



DEATH IN THE PINCERS

A Chaos Scar Adventure

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“Death in the Pincers” is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar, near the King’s Wall. It starts as a fight with drakes modified by a Chaos Shard, turns into a battle in the middle of shifting magical terrain against giant ants that are trying to steal the drakes’ treasure-laden bodies, and ends with a second battle against giant ants fixated on eating the characters instead of the drakes.

If you’re not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating it into any existing campaign situated near a wilderness area that had mining operations at some point in the past. Unlike some Chaos Scar adventures, it features a great deal of interaction with an active chunk of the meteor. If you use the adventure somewhere other than the Chaos Scar, you’ll want to invent your own explanation for the meteorite’s magic.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the [Chaos Scar introduction](#) and check out the map of the entire valley.



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BACKGROUND

Near the King's Wall, a cavern with an exposed chunk of the Chaos Meteor jutting from its wall has been taken over by a rage drake and a pack of drake followers. The rage drake has been altered by proximity to the Chaos Shard, while the rest of its pack has yet to feel the meteor's effects. The rage drake has been weakened by the shard as its evolution takes place, but also granted a higher intelligence. Its innate cunning now supplemented by a growing intelligence, the drake is on the verge of regaining its potent melee form and drawing even more drakes to its pack.

Each of the lesser drakes has patches of glowing and bumpy purple skin caused by exposure to the meteorite. The lesser drakes' mutations have not yet altered their abilities, though each has features that surface when bloodied or after it has been slain (see "Tracking Bloodied Spaces and Drake Corpses," below).

The rage drake has been substantially altered, with boosted intelligence and a bite that enrages its targets so that they revert to the most rudimentary attacks.

When not leading a hunting foray into the world beyond the cavern, the rage drake spends its time coiled around the meteorite, muttering and cooing to it. The other drakes bask as close to the meteorite as they can get or prowl restlessly in circles if they have come too close to the meteorite and been cuffed away by the rage drake.

Meanwhile, in the rock walls surrounding the cavern, a newly established colony of giant ants has been drawn to the drakes' meteorite. The ant colony and a small group of stirges that feed off the ants' leavings, have made two attempts to rush the drakes, coming in through the main tunnel first, and then through a hole the ants dug out in the ceiling 40 feet

above the cavern floor. The drakes have defeated both attacks, aided by magical bolts from the meteorite triggered by its link to the rage drake.

Now low on hive soldiers and warriors, the giant ants wait for their next chance. They have prepared two other holes in the ceiling of the chamber that are ready to collapse. Now they have pulled back, waiting for the drakes to go raiding or for any other favorable circumstances. The party's elimination of the drakes will provide just such an opportunity; the ants gather their forces from throughout their colony and assault the chamber a few minutes after the characters have confronted the drakes.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The characters track the drakes to their lair and enter. They must contend with the drakes and their meteorite fragment, which contributes to the battle through its link with the rage drake reaver.

Once the characters have dispatched the drakes, the ants, lurking in the ceiling above, begin their assault, trying to claim the Chaos Shard for themselves. The characters must repel two waves of giant ant attacks or flee. If they prevail, however, they can profit quite a bit. And then they must decide how to deal with the Chaos Shard now in their possession.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

"Death in the Pincers" takes place in the Chaos Scar. The adventure hooks that follow provide information and motivation that could put the characters on the trail of the drakes. If you want to use both hooks together, cut each quest's XP in half.

The adventure might work best if the characters have already encountered another piece of the meteorite or are otherwise clear that pieces of the meteorite are dangerous objects that should probably be destroyed. A Chaos Shard has already been encountered in "Den of the Slave-Takers," and more Chaos Scar adventures featuring the shards are on the way.

HOOK 1: HUNT THE RESIDIUM DRAKES

A human hunter named Jarek who ventured too close to the Chaos Scar while hunting in the woods had his prey, and nearly his life, taken by a pack of drakes that were covered with glowing blue scales. Jarek escaped while the drakes killed his horse. Jarek had lost a friend a few weeks before to drakes colored like these, so when the drakes that attacked him wandered back into the Chaos Scar, Jared followed and picked off one with his bow before it could disappear into a tunnel with the rest of its pack.

The drake Jarek slew was already injured. A few minutes after he killed it, the drake's corpse developed weird blisters on its skin. One broke open and blew into fine silvery powder. Jarek isn't sure, but he's heard that folk proficient with magic use a similar substance. When the hunter shows the characters the corpse of the drake, it still has three un-popped blisters. If the characters pop a blister, they find their hands or weapon covered with a small puff of residuum, the raw stuff of magic. Each blister seems to yield about 50 gp worth of the stuff!

Quest XP: 150 XP for discovering whether the rest of the glowing drakes also manifest residuum blisters when slain, or 200 XP if the characters give Jarek some form of reward for letting them in on this windfall.

HOOK 2: REVENGE & REWARDS

One of the party's friends or acquaintances has been slain near the Chaos Scar by a pack of glowing drakes. The friend slew one of the drakes before dying. Use the effects described in the first hook to describe the oddities of the drake's skin. When revenge and greed coincide, can characters resist for long?

Quest XP: 100 XP for avenging their friend. 100 XP for getting every last jot of residuum.

TREASURE PREPARATION

"Death in the Pincers" distributes treasure slightly differently from other D&D® adventures. Characters find coins worth a varying amount of gold in the rock spikes surrounding the low daises in the drake's cavern. They also find a level 3 magic item in the rock spikes, though not all groups will find it. Draw the item from the characters' wish lists.

Depending on their success at driving off the giant ants, the characters can also gain raw residuum from the drake's corpses, though they might not be able to gather that treasure until encounters D2 and D3 are over.

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of the hook used to get the characters into the Chaos Scar, read or paraphrase the following when they reach the vicinity of the drake's tunnel.

This is the place. The tunnel slopes down steeply at first but is high and broad. It's dark, but even those of you who read only books, not tracks, can see the footprints of man-sized reptiles in the debris and mud outside the tunnel mouth.

BETWEEN ENCOUNTERS

Each of the encounters in this adventure takes place in the same cavern, though the second and third encounters have features the first encounter does not. As DM, the question of pacing will hinge on the characters' motives for remaining in the cavern instead of turning around: greed and a desire to deal with the meteorite chunks.

GREED

The characters' main motivation for staying in the cavern to rest could be greed. First, they were told that it takes a few minutes for the residuum blisters to appear on the skins of the drakes. Mechanics for gathering the residuum from the blisters can be found in encounter D2, since the blisters take about 5 minutes to manifest, approximating the moment the second encounter begins.

Second, the spiky rocks around both daises (see "Features of the Area" in encounter D1) are littered with a surprising amount of coins, a gem or two, and possibly even a magic item (see "Treasure Preparation," above). Unlike most treasure reward situations, use the treasure in the spiky rocks to reward high Perception checks, so that the characters feel like they are actually managing to find treasure other heroes might have missed.

It takes a minute to search each square thoroughly. Lump the areas into 5-square sections and assume that it takes about 5 minutes for a character to gather the treasure in a section. Each section holds an average of 20 gp, and one holds the level 3 magic item above. The first character to make a DC 20 Perception check searching a 5-square area finds it.

DEALING WITH THE CHAOS SHARD

The flickering meteorite chunk in the south wall can be destroyed with a single blow of a weapon, and it crumbles into dust if any attempt is made to remove it from the wall. The magic it once possessed, except for its purple glow, was long ago exhausted.

The glowing chunk in the north wall is another matter. It seems to be physically and magically invulnerable. Weapons, spells, and prayers neither damage the chunk nor affect the wall to which it is attached. After observing a failed attack against the meteorite, an adventurer who succeeds on a DC 15 Arcana or Religion check perceives a flaw in the meteorite's supernatural defense. An impromptu ritual requiring roughly an hour and 25 gp of residuum will be sufficient to drive a wedge in the aura of invulnerability surrounding these meteorite chunks. Unlike most other rituals, the ritual is sped up considerably for each other character who helps by chanting alongside the ritual caster; each ally who helps reduces the time necessary for the ritual by 10 minutes (to a minimum time of 30 minutes total).

Encounters D2 and D3 will interrupt such efforts, at least at first.

A few groups might debate the point and decide that Chaos Shards capable of creating residuum-laden monsters should be preserved rather than destroyed. As DM, you could be grateful, since they will be providing you license to create bizarre and catastrophic consequences of their attempt to harvest future residuum-blistered monsters.

DI. GLOWING DRAKES

Level 2 Encounter (700 XP)

SETUP

- 1 guard drake (G)
- 1 needlefang drake swarm (N)
- 1 rage drake reaver (R)
- 2 spitting drakes (S)

The broad tunnels leading to the drakes' cavern are lit by the last rays of the penetrating sun during the day, which counts as dim light. At night, the tunnels are entirely dark. Characters who make a DC 12 Dungeoneering check notice scrape marks along the walls that appear to have been left by giant scales; characters whose check result equals or exceeds 16 notice that the scrape marks are ancient, far older than the claw prints on the floor.

About 60 feet from the 15-foot cliff that marks the edge of the drake's cavern, compare the characters' passive Perception to DC 15. A character who succeeds hears a rasping, scratching noise deep within the walls. The sounds do not repeat. The sounds are ants from the new queen's colony, preparing to break through the walls to initiate encounter D3, but at this point in the adventure, the scratching in the walls is a paranoia-enhancer, not a threat.

If the characters travel with light sources of their own, the gently glowing needlefang drake swarm atop the cliff will be alerted when the party's light reaches the cliff. If the characters travel in the dark, compare their Stealth check to the drake swarm's passive Perception of 12 as soon as they are within 30 feet of the cliff. When the drake swarm senses the characters, the drakes squeal and growl and

TRACKING BLOODIED SPACES AND DRAKE CORPSES

This encounter requires you to keep track of two unusual elements.

First, whenever a drake becomes bloodied, mark the square it is in and all adjacent squares as blood rock—creatures in these squares score critical hits with a natural attack roll of 19 or 20. When a creature attacks from such a square, describe the attack as magically vicious, aided by the magic of the spilled blood. The effect lasts until the end of the adventure, significant since later encounters are likely to be fought in the same area.

Second, keep track of the square in which each drake is reduced to 0 hp. It's probably better to keep track of the squares in which the drakes' bodies lie rather than marking the squares on the board, since the zones created by these meteorite-altered drakes' death auras won't come into play until encounter D2.

cascade back toward the cavern to warn the rest of the pack.

The rest of the drakes roll initiative the turn after the swarm begins screaming. Except for the guard drake, the drakes are buried in purple dreams from the meteorite, and they are slowed in the first round of combat. If the characters stealthily evade or eliminate the guard drake, the drakes other than the guard drake have a -4 penalty on Perception checks to detect the characters as they enter the main cavern.

When the characters approach the 15-foot cliff, read:

At first it looks like the tunnel ends ahead of you, but then you see that it's a 15-foot wall of boulders. It looks like it would be easy to climb, but smaller boulders and piles of bones are jumbled in the heap, complicating your steps. There's a faint purple glow moving about somewhere above the top of the cliff.

If the characters enter the main cavern before the drakes can reach them in the tunnel, read:

The cavern is lit by a brightly glowing purple chunk of rock in the north wall and a smaller flickering chunk on the south wall, both set on raised daises surrounded by spiky, glowing rock. Hissing with fury, drakes spit and claw their way toward you from the north. The drakes have crusty purple growths on their skin, but these growths glow purple like the rock, as do the drakes' eyes.

When the rage drake reaver first hits a character with its claws or a bite, read:

As its attack draws blood, the rage drake meets your gaze with its glowing reptilian eyes. It lets out a rumbling growl, licks its lips, and speaks! "More!" it bellows, and comes toward you again.

The first time a character bloodies a drake, read:

As your attack hits home, the drake's blood explodes from its eyes and the growths on its skin, staining the rock nearby a glowing purple.

The first time a character slays a drake, read:

The drake goes down in a fountain of blood and an explosion of magical energy. It's hard to be certain in the rush of the fight, but there's no sign yet of the residuum you're hoping for.

Guard Drake (G) **Level 2 Brute**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP 125

Initiative +3 **Senses Perception** +7
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24
AC 14; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 13; **Will** 12
Immune fear (while within 2 squares of an ally)
Speed 6

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, or 1d10 + 9 damage while within 2 squares of an ally.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 18 (+5) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 12 (+2)

Rage Drake Reaver (R) **Level 3 Brute**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP 150

Initiative +2 **Senses Perception** +2
HP 56; **Bloodied** 28
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 13; **Will** 13
Immune fear (while bloodied only)
Speed 6

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

⊕ **Raking Charge** (standard; at-will)
When the rage drake reaver charges, it makes two claw attacks against a single target.

⊕ **Enraging Bite** (standard; at-will) ⬥ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and the rage drake reaver makes a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack*: +5 vs. Will; until the end of its next turn, when it attacks, the target can only make a melee basic attack.

Reaving Rage (while bloodied)
While bloodied, the rage drake reaver gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls (and triggers the meteorite's attack, if it is nearby).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 18 (+5) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 16 (+4) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 11 (+1)

Needlefang Drake Swarm (N) **Level 2 Soldier**
Medium natural beast (reptile) XP 125

Initiative +7 **Senses Perception** +7
Swarm Attack aura 1; the needlefang drake swarm makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its turn in the aura.
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 17; **Will** 14
Immune fear; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 against close and area attacks
Speed 6

⊕ **Swarm of Teeth** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage, or 2d6 + 2 against a prone target.

⊕ **Pull Down** (minor 1/round; at-will)
+3 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+1)

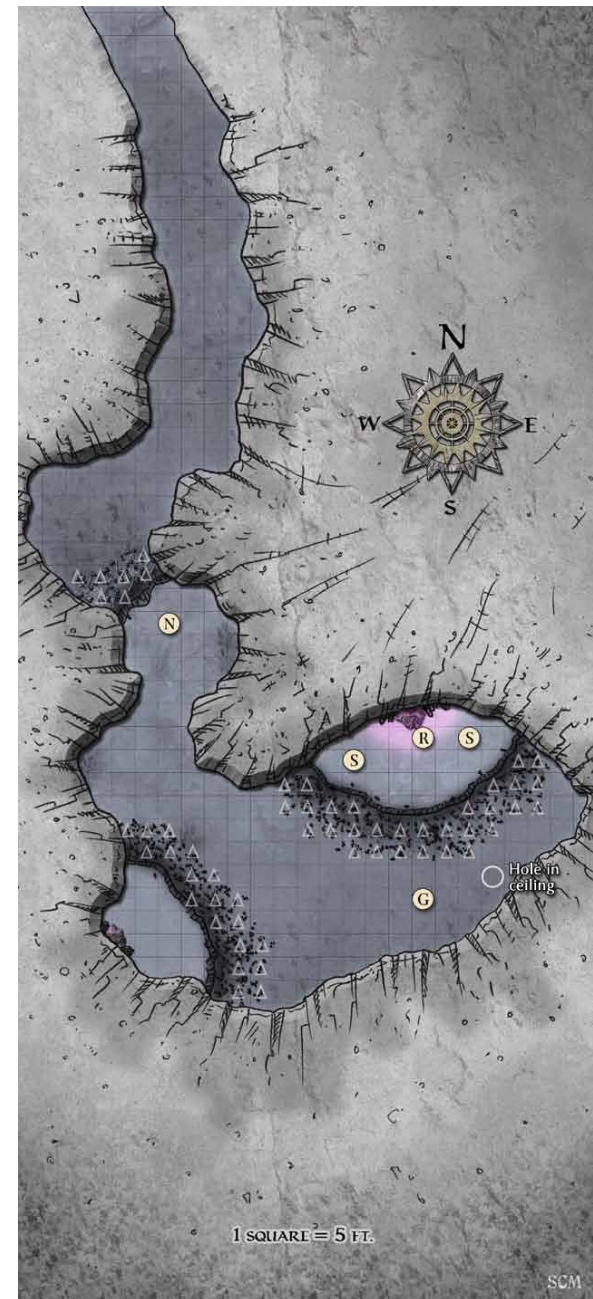
2 Spitting Drakes (S) **Level 3 Artillery**
Medium natural beast (reptile) XP 150 each

Initiative +5 **Senses Perception** +3
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 15; **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 14
Resist 10 acid
Speed 7

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.

⚡ **Caustic Spit** (standard; at-will) ⬥ **Acid**
Ranged 10; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 acid damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 12 (+2)





TACTICS

The spitting drakes attempt to stay on the low dais, spitting at characters in the rock spikes or beyond the rocks. The guard drake and needlefang drake swarm fight to keep the characters stuck in the cavern where the spitting drakes can hit them. The rage drake holds the line in front of the spitting drakes unless it takes damage from a ranged or area attack, in which case it attempts to charge into combat against a lightly armored target. Unlike most rage drakes, the reaver fights cannily, avoiding flanks, dodging away from too many attackers, and trying to use its bond with the glowing meteorite chunk to its advantage (see “Features of the Area”).

The other drakes fight like blood-crazed beasts, but all are familiar with the Blood Rock effect that occurs around them when they become bloodied. All the drakes, particularly the rage drake, try to launch melee attacks from such blood rock squares, though they’re not canny enough to try and keep the characters off the squares.

The guard drake is assigned to guard the rage drake reaver.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Unless stated otherwise, each of the features below also applies to encounters D2 and D3.

Illumination: Steady purple light from the large meteorite chunk and flickering purple light from the defunct rock on the south wall amount to normal illumination.

Defunct Meteorite: The chunk of meteorite on the south wall is about the size of a halfling’s head. It flickers with purple light but has otherwise expended its magic.

Cliff: The 15-foot-tall wall of boulders is an extremely easy climb (DC 5 Athletics).

Glowing Meteorite Chunk: A jagged, glowing, purple Chaos Shard protrudes from the north wall of the cavern. The meteorite is tuned to the rage drake’s blood. While the rage drake is bloodied, each of the rage drake’s attacks that hits also causes the Chaos Shard to target two different random enemies within 20 squares with flashing blue rays (+6 vs. Reflex; the target falls prone; see Rock Spikes, below).

Hole in Ceiling: This is the hole the giant ants came through on their first attempt against the drakes. It’s 40 feet above the ground and is unlikely to have any impact on this battle.

Low Daises: The two meteorite chunks are at the center of natural plateaus raised 5 feet above the cavern floor. Moving from the cavern floor to the top of the plateau requires 2 squares of movement. It is not possible to shift from the cavern floor to the top of the plateau. The edge of the plateau makes an excellent defensive position since enemies wishing to move to the top must move instead of shifting.

Rock Spikes: These unnatural protrusions from the cavern floor seem to be reactions to the meteorites’ magic. These squares count as difficult terrain. In addition, any creature knocked prone or that drops prone in a rock spikes square, or that crawls into a rock spikes square, takes 5 damage.

Each time a character enters a rock spikes square during combat, he or she can make a DC 10 Perception check. Success indicates that the character notices gold and silver coins scattered throughout the rock spikes along with bones. A thorough search after the fight turns up a good deal of treasure from the drakes’ earlier victims.

D2. ANTS FROM ABOVE

Level 1 or 2 Encounter (550 or 800 XP)

SETUP

- 2 armorcutter ants (A)
- 10 hive worker ants (H)
- 2 stirges (S)

As 1d6 residuum blisters finally manifest on each of the dead drakes, two new holes open in the ceiling. (If you don't want to roll randomly, distribute 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 blisters on the drakes as you like.) A stirge flies through each, followed by giant ants, clambering across the ceiling and down the walls to swarm the bodies of the dead drakes.

This encounter is meant to frighten the characters at the moment they were hoping to collect the residuum they are due. The encounter looks more

threatening than it really is, because the ten hive workers aren't concerned with attacking the characters. In this encounter, they're focused only on trying to drag the bodies of the drakes up into the ant holes and back to the colony. The fight is complicated by the fact that each of the dead drakes has an aura surrounding its body (a side effect of the magic of the meteorite), and by the fact that attacks around the drakes' corpses might *destroy* some of the residuum.

Given the complexity of the encounter and the threats to their treasure, give your characters full XP for the hive workers they defeat even though the workers aren't principally concerned with fighting.

When the residuum blisters manifest on the dead drakes, read:

As you've been waiting for the blisters to form, you've sensed that the bodies of the drakes have begun to manifest some sort of magic, as a gradually rising glow of different colors surrounds each of the bodies. Blisters surface on the skin of the drakes, just as you'd hoped. But before you can begin to truly harvest the residuum, you hear scratching overhead. Stone falls from two holes in the ceiling and two bat-winged insects fly down out of the dust and debris, followed by waves of giant ants!

TACTICS

Rather than passing through the rock spike areas, the giant ants climb along the walls to get at enemies or drake bodies on the low daises.

The stirges wait until the armorcutters are near the cavern floor before attacking, then focus on enemies near the larger creatures. Quick characters might be able to pick off a stirge before it attacks.

In order to use their *shred armor* ability, the armorcutters attack characters grabbed by the stirges or use the hive workers to gain a flanking position.

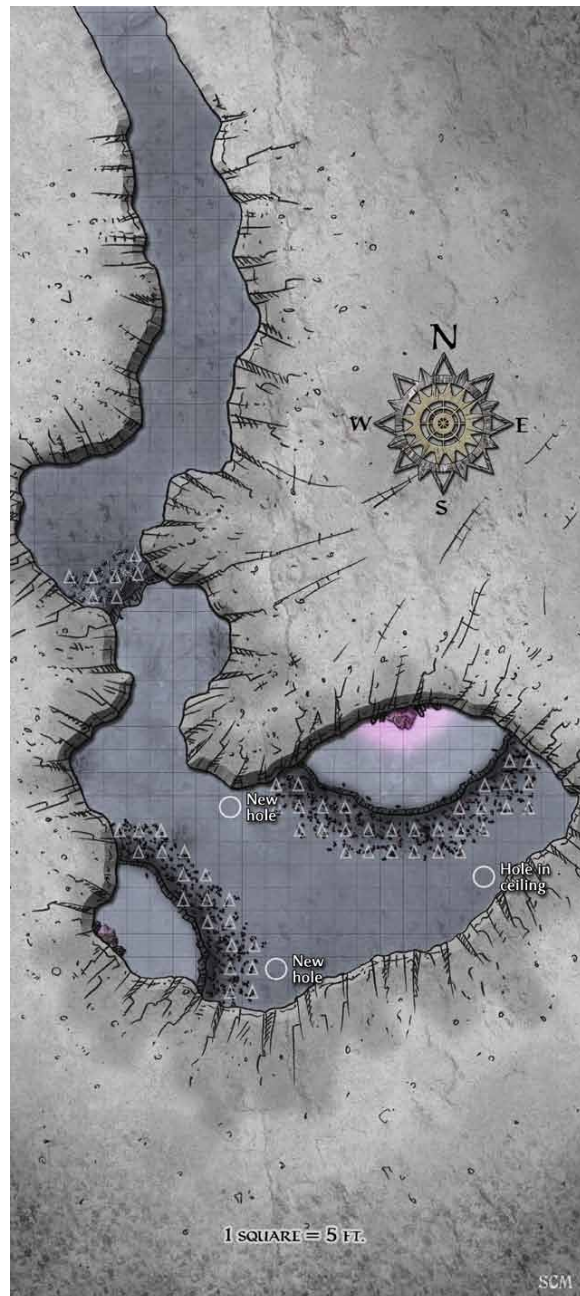
The hive workers don't attempt to cooperate with the armorcutters. The hive workers focus entirely on removing the bodies of the slain drakes.

It takes a move action for each hive worker to pick up a drake's corpse or join a carry. An ant carrying a corpse alone is slowed. Two ants moving together can carry a drake's body in one of their spaces and have speed 4 while moving the body. Three ants cooperating to move one drake's body can move at speed 6. The *hive worker frenzy* ability enables workers to make even better speed with a drake's corpse when a member of their colony is slain. A worker that exits through a hole in the ceiling won't return.

2 Armorcutter Ants (A)		Level 4 Brute
Medium natural beast		XP 175 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +6; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
HP 68; Bloodied 34		
AC 16; Fortitude 17, Reflex 14, Will 12		
Speed 6, climb 6		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)		
+7 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage.		
⬇ Shred Armor (standard; requires combat advantage against the target; at-will)		
+7 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to AC (save ends).		
⬅ Thrash (immediate reaction, when first bloodied; encounter)		
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d10 damage, and the target is knocked prone. Miss: Half damage.		
Hive Armorcutter Frenzy (when any giant ant within 10 squares of the armorcutter is reduced to 0 hit points)		
The armorcutter makes a bite attack.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 16 (+5)	Dex 11 (+2)	Wis 11 (+2)
Con 18 (+6)	Int 2 (-2)	Cha 4 (-1)

10 Hive Worker Ants (H)		Level 1 Minion
Medium natural beast		XP 25 each
Initiative +0	Senses Perception -1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		
AC 15; Fortitude 13, Reflex 13, Will 10		
Speed 6, climb 6, burrow 2 (tunneling)		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.		
Hive Worker Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)		
The hive worker shifts 2 squares.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 17 (+3)	Dex 15 (+2)	Wis 9 (-1)
Con 14 (+2)	Int 2 (-4)	Cha 4 (-3)

2 Stirges (S)		Level 1 Lurker
Small natural beast		XP 100 each
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +0; darkvision	
HP 22; Bloodied 11		
AC 15; Fortitude 12, Reflex 13, Will 10		
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape) and takes ongoing 5 damage until it escapes. An attached stirge doesn't make attack rolls while grabbing a target and gains a +5 bonus to its AC and Reflex defenses.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Skills Stealth +8		
Str 8 (-1)	Dex 16 (+3)	Wis 10 (+0)
Con 10 (+0)	Int 1 (-5)	Cha 4 (-3)



In order to attack, a hive worker has to let go of the corpse it is carrying. The worker ants use opportunity attacks if they have not already picked up a drake, but otherwise the workers attack only in two cases: If they are immobilized or otherwise prevented from approaching, grabbing, or moving with the corpse of one of the slain drakes, or if an individual hive worker survives an attack against it after the two armorcutters have been eliminated.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Many of the features of the cavern are the same as the features from the first encounter. The glowing meteorite chunk no longer attunes attacks with the bloodied rage drake reaver and the characters are likely to have spotted the treasure in the rock spikes, but otherwise the features of the cavern are pretty much the same. Additional features are as follows.

Cavern Ceiling: The ceiling is 40 feet above the floor. Ants climbing out of the holes in the ceiling generally aren't able to move to the floor and attack in the same turn.

Drake Death Zones: The corpses of the drakes killed in encounter D1 create magical zones in a burst 1 (creating a 3-square by 3-square space that the zone occupies, or 4 by 4 for the Large rage drake reaver), which manifest fully 5 minutes after the end of that encounter (which is why it's important to keep track of where each drake fell in battle in the first encounter). Each of the drake types creates a different zone; all zones cover the square in which the drake was slain and each adjacent square, though a couple of the zones leave the bodies and move elsewhere. As usual, zones can overlap.

Blast Cloud Zone (Spitting Drakes): The blood of the spitting drakes spirals into the air, creating a

purple and red haze. Squares in the cloud are lightly obscured. When a burst or blast created by a fire, force, lightning, psychic, or thunder power touches a square of blast cloud, the size of the burst or blast is increased by 1.

Death Shadow Zone (Needlefang Drake Swarm): Shadows of swirling drakes seem to wash over the area. All attacks in this zone deal an extra 1d6 psychic damage. Whenever a creature within 5 squares of the zone is reduced to 0 hp, the zone moves to center on that creature's square.

Death Crescendo Zone (Guard Drake): Devotion in life turns to venom in death. Each time a creature is reduced to 0 hp in this zone, all attacks in the cave during the next turn gain a +2 attack bonus. When a creature within 5 squares of the zone uses a healing surge, the zone moves to center on that creature's square.

Rage of the Wild Zone (Rage Drake Reaver): The rage drake reaver's blood infuses this area with a zone that forces each non-beast creature that starts its turn in the zone to make a melee attack on that turn or take 5 psychic damage.

Residuum Blisters: Each of the drakes slain in the first encounter has manifested 1d6 residuum blisters. When broken by an adjacent character and gathered into a vial (a standard action), each blister provides 50 gp of residuum.

A character who wants to use a minor action to scrape a residuum blister must make a DC 15 Thievery or Arcana check. Success indicates that the character gathered the residuum successfully. Otherwise half the residuum from that blister was lost.

For dramatic effect, feel free to scrape away a blister or three as the ants drag a drake toward their holes.

D3: MARCH OF THE HIVE

Level 1 Encounter (500 XP)

SETUP

1 hive warrior ant (H)

1 hive soldier ant (S)

9 hive worker ants (W)

While the characters catch their breath from the attack of the armorcutters, the ants digging through the walls of the tunnel to the surface announce their arrival with a thunderous crash. The ants march up the 15-foot cliff and into the cavern to claim the meteorites for the colony.

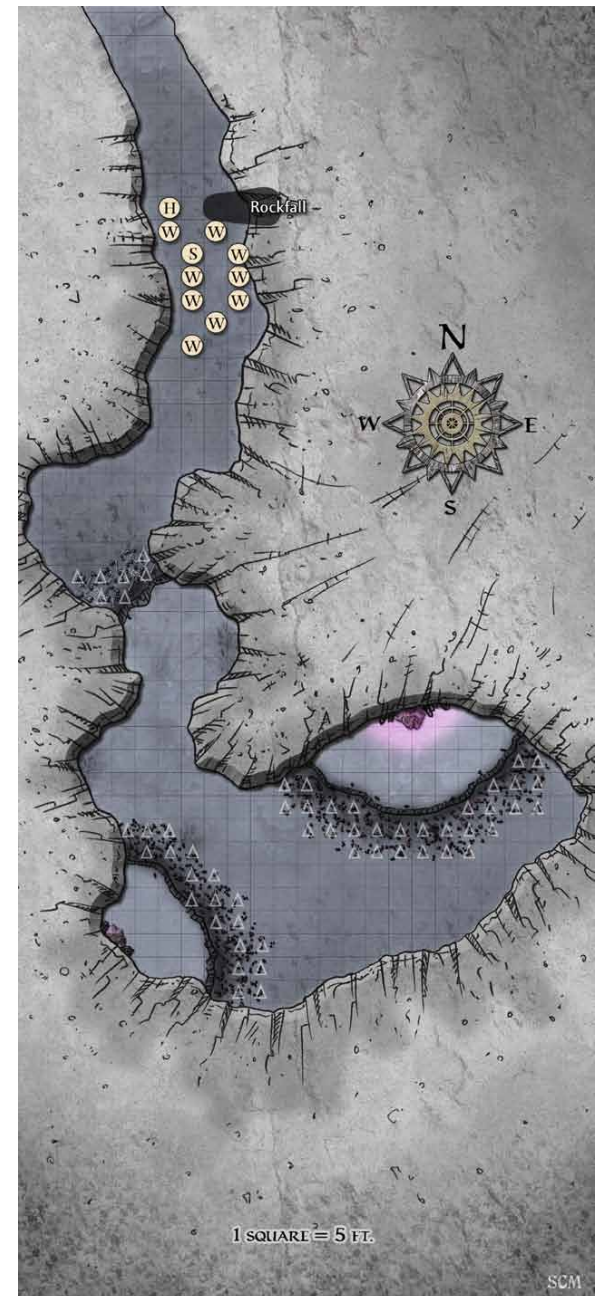
There's nothing fancy about this fight. At the DM's option, the death auras of the drakes might linger after the residuum blisters have been scraped away, or you can end the auras, whichever suits you.

The hive has already been depleted by earlier attacks against the drakes, so if this attack fails, the worst the characters will see afterward are hive worker antennas twitching occasionally on the far side of the holes.

When the characters have had a couple minutes to wipe off the ichor and catch their breath, read:

There's a huge crash from the north tunnel, the way you came in, and dust puffs into the room as if a big mass of stone had been displaced farther up the tunnel.

Hive Soldier Ant (S)		Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural beast		XP 150
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
HP 46; Bloodied 23		
AC 18; Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 12		
Speed 6, climb 6		
⊕ Grasping Mandibles (standard; usable only while the hive soldier does not have a creature grabbed; at-will) +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed.		
⊕ Acid Sting (standard; at-will) ⊕ Acid Targets a creature grabbed by the hive soldier; +10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).		
⚡ Death Convulsion (when the hive soldier drops to 0 hit points) Close burst 1; targets enemies; +8 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone.		
⚡ Hive Soldier Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will) The soldier gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 17 (+4)	Dex 15 (+3)	Wis 9 (+0)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 4 (-2)



Hive Warrior (H)		Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast		XP 125
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +4; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
HP 36; Bloodied 18		
AC 16; Fortitude 14, Reflex 15, Will 11		
Speed 8, climb 8		
⊕ Piercing Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Acid		
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage. The hive warrior's attack deals 1d10 extra acid damage to any target that already has ongoing acid damage.		
Hive Warrior Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)		
The warrior is no longer marked or cursed, and it shifts 2 squares.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 9 (+0)
Con 12 (+2)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 4 (-2)

10 Hive Workers (W)		Level 1 Minion
Medium natural beast		XP 25 each
Initiative +0	Senses Perception -1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		
AC 15; Fortitude 13, Reflex 13, Will 10		
Speed 6, climb 6, burrow 2 (tunneling)		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.		
Hive Worker Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)		
The hive worker shifts 2 squares.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 17 (+3)	Dex 15 (+2)	Wis 9 (-1)
Con 14 (+2)	Int 2 (-4)	Cha 4 (-3)

TACTICS

When the soldier stings a character and delivers ongoing acid damage, the hive warrior attempts to follow up with its *caustic reaction* attack.

These hive workers are angered by the smell of all the previous ant deaths in the cavern. They ignore the drakes' bodies and attack the characters.

If the characters are dealing with the encounter easily, add more hive workers, from the tunnel or ceiling, one or two at a time.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The features are the same as those in encounter D2, with the following exception.

Rockfall: The area indicated as the rockfall is now a narrow passageway that requires Medium creatures to drop prone to crawl through, but it is not impassable. ☹

About the Author

Rob Heinsoo led the design of the 4th Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Roleplaying Game. His 4th Edition design credits include *Martial Power*™ and the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Player's Guide*. His other game designs include *Three-Dragon Ante*™ and *Inn-Fighting*™.