertheless, reputation is just a stepping stone in the Magnifex's unending search for increasing amounts of power, as is the way of all dragons.

Magnifex dragons have one weakness: art. In the presence of beautiful, artistic images or sounds, they may become distracted.

Adult Magnifex Dragon

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)
Hit Points 197 (18d12 + 80)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +8, Cha +13
Skills Insight +13, Perception +7, Perform +13, Persuasion +13, Stealth +8
Senses blindsight 40 ft., darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Innate Spellcasting. The dragon's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

1/day each: *detect thoughts, fear, hallucinatory terrain, hideous laughter, silent image, suggestion.*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magnifex Rapture. If a Magnifex dragon witnesses a work of art created by a character with a +6 proficiency bonus or a successful DC 24 Charisma (Performance) check, it becomes restrained until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon uses its frightful presence, and immediately makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Mercurial Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon spits a stream of molten bismuth in a line that is 90 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. A creature that fails its save becomes poisoned until the end of its next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Frightful Presence. The dragon uses its Frightful Presence.

Spellcasting. The dragon uses one of its spells.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Each creature within 20 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

Young Magnifex Dragon

Large dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)

Hit Points 168 (16d10 + 80)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +7, Cha +11

Skills Insight +4, Perception +4, Perform +11, Persuasion +11

Senses blindsight 40 ft., darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Drakhan Resistance. The dragon has advantage on all saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities and is immune to the *maze* spell.

Magnifex Rapture. If a Magnifex dragon witnesses a work of art created by a character with a +6 proficiency bonus or a successful DC 24 Charisma (Performance) check, it becomes restrained until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 22 (4d10) poison damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) piercing damage.

Mercurial Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon spits a stream of molten bismuth in a line that is 90 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. A creature that fails its save becomes poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Mydru

Strange denizens of the Red Moon underground, mydru are vegetal lifeforms with independent mobility and limited sentience. Forced to hide in the tunnels beneath the Shrilling Sands by the cruel ecosystem and relentless predators, the mydru developed a similarly aggressive disposition, hunting and devouring anything that enters their territory, just as they were hunted and killed on the surface.

A mydru resembles a brutish troll or large ape, roughly 8 feet tall, and is made of cactus-like flesh, with bulbous joints and thorny skin. Its fangs and claws seem made of wood, and it has only the barest hint of facial features, suggested by the lumps and gnarls on its head.

Mydru

Large plant, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (12d10 + 60)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	5 (-3)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +9

Skills Perception +3, Nature +1, Stealth +10, Survival +3

Damage Resistances acid, lightning, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Piercing Grapple. At the start of the mydru's turn, any creature it currently has grappled automatically takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

Thorny Body. Any creature that makes a melee attack against the mydru must then immediately succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The mydru makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16).

Thorn. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 20/50 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Mydru Witch

Large plant, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 147 (14d10 + 70)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	9 (-1)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +9, Wis +6
Skills Medicine +6, Perception +6, Nature +3, Survival +6
Damage Resistances acid, lightning, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages —
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Piercing Grapple. At the start of the mydru witch's turn, any creature it currently has grappled automatically takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

Thorny body. Any creature that makes a melee attack against the mydru witch must then immediately succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The mydru witch makes two vine attacks.

Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16).

Thorn Spray. The mydru witch shoots thorns in a 60 ft. cone. All creatures in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) piercing damage on a failed save, or half damage on a success.

Spawn Weedwraith. Any creature killed by a mydru witch is overtaken by a leafy, mossy growth, and its body is destroyed within 24 hours. After this time, the creature rises as a weedwraith under the mydru witch's control, with no memory of its previous existence.

Nix Dragon

A brood apart from all other Drakhan creatures, the Nix are not true dragons but frightful dragon-shaped undead. They mimic the powers and abilities of dragons, but in truth they are not even living creatures but corpses animated by the endless will and dark power of Nixis, their great mother and azhurma.

As part of their efforts to imitate their living selves, Nix dragons have been gifted with terrible breath weapons, extensions of Nixis' corrupt essence itself, which are not made of actual breath but pure, concentrated necromantic power. The breath weapon of a Nix dragon has been described as burning and freezing at the same time, for it strikes not only the target's body but also its very lifeforce.

Nix Dracolich

Gargantuan undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 330 (20d20 + 120)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +13, Int +14, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +14, Deception +9, History +14, Intimidate +16, Persuasion +9, Religion +14
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities poison, necrotic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 22 (41,000 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The Nix dracolich's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 22,

+14 to hit with spell attacks). The Nix dracolich can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

1/day each: *bestow curse, blight, cause fear, false life, finger of death, ray of enfeeblement, vampiric touch*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Nix dracolich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Nix Rune. All Nix dracoliches are branded with a Nix rune on their skulls, which is the source of their power.

A Nix rune may be dispelled with *dispel magic* (DC 19) or *antimagic field* or removed with *remove curse* or *greater restoration*.

A creature may target a Nix dracolich's rune with a weapon or spell attack by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the Nix dracolich is dealt damage by this attack, its Nix rune is disabled.

A Nix dracolich's rune is also automatically disabled if its body is entirely destroyed as per the *disintegrate* spell or similar magic.

If a Nix dracolich's rune is dispelled or disabled, its Draining Bite attack no longer deals necrotic damage, and it can no longer cast spells.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Nix dracolich uses its Frightful Presence and makes two claw attacks and one Draining Bite attack.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Draining Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 20 ft. one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 22 Strength saving throw or be thrown 30 feet away from the dracolich, taking an extra 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and landing prone.

Wing Skewer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 20 ft, one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 22).

Frightful Presence. Each living creature that is within 120 feet of the dracolich and aware of it must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become restrained and frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dracolich's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Risen in Nix. The dracolich targets one destroyed Nix dragon or drake within 60 feet whose rune has not been disabled. The target creature revives with full hit points.

Death Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dracolich breathes toxic fumes in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 21 Constitution saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) necrotic damage plus 36 (8d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dracolich can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dracolich regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Preternatural Senses. The dracolich makes a Wisdom (Perception) check, and if a creature is hidden from the dracolich, it's not hidden from it anymore.

Frightful Presence. The dracolich uses its Frightful Presence.

Nix Necromancy. The dracolich casts a spell.

Tail Attack. The dracolich makes a tail attack.

Wing Skewer (Costs 2 Actions). The Nix dracolich makes two Wing Skewer attacks.

Nix Dragon

Huge undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 207 (18d12 + 90)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +11, Int +9, Cha +8

Skills Arcana +9, History +9, Intimidate +14, Persuasion +8, Religion +9

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities poison, necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Nix dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Nix Rune. All Nix dragons are branded with a Nix rune on their skulls, which is the source of their power.

A Nix rune may be dispelled with dispel magic (DC 19) or antimagic field or removed with remove curse or greater restoration.

A creature may target a Nix dragon's rune with a weapon or spell attack by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the Nix dragon is dealt damage by this attack, its Nix rune is disabled.

A Nix dragon's rune is also automatically disabled if its body is entirely destroyed as per the disintegrate spell or similar magic.

If a Nix dragon's rune is dispelled or disabled, its Draining Bite attack and Death Breath ability no longer deal necrotic damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Nix dragon uses its Frightful Presence; then, it makes two claw attacks and one Draining Bite attack.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Draining Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft. one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing damage, and if the target is a Large or smaller creature it must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be thrown 20 feet away from the Nix dragon, taking an extra 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and landing prone.

Wing Skewer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft, one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 20).

Frightful Presence. Each living creature that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become restrained and frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the Nix dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Death Breath (Recharge 5–6). The Nix dragon breathes toxic fumes in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) necrotic damage plus 27 (6d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Nix dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Nix dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Preternatural Senses. The Nix dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check, and if a creature is hidden from the Nix dragon, it's not hidden from it anymore

Frightful Presence. The Nix dragon uses its Frightful Presence.

Tail Attack. The Nix dragon makes one tail attack.

Wing Skewer (Costs 2 Actions). The Nix dragon makes two Wing Skewer attacks.

Nix Drake

Large undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 152 (16d10 + 64)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +9, Int +5, Cha +5

Skills Arcana +5, Intimidate +10

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities poison, necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Nix Rune. All Nix drakes are branded with a Nix rune on their skulls, which is the source of their power.

A Nix rune may be dispelled with *dispel magic* (DC 19) or *antimagic field* or removed with *remove curse* or *greater restoration.*

A creature may target a Nix drake's rune with a weapon or spell attack by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the Nix drake is dealt damage by this attack, its Nix rune is disabled.

A Nix drake's rune is also automatically disabled if its body is entirely destroyed as per the *disintegrate* spell or similar magic.

If a Nix drake's rune is dispelled or disabled, its bite and breath weapons no longer deal necrotic damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Nix drake makes two claw attacks and one Draining Bite attack.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Draining Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Death breath (Recharge 5–6). The Nix drake breathes toxic fumes in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) necrotic damage plus 22 (5d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

Nursery Automaton

Artfully crafted construct and resembling six-legged lizards with pincers and filigreed jaws, nursery automatons fiercely attack anyone that threatens the eggs they guard.

Nursery Automaton

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 144 (16d10 + 56)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	1 (-5)

Skills Perception +9
Damage Resistances fire
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Magic Resistance. The automaton has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Many Limbed. The automaton has resistance on saving throws against the prone and restrained conditions.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The automaton makes one bite attack and one tail attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The automaton exhales flame in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. Va'ra

Palan Ethen

The leader of a humanoid squad under the command of Azhurma Aureus and his underlings, Palan was a knight back in Valerna, and his abilities all stem from his military training and his unyielding honor.

Palan Ethen

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 19 (+1 plate)
Hit Points 161 (19d8 + 76)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +10
Skills Athletics +11, Perception +9, Persuasion +9, Survival +9
Senses passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Spellcasting. Palan is a 19th-level spellcaster, using limited blessings from his Galadyan faith. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): light, sacred flame, true strike
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, detect magic, healing word, shield of faith*
2nd level (3 slots): *continual flame, prayer of healing, warding bond*
3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope, glyph of warding, protection from energy*
4th level (1 slot): *death ward*

ACTIONS

Galadyan Onslaught. Palan makes three maul attacks and regains 5 (1d4 + 3) hit points.

Galadyan Faith. Palan makes one maul attack and uses sacred flame.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 3 radiant damage.

Sacred Flame. Targets one creature within 60 ft. range. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Dex save or take 18 (4d8) radiant damage.

Runecorpse Swarm

The last of the fearsome undead experiments born of Nixis's dark imagination, runecorpses are Valernians and other humanoids who have been branded with a Nix rune, allowing them to rise again through Nix necromancy. Runecorpses function with a singular mind and purpose, controlled by the one will of the Nix dragon that created them.

A runecorpse looks like a mangled, animated humanoid corpse (whether human, elf, gnome, dwarf, halfling, or orc) with a Nix rune on its chest or forehead. Its eyes glow with necrotic energy the same color as its rune. It is only partially mindless, as its essence has been replaced by the Nix's deathless loathing for anything that lives.

Runecorpse Swarm

Gargantuan swarm of Medium beasts, neutral evil

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 290 (20d20 + 80)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Damage Resistances cold, bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, grappled, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages —
Challenge 18 (33,000 XP)

Nix Rune. Every individual in a runecorpse swarm is branded with a Nix rune, which is the source of their power. Disabling a single rune does not harm or hinder the swarm, but disabling all of them at the same time does.

Casting an *antimagic* field or *magic circle* spell that targets the runecorpse swarm deals 5 (1d10) radiant damage to it for each spell level of the effect and disables all of the runecorpse swarm's runes.

If all of the runecorpse swarm's Nix runes are disabled, its attack rolls are no longer made with advantage, and its attacks no longer deal necrotic damage.

Each runecorpse swarm is tethered to a single runecorpse ruler. If the rune of its runecorpse ruler is disabled, the runecorpse swarm's hit point maximum is halved, and it suffers damage equal to half of its hit point maximum. In addition, its runes become disabled as well. If the runecorpse ruler's rune is restored, the swarm's runes are restored as well. If the swarm's runecorpse ruler is destroyed, the entire swarm is destroyed as well.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The runecorpse swarm makes one Mob attack against each target within 5 feet.

Mob. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.

RUNECORPSE RULER

When there is no dragon to take control of a runecorpse swarm, the mightiest of nearby runecorpses assumes control, and all runecorpses obey its will like extensions of its body. Being free of draconic control doesn't make the runecorpse ruler any kinder or restore any of its memories. It remains twisted and single-minded in its purpose of stamping out all life.

Runecorpse Ruler

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 190 (20d8 + 100)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	7 (-2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Necrotic Aura. Any creature that begins its turn within 10 feet of both a runecorpse ruler and at least one other creature with a functioning Nix rune takes 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Nix Rune. All runecorpose rulers are branded with a Nix rune on their skulls, which is the source of their power.

A Nix rune may be dispelled with dispel magic (DC 19) or antimagic field or removed with remove curse or greater restoration.

A creature may target a runecorpse ruler's rune with a weapon or spell attack by making their attack roll with disadvantage. If the runecorpse ruler is dealt damage by this attack, its Nix rune is disabled.

A runecorpse ruler's rune is also automatically disabled if its body is entirely destroyed as per the disintegrate spell or similar magic.

If a runecorpse ruler's Nix rune is dispelled or disabled, it can no longer use its Necrotic Aura or Risen in Nix abilities or its Necrotic Bolt attack, and its claw attacks no longer deal necrotic damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The runecorpse ruler makes two weapon attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage and 21 (6d6) necrotic damage.

Necrotic Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.

Consume Corpse. The runecorpse ruler targets a runecorpse swarm within 5 feet. The swarm takes 11 (2d10) force damage, and the runecorpse ruler regains the same amount of hit points. If the runecorpse ruler's rune is disabled, it is not disabled anymore.

Risen in Nix. The runecorpse ruler targets a runecorpse swarm within 30 feet. The swarm regains 27 (5d10) hit points.

Salt Stalkers

These gigantic bugs are fearsome predators, not only due to their Large size and deadly poison but also due to their ability to become practically invisible. A salt stalker is so attuned to the desert around it that it automatically takes on the coloration and texture of its surroundings, sometimes surprising even dragons with its deadly attacks.

A salt stalker looks like a large long-legged spider or solifugid, made entirely of rocky tumors and silicate growths.

Salt Stalker

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48)
Speed 40 ft., climb 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	7 (-2)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +12
Damage Resistances piercing, poison, slashing
Condition Immunities petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., tremorsense 20 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages —
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Rock Camouflage. While climbing or standing on a rocky or sandy surface, the salt stalker may become invisible as a bonus action.

Spider Climb. The salt stalker may climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Stalking Strike. If the sand stalker has advantage on its attack roll against a target, it may make a pincer attack against that target as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Pincer. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes an additional 36 (8d8) poison damage and becomes paralyzed for 1 minute. On a successful save, the target takes only half the poison damage and is not paralyzed, but they are poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Salt Stalker Poison

The most fearsome ability of sand stalkers is not their natural camouflage but their poison, which quickly fills the target's bloodstream with humidity-absorbing silicates, essentially mummifying the stalker's hapless victim.

Any creature that is reduced to 0 hit points due to the salt stalker's poison damage dies immediately, their body dessicated as if it had dried up for centuries, and cannot be brought back to life except by resurrection or true resurrection.

Sandbeetle Swarm

Sandbeetles are a common, seemingly innocuous but horrible threat from the Titan Wastes, which even dragons take seriously.

Looking like a dust cloud in the distance, a sandbeetle swarm is actually made of millions of tiny bugs. Armed with burrowing pincers and voracious hunger, they can devour a human-sized creature in minutes, leaving only a pile of viscera behind.

Sandbeetle Swarm

Gargantuan swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 287 (25d20 + 25)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+1)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)

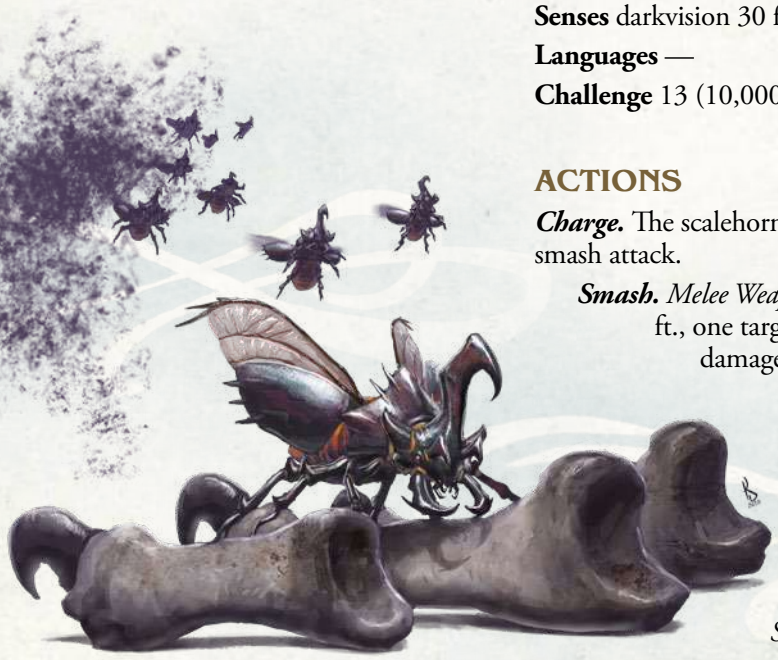
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Cloud of Doom. The swarm makes a bites attack against every creature in its space or within 5 feet of its space.

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 29 (8d6 + 1) piercing damage, or 15 (4d6 + 1) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.



Sandbeetle Swarm

Scalehorn

A massive herbivore and the only non-hunter that survives in the Shrilling Sands, the scalehorn owes its survival to both its massive girth, second only to desert worms and dragons themselves, and its ability to subsist for months on tiny amounts of water and plant matter.

Despite their plant-eating habits, scalehorns are quite territorial and aggressive, attacking anything that approaches them, for they know no creature in the Shrilling Sands has peaceful intentions.

Scalehorn

Huge beast, neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 189 (14d12 + 98)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	8 (-1)	25 (+7)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +5
Damage Resistances cold, fire, piercing, slashing
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages —
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Charge. The scalehorn uses its Trample and then makes a smash attack.

Smash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and, if the target is Medium or

smaller, it must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be tossed 30 feet away from the scalehorn in a random direction and fall prone.

Trample. The scalehorn moves up to twice its speed in a straight line. It can enter and move through the space of other Large or smaller creatures during this movement. Any creature on the path of the scalehorn's movement must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, being knocked prone and taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save. A successful save negates the prone condition and halves the damage.

Scaleshifter

Sunlight falls down relentlessly. The air feels thick, foggy, heavy with evaporating moisture. There is something confusing, shifting, in the back of your eyes. It hurts your head. Then, the desert itself seems to shift, and the shape resolves into scales. They coil and undulate in the scorching sun. They reflect the flare, dazzling, blinding. They leap at you.

A scaleshifter is a fearsome predator from the Red Moon's deserts and caves, a large hunter lizard with two coiling 'tails' on its shoulders, with the ability to shift its scales to reflect light. This gives the scaleshifter several hunting advantages, allowing it to camouflage itself, blind its enemies with sunlight, or even project a mirage of its body, masking its actual position.

The scaleshifter attacks by piercing targets with its front 'tails' and bringing the meal to its mouth. The normal lizard tail on the creature's rear cannot attack.

A scaleshifter will prey on anything it believes it can kill; if faced with superior opposition, it becomes invisible and tries to escape. Scaleshifters gather in small packs of 2 to 5 individuals, but not out of loyalty or instinct, only to hunt larger and stronger creatures; if prey is scarce, a pack will quickly break up, its members turning on each other for food.

Scaleshifter

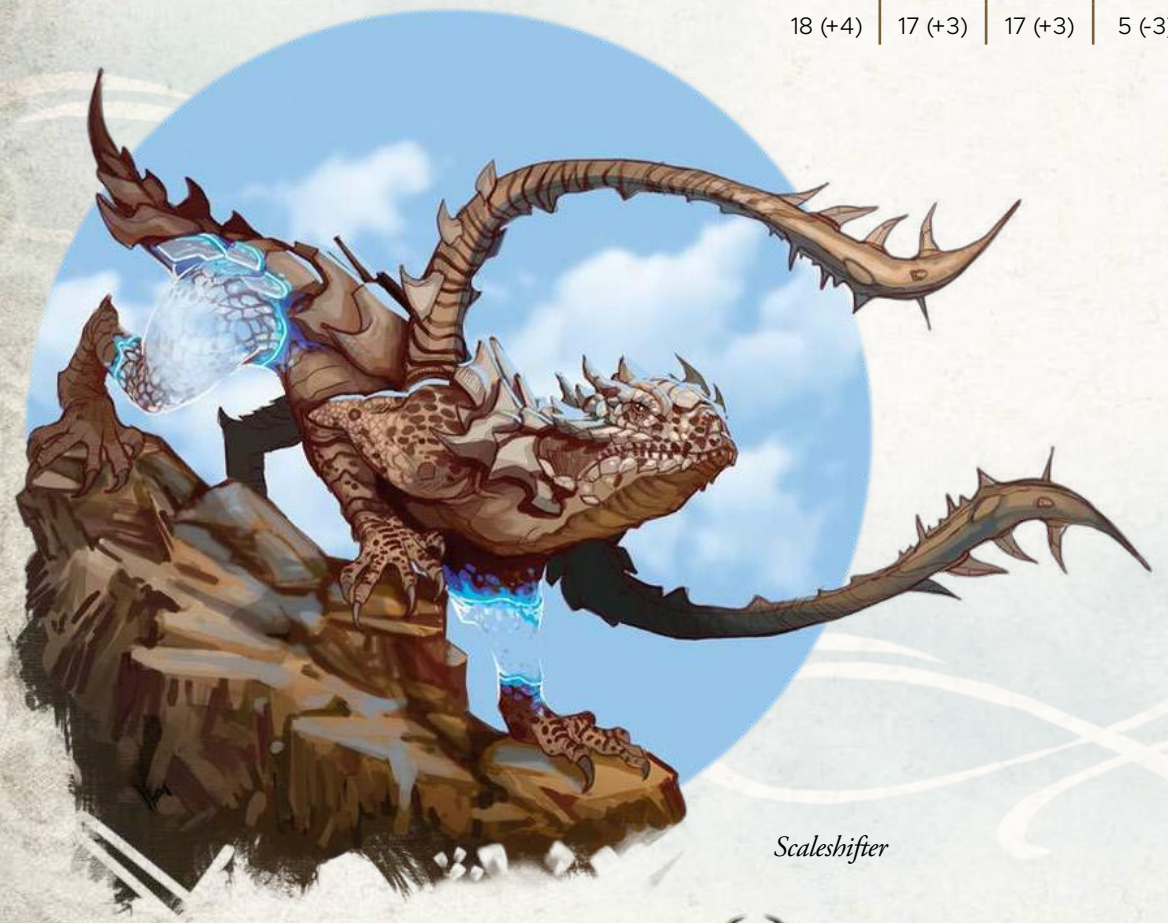
Large beast, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 93 (11d10 + 33)

Speed 40 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	5 (-3)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)



Scaleshifter

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Draconic

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The scaleshifter makes one bite attack and two tail attacks.

Glare. The scaleshifter chooses a point within 90 feet. Each creature within 5 feet of the chosen point must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or become blinded until the end of its next turn. The scaleshifter may only use this ability under direct sunlight.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft, one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target moves to a spot of the scaleshifter's choice within 5 feet of the scaleshifter.

Shatterling

Primal creatures of raw magic and crystalline matter, shatterlings resemble six-foot long long feathered lizards made of stained glass, whose bodies shift and reform with every movement.

Shatterling

Medium elemental, neutral

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 10 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	21 (+5)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)	9 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances lightning, thunder; piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning from magical sources

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Resounding Shards. Any creature that successfully deals cold, fire, lightning, thunder, or radiant damage to the shatterling takes 10 (3d6) thunder damage.

Scintillating Shards. When a shatterling moves at least half its flying speed, each creature that can see it must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or become blinded until the end of its next turn.

Shifting Shards. Any creature that successfully deals damage to a shatterling with a melee attack takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shatterling makes two shardclaw attacks and two shardfeather attacks.

Shardclaw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Shardfeather. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Feather Fan. The shatterling shoots sharp crystalline feathers in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage and 3 (1d6) radiant damage.

Silicraw

A unique form of undead creature, a silicraw is a manifestation of the spirits of hundreds of creatures who have been killed by predators in the Shrilling Sands.

A silicraw looks like a mass of animated pebbles, grains, or splinters roughly sculpted into the shape of an indeterminate, featureless beast, with a shifting number of legs or other limbs. Although the silicraw can no longer eat, it hungers for the life it lost and pretends to hunt, giving itself a "body" of sorts through its supernatural ability to possess and animate earth and sand.

Silicraw

Huge undead, neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 250 (20d12 + 120)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	13 (+1)	22 (+6)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances fire, piercing, radiant, slashing

Damage Immunities acid, cold, lightning, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses blindsight 60 ft., tremorsense 30 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —
Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Micro-Silicates. Damage dealt by the silicraw's attacks ignores the target's damage resistances.

Shifting Shape. The silicraw can enter a space occupied by another creature and move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain.

ACTIONS

Onslaught. The silicraw makes a claw attack against each creature in its space and within 10 feet of it.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) slashing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 21).

Engulf. The silicraw swallows a Large or smaller creature it has grappled, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the target is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the silicraw, and it takes 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and 14 (4d6) piercing damage at the start of each of the silicraw's turns. The silicraw can have only two Large or smaller creatures swallowed at the same time.

A creature can attempt to free itself from the silicraw by making a DC 21 Strength check as an action. If the check succeeds, the creature is no longer swallowed, blinded, or restrained, and it appears in the same space it was. If the silicraw dies, all swallowed creatures are automatically freed as above.

The Stonecutter Golem

Originally intended as a guardian for Sivax's vaults, the golem Stonecutter is a visual and mechanical masterpiece. Combining state-of-the-art machinery, stunning artistic design and the flesh of various mighty creatures, Stonecutter is the most beautiful - by Magnifex Standards - creature in the Crystalline Maze.

When Sivax disposed of the Architect centuries ago, the golem was possessed by Mutroz's trapped mind. They went insane from the ordeal and deteriorated over the ages, eventually becoming obsessed with a single idea: "Find the Architect," both knowing and not knowing that what they seek is their own, lost self.

For uncounted centuries, the beautiful golem has wandered aimlessly through the myriad hallways and causeways of the Crystalline Maze, drilling new tunnels, leveling walls, shredding or mauling anyone unwary or imprudent enough to cross its path. It is relentless and nigh unstoppable, covered with plating of diamond-like strength, and set on carrying out its last command.

A successful DC 28 Intelligence (Arcana) check can recognize the golem is animated by the disembodied, deteriorated mind of a living being, but nothing else.

Stonecutter

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 28 (natural armor)
Hit Points 375 (30d12 + 180)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	5 (-3)	9 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances acid, bludgeoning, cold, fire, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

M Fluid Leak. Any creature that deals damage to Stonecutter from within a range of 5 ft. must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage and become poisoned until its next short rest.

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to healing magic and to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Lightning Absorption. Whenever the golem is subject to lightning damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Power Drill. The golem's weapon attacks are magical, and they ignore all damage resistance.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two drill attacks.

Drill. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (4d10 + 8) piercing damage.

Lighting Discharge (Recharge 5–6). Stonecutter projects lightning in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 20 Dexterity or Constitution saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Stormwurm

Massive creatures from the Titan Wastes, evolved over millennia to withstand Baastherox's storms and Drakha's frightening weather, stormwurms are building-sized grubs with the ability to turn water into energy.

Their bodies are so full of energy that they can summon lightning and evaporate nearby water sources, which lets them absorb ambient moisture and, thus, generate more energy. A stormwurm can swallow human-sized creatures whole, the moisture in their bodies immediately feeding the monster's body furnace.

Stormwurm

Gargantuan monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 315 (18d20 + 126)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	9 (-1)	24 (+7)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +13

Senses blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Energy Aura. Any creature that begins its turn within 30 feet of the stormwurm must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) fire damage as it dries out, its moisture absorbed by the stormwurm. If a creature fails its save, all nonmagical liquids it is carrying completely evaporate, and all magical liquids lose one dose each. If a creature dies from a stormwurm's energy aura, the stormwurm can immediately use its Energy Release attack as a reaction.

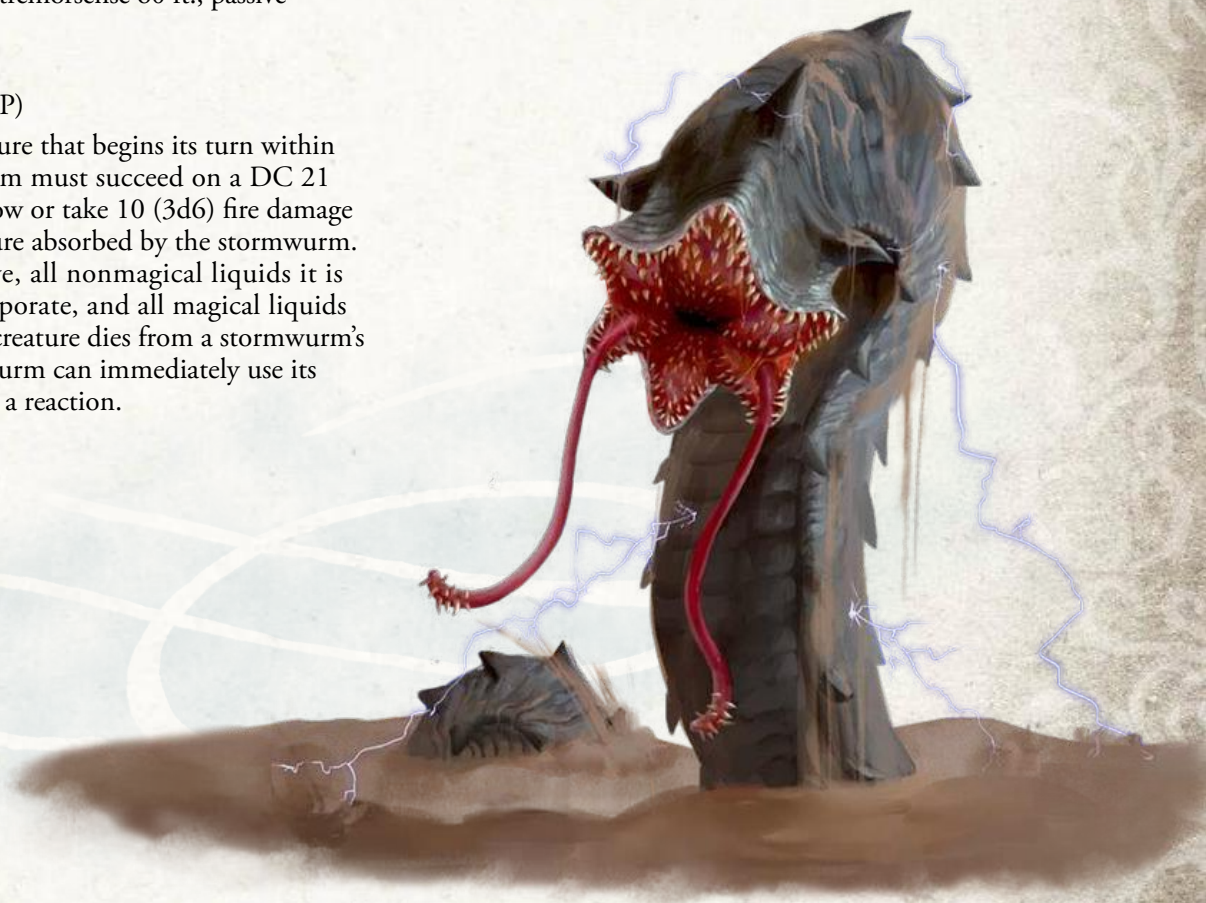
ACTIONS

Lightning Storm. The stormwurm makes one Energy Release attack against each target within range. The stormwurm can only use this ability if it has swallowed at least one creature during this fight.

Energy Release. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) lightning damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) piercing damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, that creature is swallowed. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the stormwurm, and it takes 14 (4d6) acid damage plus 14 (4d6) fire damage at the start of each of the stormwurm's turns. When a swallowed creature takes damage in this way, they lose one single nonmagical item from their gear, randomly determined or chosen by you. If a swallowed creature dies, the stormwurm can immediately make an energy release attack as a reaction.

If the stormwurm takes 24 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the stormwurm must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the stormwurm. If the stormwurm dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 20 feet of movement, exiting prone.



Stormwurm

YOUNG STORMWURM

When not fully grown, stormwurms don't generate enough energy to evaporate water around them, so they need to swallow their prey to absorb their moisture. This makes young stormwurms much more aggressive and predatory than their mature counterparts, even if they are smaller.

Young Stormwurm

Huge monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 161 (14d12 + 70)
Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	9 (-1)	20 (+5)	1 (-5)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +10
Senses blindsight 20 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages —
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Energy Aura. Any creature that begins its turn within 30 feet of a young stormwurm must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage as it dries out, its moisture absorbed by the young stormwurm. If a creature fails its save, all nonmagical liquids it is carrying completely evaporate.

ACTIONS

Energy Release. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) lightning damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d6 + 6) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, that creature is swallowed. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the young stormwurm, and it takes 10 (3d6) acid damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage at the start of each of the young stormwurm's turns. When a swallowed creature takes damage in this way, they lose one single nonmagical item from their gear, randomly determined or chosen by the GM.

If the stormwurm takes 18 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the stormwurm must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the stormwurm. If the stormwurm dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 10 feet of movement, exiting prone.

STORMWURM LARVA

The most predatory stage of the stormwurm, larvae still need to eat to convert their food into energy, so they never stop hunting and eating whenever possible.

Stormwurm Larva

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)
Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	3 (-4)

Saving Throws Con +8
Senses blindsight 20 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Striker Rock

Frêke vo'ode, or striker rocks, are elemental creatures native to Coatl lands, probably born from the brood's experiments. They are aggressive and territorial but not too bright. Still, they are cunning when attacking and can ensnare their prey with their lightning whips.

Striker Rock

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 161 (14d10 + 84)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	9 (-1)	22 (+6)	5 (-3)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities lightning, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Lightning Current. Any creature that successfully damages the striker rock with a melee attack or begins their turn grappled or restrained by the striker rock takes 14 (4d6) lightning damage.

Water Vulnerability. When a striker rock touches a large body of water or is soaked with water, they lose their lightning damage immunity, and every time they deal lightning damage while in such a state, they take the same amount of lightning damage themselves.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The striker rock makes two fulgurant whip attacks. If both attacks hit, the target becomes grappled (escape DC 19).

Fulgurant Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (4d6 + 6) lightning damage, plus the target is pulled 10 feet toward the striker rock and becomes restrained until the end of their next turn.

Fulgurant Discharge. The striker rock targets a grappled or restrained creature. The creature must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

Striker Rock

Sycalid Swarm

Sycalids are little but deadly crystalline bugs who form multitudinous nests within crystal formations and caves in the Shrilling Sands. A single sycalid is barely larger than a mouse, but together they can quickly overwhelm and kill much larger prey, daring to attack even dragons when in enough numbers.

Sycalids look like crystalline, iridescent beetles or scorpions with blunt antlers that they use to pummel their targets into a slow, painful death by a thousand pokes.

Sycalid Swarm

Huge swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 225 (30d12 + 30)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, fire, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 40 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening without squeezing. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Rush. Each creature in the swarm's space must make a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) bludgeoning damage and falling prone on a failed save. A successful save halves the damage and negates the prone condition.

Tonati

Tonati, full name Tonaticoatl, is an ancient dragon who has long dreamed of deposing her azhurma. Her intention is to use Kuxcoatl's latest experiment, testing the player characters, against him. To this end, she has placed special weapons and clues throughout the experiment, so the Valernians can make it to the final stage. Once there, she plans to lure them into a fight with Kuxcoatl himself.

While she does not actively look to become the brood's azhurma, should it happen as the likely result of her decisive actions, Tonati would be more than willing to "accept the burden of leadership."

Tonati

Gargantuan dragon, true neutral

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 455 (26d20 + 182)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	14 (+2)	24 (+7)	21 (+5)	16 (+3)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Int +13, Wis +11; advantage on saving throws against enchantment effects
Skills Arcana +13, History +13, Persuasion +15, Stealth +10
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 25 (75,000 XP)

Enchantment Resistance. Tonati has advantage on saving throws made against enchantment spells and spell-like effects. If Tonati succeeds on a save against an enchantment spell or effect, she can also use her reaction to redirect it against any other creature within the effect's range, which must now make a saving throw against the effect as if they were their primary target but against a spell save DC of 21.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Tonati fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Spellcasting. Tonati is a 13th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 21, +13 to hit with spell attacks). Tonati has the following spells prepared:

cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, mage hand, message, minor illusion, prestidigitation.*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, detect magic, fog cloud, silent image.*
2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, invisibility, mirror image.*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, major image, nondetection.*

4rd level (3 slots): *dimension door, greater invisibility, hallucinatory terrain.*

5th level (2 slots): *arcane hand, mislead.*

6th level (1 slot): *true seeing.*

7th level (1 slot): *etherealness.*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Tonati makes three attacks: two with her claws and either one bite attack or one tail lasso attack.

Mystifying Presence. Each creature that is aware of Tonati must succeed on a DC 24 Wisdom saving throw or become restrained for one minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) slashing damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 7) piercing damage.

Tail Lasso. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 23) for 1 round.

Wing Flap. All creatures in a 20-foot radius around Tonati must succeed on a DC 23 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 20 feet and take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage. Tonati can then move up to half of her flying speed.

Breath Weapons (recharge 5–6). Tonati uses one of the following breath weapons:

Dragonfire. Tonati breathes fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a success.

Biting Wind. Tonati breathes icy wind in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw or take 33 (6d10) cold damage and become incapacitated until the end of their next turn. A success halves the damage and negates the incapacitated condition.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Tonati can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tonati regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Detect. Tonati makes a Wisdom (Perception) check, and if a creature is hidden from Tonati, it's not hidden from her anymore.

Mystifying Presence. Tonati uses her Mystifying Presence.

Tail Attack. Tonati makes a tail lasso attack.

Wing Attack. Tonati uses her Wing Flap.

Weedwraith

A bizarre form of undead that doesn't come from animal life, a weedwraith is the risen spirit of a sentient plant or of an animal that died by the magic of certain spellcasting plants—an exceedingly rare occurrence and an equally rare creature.

A weedwraith looks like a floating, vaguely tree-shaped cloud of spores or green smoke. It regularly extends and retracts two distinct, misty limbs with which it grabs its victims.

Weedwraith

Large undead, neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	7 (-2)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities lightning, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Weed Cloud. The weedwraith can move through the spaces of other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It may enter the space of another creature or object.

Incorporeal Thorns. At the start of the weedwraith's turn, any creature in its space takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The weedwraith makes two misty vine attacks.

Misty Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated until the end of its next turn.

Incorporeal Spores (Recharge 6). The weedwraith creates a spore cloud in a 30 ft. cube in an area within 60 feet that it can see. Each creature in the area must make a DC

14 Constitution saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) poison damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half damage on a success.

Spawn Weedwraith. Any creature killed by a weedwraith is overtaken by a leafy, mossy growth, and its body is destroyed within 24 hours. After this time, the creature rises as a weedwraith under the mydru witch's control, with no memory of its previous existence. If the mydru witch is dead, the weedwraith is free to roam and kill.

Zaadren

Zaadren, or "servitor" constructs, are the janitors and technicians of the Kiln's upper levels, designed by the Ehrlya to perform maintenance on simple mechanisms and piping.

A zaadren looks like a polished rock orb with a 2-foot diameter resting on a metal cradle with five to seven insect-like legs. The orb has a beak-like extension at its front and a wider sort of snout on its rear.

Zaadren

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 44 (8d6 + 16)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Damage Resistances fire
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Magic Resistance. The zaadren has advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Jolt. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) lightning damage.

Zunrüs

The leader of the Charred Claw agents sent to undermine the Golden City's Valernian uprising, Zunrüs has made a deal with High Magistrate Solimarnex to turn Aureus and the Valernian citizens against each other.

Zunrüs is a tough, bitter man, capable of killing remorselessly and throwing himself against certain death if it means getting back at Valernians somehow.

Zunrüs

Medium dragon, neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (+2 scale armor)
Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +10
Skills Acrobatics +10, Athletics +11, Intimidation +8, Investigation +6, Perception +6, Stealth +10, Survival +6
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Immunities fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 15 (2,900 XP)

Knife Slide. Each of Zunrüs's weapon attacks deal an additional 21 (6d6) damage of its base damage type if the target is within 5 feet of a Charred Claw assassin.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Zunrüs makes three weapon attacks.

Va'ra Greatblade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra greatblade's damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

Va'ra Dart. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra dart's damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

Appendix B:
ARTIFACTS & ITEMS

Acidstaff

Weapon (any staff or polearm), uncommon (requires attunement)

Acidstaves are crafted by Magnifex alchemists to apply their knowledge to practical uses. A weapon enchanted as an acistaff sprays the target with acid on a successful hit, dealing an additional 10 (3d6) acid damage.

The target may attempt a Dexterity saving throw to avoid this additional acid damage; the DC of the save equals 8 + the wielder's Dexterity modifier + the wielder's proficiency bonus.

Cloak of Evershifting Skins

Cloak of Evershifting Skins

A legendary artifact and the main goal of the party that undertakes this adventure, the Cloak of Evershifting Skins was only a dream of its creator, the dragon Mutroz the Architect, but before their fall at the hands of Sivax Magnifex, they managed to write down the instructions and components to create it. To craft the cloak, a character needs to gather the following materials:

- A cloak of the finest cloth or silk, worth at least 500 gp
- Gold thread worth at least 1,000 gp
- Cured leather from a dragon's hide
- One roll of colored gauze worth at least 500 gp
- A live butterfly, sacrificed during crafting
- One drop of everflux quicksilver
- A custom-crafted silver and jacinth brooch worth at least 2,000 gp

If the adventurers gather all the ingredients, the entire party must spend one full week, or one month if only one character does the work, preparing and crafting the materials as per Mutroz's instructions. When the work is finished, a 17th-level or higher spellcaster must cast *astral projection* on the finished cloak. No other material components are required, as they are already included in the materials listed.

This magical cloak allows the wearer to become one with the forces of change and illusion themselves.

Shifting. An attuned character wearing the cloak gains a +1 bonus to AC and advantage on all checks made to Hide, conceal an item, or disguise themselves.

If an attuned character wears the cloak for 24 hours straight or more or if they attempt to remove the cloak willingly, it assaults the wearer's own sense of self. The character must succeed on a DC 26 Charisma saving throw or be afflicted by a random type of long-term madness effect. If the character was already under the effects of a short- or long-term madness effect, they gain an indefinite madness flaw instead. Any madness effects remain even if the character takes off the cloak.

Half-Real. An attuned character wearing the cloak cannot be grappled, is immune to the incapacitated and restrained conditions, and permanently has the effects of the *invisibility* and *nondetection* spells on their person. The *invisibility* and *nondetection* effects end if the wearer attacks or casts a spell, but they can also end the effects at will. The effects automatically resume as soon as the wearer moves at least half its speed.

If the wearer remains under the invisibility and nondetection effects for 24 hours or more, they must succeed on a DC 26 Charisma check to maintain their corporeal solidity. If the check fails, they cannot end the invisibility and nondetection effects, become visible, or physically interact with other creatures or objects until their next long rest. If they try to remove the cloak while in this state, they suffer disadvantage on their saving throw against indefinite madness.

Myriad Skins. An attuned wearer of the cloak may cast the *alter self* spell at will. Using this ability ends the invisibility and nondetection effect until the character moves at least half their speed.

After the alter self effect ends, the character must make a DC 26 Charisma saving throw. If they fail the save, they do not return to their original form and instead adopt a random new form within the spell's parameters chosen by the GM. The wearer cannot end this effect at will.

If the wearer of the cloak remains out of their original form for more than 24 hours, their body forgets its proper shape for good, and they become forever unable to return to it. A character unable to return to their original form may still use *alter self* to take other forms while wearing the cloak, always adopting a new random form when the effect ends.

If a creature under the alter self effect takes off the cloak, they remain stuck in their current form as if it had always been their natural form, and even new shapechanging spells or effects assume this is the character's original form.

Travel across Worlds. An attuned wearer of the cloak may cast the *astral projection* spell on their person and possessions once per day. The character always knows instinctively how to return to their home world while using this ability.

While the attuned wearer of the cloak is unconscious and not dying (such as sleeping), they shift outside reality as per a *demiplane* spell, and no other creature can physically interact with them until they wake up. Only an *astral projection* spell allows other characters to perceive and interact with the unconscious wearer of the cloak.

Destroying the Cloak. Once crafted, the cloak is far more powerful than even Mutroz foresaw. The only way to destroy it is by fully submerging it in an everflux quicksilver pool for a full 24 hours.

Deathless Spear

Weapon (spear), rare

This magical spear deals an additional 1d8 radiant damage on a successful hit against undead creatures. In addition, if the deathless spear deals damage to a creature that has the Nix Rune trait, the creature's nix rune is disabled. This effect can also disable the runes on Nixis' body parts.

Dragonkin Weapons

The dragonkin of the red moon wield vicious weapons that deal more damage and have slightly different properties to their Valernian counterparts.

DRAGONKIN BLADE

Melee weapon (martial, sword)
Category: Items
Damage: 2d4
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Finesse, Light
Weight: 1

DRAGONKIN DAGGER

Melee weapon (martial, dagger)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d8
Damage Type: Piercing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Range, Finesse, Thrown
Range: 20/40 ft.
Weight: 1

DRAGONKIN DART

Ranged weapon (martial, dart)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d4
Damage Type: Piercing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Finesse, Light, Range, Thrown
Range: 30/90 ft.
Weight: 0.5

DRAGONKIN GREATBLADE

Melee weapon (martial, spear)
Category: Items
Damage: 2d8
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Heavy (for non-dragons), Two-Handed
Weight: 5

DRAGONKIN HALBERD

Melee weapon (martial, polearm)
Category: Items
Damage: 2d6
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Heavy, Two-handed
Weight: 1

DRAGONKIN JAVELIN

Ranged weapon (martial, javelin)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d8
Damage Type: Piercing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Finesse, Range, Thrown
Range: 30/120 ft.
Weight: 2

DRAGONKIN SPEAR

Melee weapon (martial, spear)
Category: Items
Damage: 2d6
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Range, Heavy, Reach, Thrown, Two-Handed (for non-dragons)
Range: 20/60 ft.
Weight: 5

DRAGONKIN SERRATED SWORD

Melee weapon (martial, sword)
Category: Items
Damage: 2d8
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Heavy (for non-dragons), Two-Handed (for non-dragons)
Weight: 5
Weight: 5

DRAGONKIN SPIKED HAMMER

Melee weapon (martial, warhammer)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d8 bludgeoning plus 1d8 piercing
Damage Type: Bludgeoning/Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Heavy (for non-dragons), Two-Handed (for non-dragons)
Weight: 5
Weight: 5

DRAKHAN KNIFE

Melee weapon (martial, dagger)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d6
Damage Type: Piercing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Range, Finesse, Light, Thrown
Range: 20/60 ft.
Weight: 1

MAGNIFEX BLADESTAFF

Melee weapon (martial, polearm)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d6
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Finesse, Reach
Weight: 3
Weight: 1

MAGNIFEX SCIMITAR

Melee weapon (martial, polearm)
Category: Items
Damage: 1d10
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Finesse
Weight: 2
Weight: 1

MAGNIFEX VOULGE

Melee weapon (martial, polearm)
Category: Items
Damage: 2d6
Damage Type: Slashing
Item Rarity: Standard (in Drakha)
Properties: Heavy (for non-dragons), Reach, Two-Handed
Weight: 5
Weight: 1

Lawbreaker Weapons

Certain weapons have been used to topple empires, or to undo organizations with a single blow. Sometimes these weapons gain a spontaneous enchantment through Vaala, granting them the Lawbreaker magical property. A lawbreaker weapon will always strengthen the cause of chaos, disorder and dissension. A weapon can also be enchanted to gain the lawbreaker property, with the same process and cost as creating an uncommon magic weapon.

Property: Lawbreaker. This weapon's attacks count as magical. When striking a creature or object upon which many other objects or persons depend, such as a ruler, an important monument, a construction kingpin or a document of law, a lawbreaker weapon gains advantage on attack rolls and it ignores any damage resistance that may apply, including an Azhurma's damage reduction. The GM has the final word on whether a target is valid to apply the bonuses of a lawbreaker weapon.

Lightning Net

Weapon (net), rare (requires attunement)

A lightning net is normal while it remains folded in its wielder's hands. When used in combat, it unfolds to cover a roughly 5 ft. x 5 ft. area. If used to make an attack, the wielder may add their Strength or Dexterity modifier to the attack roll.

A creature other than the attuned wielder that is hit or touched by a lightning net takes 2d8 lightning damage, and must succeed on a Constitution save or become restrained and incapacitated. The target may attempt a Strength saving throw at the start of each of its turns to end the restrained and incapacitated conditions on itself. While the lightning net is incapacitating a target, it cannot be used to attack any other target.

The attuned wielder may retrieve and fold the lightning net as a bonus action, without taking damage or suffering any harmful effect.

Ossified Shard Artifact

A weapon or spellcasting focus that has fused with shavings from a shard of Kadmos, or blessed by the power of Kadmos itself, becomes ossified, gaining the Ossified Shard property and granting it increased power against Drakhan dragons.

Property: Ossified Shard. When a weapon or spellcasting focus with this property is used to make a successful weapon or spell attack against a dragon from the Red Moon or its kin, the attack deals double its base damage, ignoring any damage resistance the dragon has, including an Azhurma's Damage Reduction. If the dragon is immune to the weapon or spell's base damage, it is resistant to it instead.

The ossified shard property does not double the extra damage granted by an Arrow or Slaying or Dragonslayer sword.

An ossified shard weapon is worth 5,000 gp.

Sandseeker Javelin

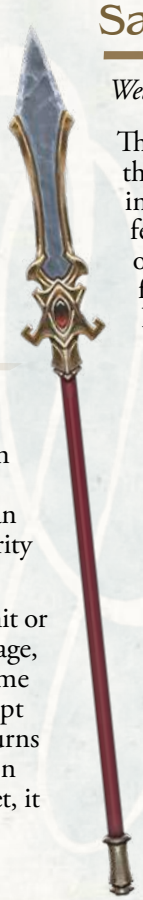
Weapon (javelin), rare

This javelin is a magical weapon. When you throw the javelin and speak its command word, it dissipates into a small sandstorm in a 120 foot line that is 30 feet wide. Every creature in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 1d6 fire damage plus 1d6 piercing damage and become Blinded for 1 round. The sandseeker javelin reforms in your hand at the end of your turn.

Trueshield

Armor (shield), rare

This magical shield increases the wielder's AC by 1. It also has a highly reflective surface, which helps reveal illusions as they are. The wielder of a trueshield has advantage on all saving throws against Illusion effects, and on all checks made to detect or dispel an Illusion effect.



Dragonkin Spear

Um'Frêki

Weapon (pike), artifact

Um'Frêki, the Hooked Render is a magical weapon, designed by Mutroz the Architect as a potential deterrent against Sivax, their former employer. Although Sivax did betray Mutroz, the Architect had no chance to finish the weapon, and its pieces remain scattered across the Crystalline Maze below the Magnifex domain.

If the adventurers find the spell within the lost notes stashed in area 4 and the discarded weapon pieces in areas 16 and 17, they can now assemble the weapon and use it against Sivax - or any Magnifex dragon.

Um'Frêki was intended as a dart by its dragon creator, but in the hands of a human-sized character it counts as a two-handed melee weapon. The weapon deals 3d6 piercing damage, and anyone with martial weapons proficiency can add their proficiency bonus to the attack roll. The wielder also gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magical weapon, and it deals double weapon damage against Magnifex dragons and dragonkin. If used against Sivax, this weapon ignores his damage reduction.

Va'ra Crystals

Va'ra ore has the ability to store the Vaala of non-draconic creatures.

Any character that touches a va'ra crystal with bare hands, or carries one or more va'ra crystals for more than 1 hour, gains an Exhaustion level. A character cannot gain more than 1 Exhaustion level per day from carrying or touching va'ra crystals.

If used as an improvised weapon, a va'ra crystal deals necrotic damage, and the target of a successful attack must succeed on a DC 10 saving throw or suffer 1 level of Exhaustion.

A single va'ra crystal can be used to give the va'ra weapon property to a weapon after working on it with smith's tools or jeweler's tools for 10 total days, divided among the number of proficient characters working on the weapon. While working on such a weapon, a character cannot regain exhaustion levels from rest.

Va'ra Weapons

These deadly weapons were made by the cruelest minds of dragonkind so that dragonkin could harvest or outright destroy the magical energy of humanoids and other Valernian creatures. Wounds from a Va'ra weapon not only hurt the body, but they also sap the target's very essence, leaving them dried, drained and - in some cases - incapable of healing or resurrection.

Property: Va'ra Weapon. Any creature damaged by a va'ra weapon takes additional necrotic damage equal to 1d6 per each die of the weapon's base damage. A creature that takes necrotic damage from a va'ra weapon must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. The DC for this save is equal to 8 + the wielder's Charisma modifier + the wielder's proficiency bonus.

A non-dragon creature killed by a Va'ra weapon's damage or exhaustion effect becomes a dry husk which cannot be brought back to life by any means.

A va'ra weapon is worth 500 gp in Drakhan markets, or 5000 gp if sold elsewhere.

Um'Frêki

Appendix C:

TALES OF DRAKHA

The adventures in this volume are all based on events that took place in Dragonbond history, and are tied to lore elements of our canon storyline. They are loosely based on some of the most relevant times that the azhurma of Drakha faced a challenge from their Valernian subjects, and the events leading up to that. This is stuff that storytellers from Drakha - and some from Valerna - speak about in the actual campaign setting.

What you play is your own world, your own canon and your own storyline, of course, but we thought it could be interesting to present the aftermath of the stories, or the 'historical endings', as they are told in Dragonbond lore.

The following sections present the aftermath of these adventures as known and retold in-universe, which may or may not be accurate in your own campaign. These are the versions of the story that we will reference in current and future products. They do not count as an actual part of the adventure, and you may or may not adopt them as the actual endings of each story. If you wish to take them into account, you may tell them after the adventure as an epilogue - or as a fake, 'official version' of what really happened.

THE VOICE OF DISSENT

At the height of the revolt, Aureus spoke.

He swept the rebels who dared challenge him with an arc of his massive tail. Then, he flew high above the Court of Trials and hovered there, his booming voice filling the city, reaching every street and every crevice within miles.

And just like that, the insurrection was over, every dragon and every citizen transfixed by the authority in the Golden Dragon's roar.

'This helps no one', bellowed Aureus. 'You are not better off now. Look at your wounds. Look at your homes, your bodies, your streets. We did not wish this. I did not wish this.'

Crowds all over the city gasped and stopped on the spot, their spirit deflated, their cries of dissent choked halfway out their throats. It was an entire city, suddenly realizing what they'd been doing.

The overwhelming silence that came then was both soothing and uncomfortable, for the entire Golden City, from walls to spires, from gates to alleys, fell quiet. Nobody lifted their gaze. Not even a breeze dared rise before Aureus' words. It was as peaceful and heavy as a tombstone falling into place.

Then, His Radiant Majesty flew down to the rebels who not a minute before had been fighting him to the death. That seemed an age ago, an imaginary tale.

'Solimarnex used you,' he said. 'You were a tool of his ambitions. Of his game.' His tone was stern and commanding, but also forgiving.

Then Aureus turned His head.

Solimarnex was there, right behind Aureus, cowering just enough to not seem upright. Nobody had seen him arrive. It was as if the Golden Dragon had summoned him without speaking.

Aureus stood face to face with Solimarnex, which seemed a viper before a lion.

'I'm proud', said Aureus. 'I'm disappointed.'

Solimarnex did not reply; he only hissed defiantly, belying his crouching posture.

'You want to lead the Charred Claw. Let you suit that title.'

Without another word, Aureus breathed a cascade of molten gold on Solimarnex' cowering form, which caused the traitorous dragon to become scorched and shriveled, his gleaming scales graying and flaking in the thin air - as they remain to this day.

'Nothing in my city happens outside my design', finished Aureus, throwing back his head, so as to look both at the rebels and at Solimarnex writhing in the arena. 'And now you will always know.'

Then he flapped his wings, and took off to lead the city rebuilding efforts.

THE PRIMORDIAL SHARD

Centuries later, when the Return of the Dragons was ancient history, and the razing of Valerna was only a bad memory branded in the minds of those that did not witness it except in visions and the nightmares of their people, we asked how it had happened. How did the dragons return from their exile in the Red Moon? How did they break the curse and leave the gulf between worlds open for their swarms to return in force?

Many said it began with the Primordial Shard; a single claw of the First Dragon, who carried the curse of its progeny to the Red Moon at the dawn of history.

Legend tells that the Greatest Warriors of Valerna, its bravest hunters and heroes, once gathered to challenge Baastherox, the Mightiest of Dragons, for the shard of Kadmos, as asked by their late companion, the knight Palan of Ysval.

The heroes could not defeat Baastherox, of course - his scars only seemed to make him stronger, and the more wounded he looked, the more his power grew. He laughed hearty and roared in triumph, enjoying a challenge for the first time in ages untold, chanting battle hymns he made up on the spot as the heroes' enchanted weapons faced down his dragonfire. When the heroes could fight no more, he spared them - those that could still be spared - and gifted them with their lives and with the shard, proud of having faced such spirit from the children of Valerna.

Or so the legend tells.

Perhaps Baastherox just scared the heroes away with a warning; perhaps the shard sits still in his lair and it had nothing to do with the breaking of the curse. But historians in both Drakha and Valerna maintain that the Greatest Warriors took the shard, and used the notes of Mzeebal the Madcap, the dragonkin sage who dared camp in Baastherox's shadow, to create a road back to their world. They used the Spear of Fannax the Dragonkin, which still contained the life force of their friend Palan, to open a wound in space that allowed them to return to their world. Thus Palan's lifelong wish of seeing Valerna again was fulfilled, in a fashion.

And in every History academy it is said, in hushed yet certain tones, that this first crack, this first scratch in the curse, was what the Returned Dragonbonded used, years later, to carry the Rune of Aureus back to Valerna, and with it the Rune of Kuxcoatl, and with them the anchors of what would become the Dragon Invasion, and lay waste to the mortal world.

SECRETS OF THE FORGE'S CORE

Today we remember the Scalebreakers as being the greatest dragon slayers in both Drakha and Valerna, having bearded even Azhurmas in their den. But once they were but a ragtag band of survivors, who had only killed a couple dragons by luck, and only because they were desperate for freedom.

The history of the Scalebreakers, and of all Drakhan citizens, turned when they destroyed the Va'ra vein.

Some members of the Scalebreakers—or maybe it was some legendary hero from another tale, and the Scalebreakers only took the credit and the spoils—entered the Nurazhirme Kiln, the lair of Ehrlya Dragons, and sabotaged the only vein of Va'ra crystals in the Red Moon. In those days, va'ra weapons were not as rare as they are now, and Aureus' Ban had not been enacted against their use; dragons and dragonkin widely used these weapons to drain Vaala lifeforce out of mortals, both as a test of magic channeling, and as a way to keep Valernians in line.

That ended when a group of Scalebreakers—or at least a group sent by the Scalebreakers—infiltrated the Kiln, reached the Va'ra lode and destroyed it with both magic and cunning. Trying to escape their sabotage, the agents came across Dehrilya's Flawless Forge, and were forced to face the Azhurma Forge Queen herself. Only one of the agents managed to escape the wrath of Dehrilya; perhaps she let the survivor go, out of boredom or amusement. And perhaps the hero was just lucky to leave alive.

In any case, either as a gift from Dehrilya, or stolen from her vault, the hero brought back a great sword of dragonbone, with a hilt of Ehrlya metal. He left it as a gift to the Scalebreakers as a last act before leaving them, or dying from the wounds of Dehrilya's fire.

Ignatz the halfling kept the sword, which became a symbol for the Scalebreakers, not only for the blade's dragonslayer quality, but because it represented the ability of mortals to rise up to the dragons and snatch at least a partial victory. The Va'ra vein had been destroyed, and a prize was retrieved from the Forge Queen's vault.

This led the Scalebreakers to newfound pride and deeds, until they became the accomplished dragon hunters they are now. And it is said the fabled Ehrlyablade is still on display at one of the group's secret hideouts in the Red Moon, as a reminder of the strength of Valernians—and the folly of challenging an azhurma.

THE HEARTS OF PERMUTATION

The heroes defeated Kuxcoatl and escaped his maddening trap, remembering their real lives and identities. They broke free of the pyramid, taking one of Kuxcoatl's artifacts and using it to return to their world.

Then they woke up, having lost their memories again, having returned to a small chamber, without equipment, with unknown marks on their bodies.

"Do I have to do this again, master?"

"Do you feel pity for these mortals, Esha? Perhaps I gave you too much human compassion after all…"

"It *does* get boring after a couple dozen times."

"Boredom. Another mortal concept I don't quite grasp."

Esha sighed, looking at the prisoners through her master's gazing pool. Kuxcoatl looked over her shoulder.

"I guess *they* are not bored yet."

"How could they be, master? We make them forget every time."

"So it's not only repetition which begets boredom, but repetition *and* memory".

Kuxcoatl took some notes in a stone slab beside him.

"You may be right, Esha. I'll take a bit more of their memories this time. See if that changes their reactions."

Esha rolled her eyes, and stepped through the gazing pool. Soon, she appeared among the adventurers, as groggy and confused as them, her memory temporarily as lost as theirs.

"Good," whispered Kuxcoatl, and began the experiment anew.

TO BE IN ALL SHADOWS

The chasm of U'drutz, at the border of the Nix dragons' territory in the Catacomb Reaches, used to be considered a potential safe haven for Valernians and other non-dragon refugees, as dragons rarely dared approach the region. But all attempts to settle the region ended badly—insofar as nobody knows what happened to those making the attempt.

One of the few surviving accounts of a failed attempt to settle U'drutz comes from the survivors of the doomed Amberskins tribe. These people had survived in the region long enough to have sired a generation of Drakha-born tribespeople who sought to secede from their elders, who remained Valernian traditionalists. Supposedly, this conflict weakened the tribe enough that a surprise raid by Nix'udjar dragonkin took them entirely by surprise and scattered the tribe, with the largest group of survivors heading straight into the Catacomb Reaches, apparently in search of an ancient Ehrlya artifact known as the Warsled—the husk of a magical, floating ship which would help them escape the Nix'udjar's onslaught. Nobody heard from that group of survivors again, and only a handful of Amberskins reached other settlements alive much later.

In fact, even the tale of the lost Amberskins would remain unknown were it not for a group of Fulgen traders, who traveled to Ossarium, the central region of Nix lands, in search of a permit of passage in the name of the Golden City. These diplomats were not allowed to linger around the lands of Ossarium, of course, but they managed to notice two things. One, the massive husk of what could have been a crashed, metallic ship, extinguished runes carved on the slag: and second, that the undead guards at the Nix border included the animated bodies of civilians and children, who never wander into the Catacomb Reaches. A greater riddle is posed by the account of Valernian-made weapons among the same undead guards. Had the Amberskins hired Valernians to help their escape? Were they Valernians from the tribe, who had kept gear from their homeworld hidden from draconic vigilance? Was the charred husk the remains of the Ehrlya Warsled?

The issue remains a mystery. And, since these dark reports all come from the vicinity of Nixis' lair in the Great Mausoleum, it is likely that only she knows the answer.

THE SCENT OF CREEPING DEATH

Much has been told of the Orphan's Crags, the region beyond the Shrilling Sands, where dragons dare not intrude and where humans and other Valernians can live safely in a deathless paradise.

Every Drakhan year, dozens of Valernian escapees and adventurers get lost in the way, forever swallowed by the sands, in their attempts to reach the fabled sanctuary. But there is no single record of a returning party. Not one.

For some, this is proof that the Orphan's Crags don't exist; for others, it is the opposite: the fact that nobody has returned confirms that they wanted to stay there forever.

For the sake of completeness, we include here the only surviving excerpt from the notes of Vyris, a self-professed "Notorious Skolla from the Ysval Region". We know nothing else of this Vyris, save for the two and a half scraps of paper rescued from their expedition log, and transcribed here, including incomplete phrases, dubious terms and truncated sections.

Day 11

I can't write yet. This is (too much)...

Day 12

We defeated her. Last night.

We killed Rawraxxa. The dragon is (...) can scarcely believe it myself. It MUST have been dead, with that many (...) I saw the sands swallow her carcass, a fitting end for (...) "apex predator."

Last night we were too tired to (celebrate. We) just wanted peace. We didn't even have dinner. We have to worry about food (and water now) if we want to go back to (...) the last to fall asleep, as always (...) but I swear I saw (…)

Today the sands seem calm, (however,) and a great weight has been lifted from the (surroundings) (...) Orphan's Crags (...) today we begin work, and tomorrow (...) bring more people (...) finally make it into (...)

Day 13

I was wrong. We were all (...)

Blood covered the few remaining words.

THE CRYSTAL HAUNTS

From the Gallery of Magnificence, in the Vault of Paradis:

EXHIBIT 12,149: THE CLOAK OF EVERSHIFTING SKINS

Created by a cabal of valiant heroes, who dared the Crystal Haunts only to obtain the single drop of everflux quicksilver needed to craft it, this cloak is a testament to bravery, persistence and cunning.

Guided by the words of the late dragon architect Mutroz (see Exhibit 7), who left posthumous instructions to build the fabled artifact, these brave heroes faced untold dangers and the might of the great Magnifex brood to reach the Vault of Prince Sivax and collect the needed component.

They of course had to face and defeat the Prince, who put in a predictably flawless act of falling dead after a particularly deserving blow, even feigning to sink into a pool of mercury, with the impeccable histrionism he is justly famed for, and the heroes scampered away with their prize to craft the mighty treasure.

Mutroz' list of ingredients, as researched by great Sivax himself when he planted it to entice brave, competent heroes to his lair, included a cloak of the finest silk, woven with colored gauze, gold thread and dragon hide, and clasped with a custom brooch to which a live butterfly (displayed in the exhibit) was nailed during the crafting process, using the everflux quicksilver to cement the enchantment. You can appreciate all of these, we're sure, in the exhibit's delicate, shifting fabric.

Once the artifact was finished, the heroes had outlived their use, and Sivax rose again, tracking them down as the uncouth thieves they were and recovering the artifact that was, by any measure, rightfully his. Because, who could be worthier to own such a splendid cloak than Sivax? What better place to display it than the Prince's very own Magnificent Gallery?

We believe that the heroes (see exhibit 12,150) would agree.

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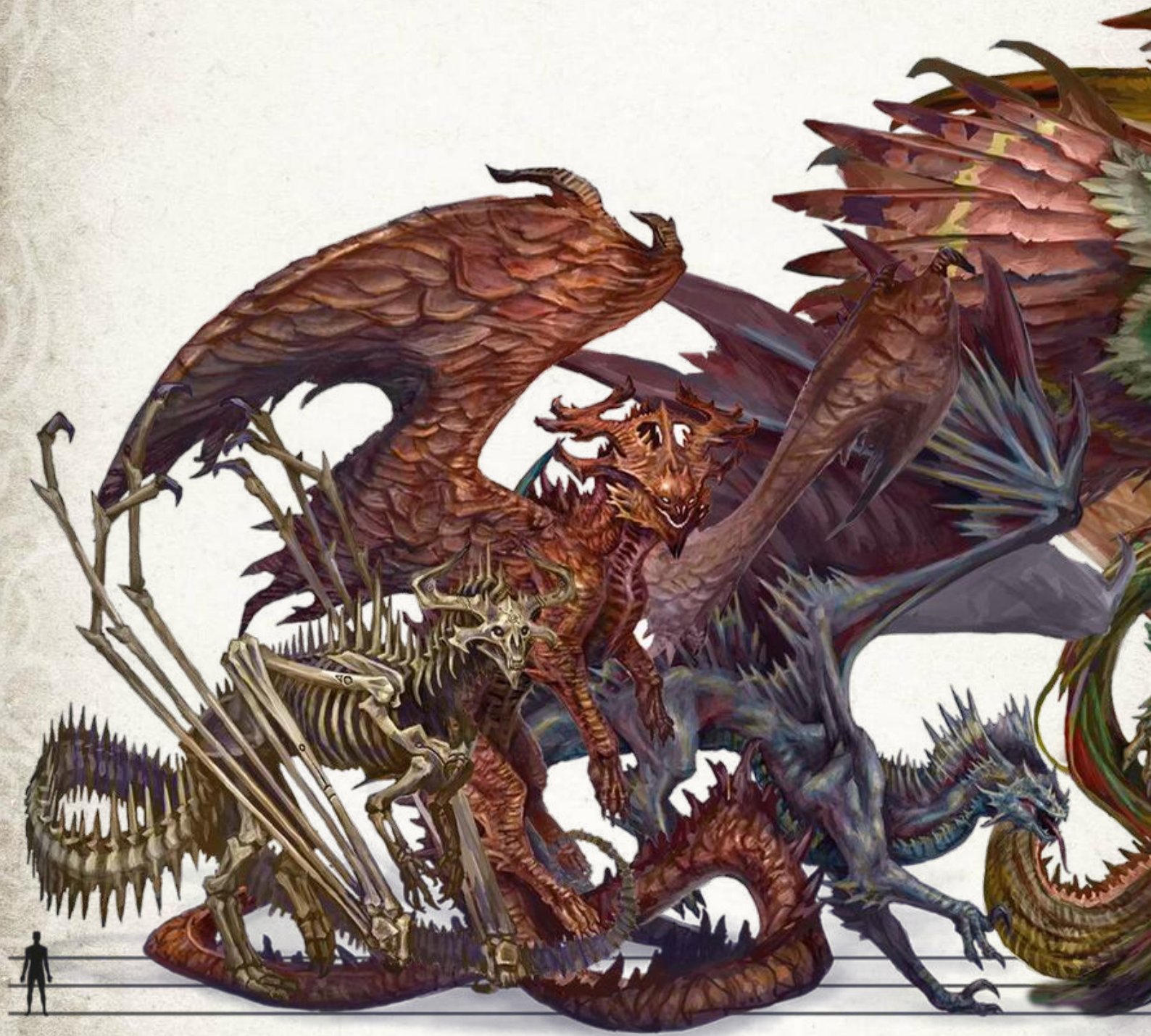
Altar and obsidian stone from Kuxcoatl

DRAGON SIZE CHART



Nixis

Dehrilya

Sivax Magnifex

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Great Wyrms of Drakha

Dragon encounter Tracksheet

Azhurma: _____

Actions

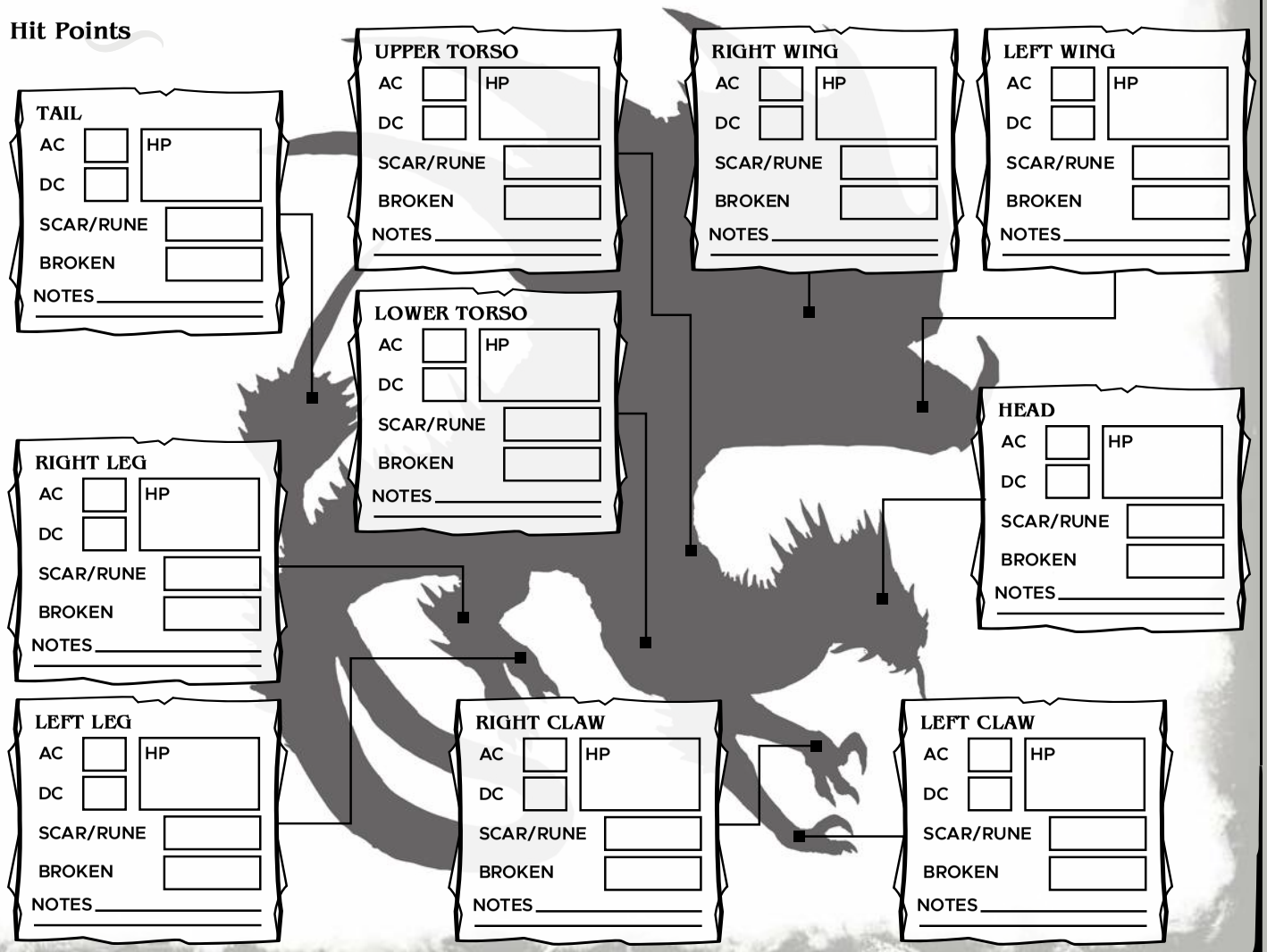
FIRST PHASE	SECOND PHASE	THIRD PHASE

Initiative

Stats

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	DAMAGE RESISTANCE

Hit Points



TAIL
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

UPPER TORSO
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

RIGHT WING
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

LEFT WING
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

LOWER TORSO
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

HEAD
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

RIGHT LEG
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

LEFT LEG
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
NOTES _____

RIGHT CLAW
AC ☐ DC ☐ HP
SCAR/RUNE ☐
BROKEN ☐
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