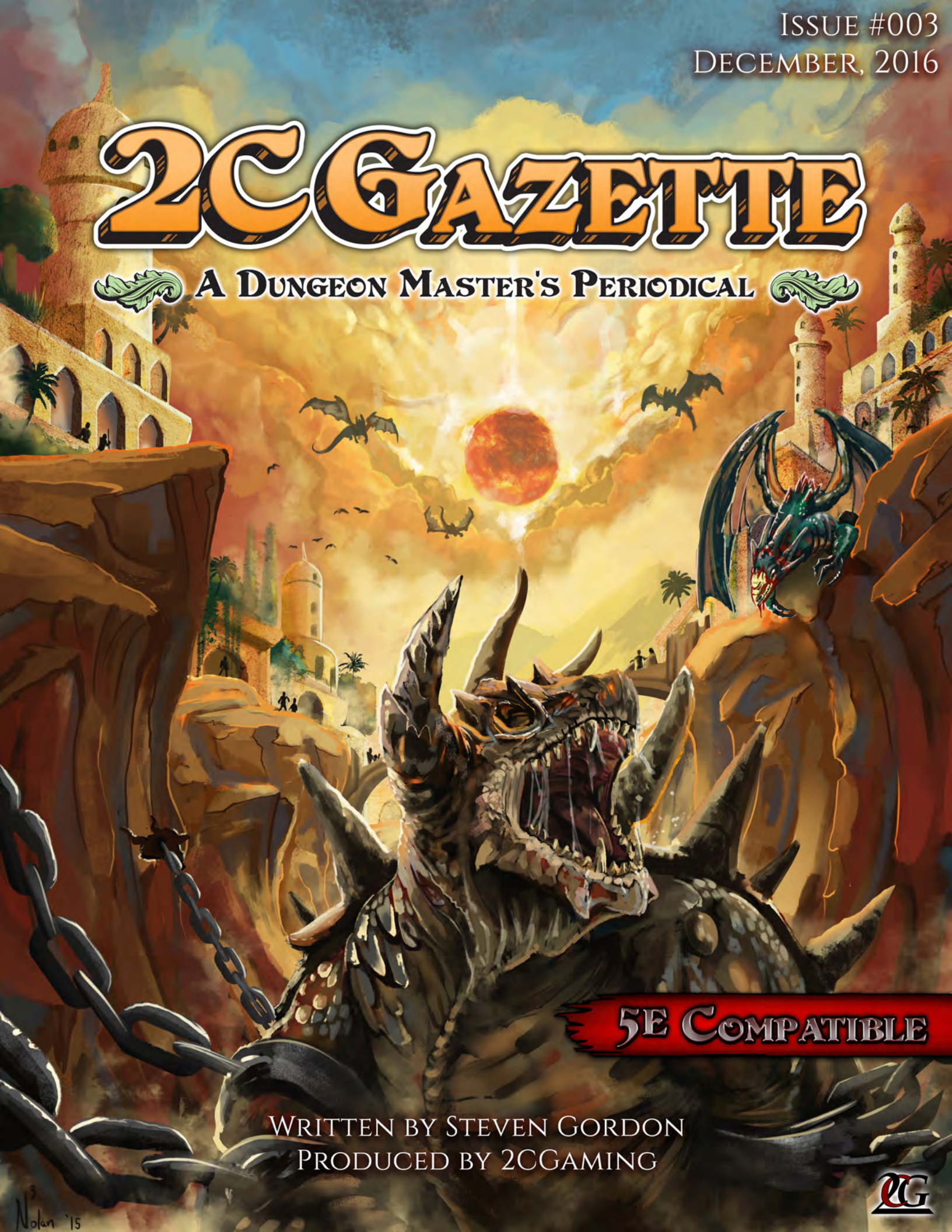


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A DUNGEON MASTER'S PERIODICAL



5E COMPATIBLE

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Nolan '15

Dragon's Roost

 The 2CGazette #003 - December, 2016 

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Produced By
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Dragon's Roost

Encounter Level 8 (Scales 5 to 12)

SUMMARY

Dragons are cool, but they often don't make the best use of the terrain around them. If you think about it, a cave is really a poor choice for a flying creature to make its lair. An old watchtower in the middle of a muddy field is far superior for a pair of young black dragons looking to start a family. With difficult terrain for intruders to traverse, and plenty of open sky for the dragons to maneuver, assaulting this pair is a dangerous proposition indeed.

ENCOUNTER STATISTICS

Terrain Tags: Nature, travel

Favors: Rangers, rogues, spellcasting heroes, ranged weapons

Foils: Paladins, melee weapons

Encounter Weight: Heavy

Creatures: 2 Young Black Dragons

XP: 10,800 experience points (5,800 XP from creatures, 5,000 XP from environment)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

How well your players prepare for this encounter is going to have a lot of impact on how well it goes—even more so than usual. A party that blunders in blindly is going to be strafed by acid breath from dragons they can barely see and picked off one by one. A well-equipped party with a plan can catch the dragons by surprise, lock them down, and take them out. The 'Scaling by Tactics' section will affect this encounter more than others as well, making the dragons either simple predators or truly cunning adversaries.

MARRWATCH OUTPOST

The Marrwatch were a band of rangers and druids dedicated to preserving the Marrwood Forest. They vanished long ago, and what was once a forest has decayed into a fetid swamp. A tall stone tower remains, standing sturdy on a solid foundation despite decades of plant growth covering its exterior. Two young black dragons have moved in to the tower, claiming the area as their lair. The wooden roof has rotted away, allowing them to fly in and out of the top of the tower with ease, though once they are fully grown they may find it too confining to stay. They are a mated pair, demonstrating unusual kinship for dragons. The female is named Oreptonthas and is the more cautious of the pair. The male, Jakthil, is much more openly aggressive. Both are open to negotiating and bargaining with trespassers, though

they lack the instinct for lying and scheming that other dragons have, making them more inclined to suggest a deal in which the adventurers drop all their treasure and in exchange can leave with their lives. Read the following text to establish the encounter:

The ground gets softer beneath your feet. Solid earth turns to squishing mud, and small pools of water become the plant-filled fens of a swamp. A fog hangs around you, making it difficult to see anything more than 20 ft. away from you. In the distance, you can just make out the base of a tower. You hear the beating of heavy wings ahead of you, high up in the fog.

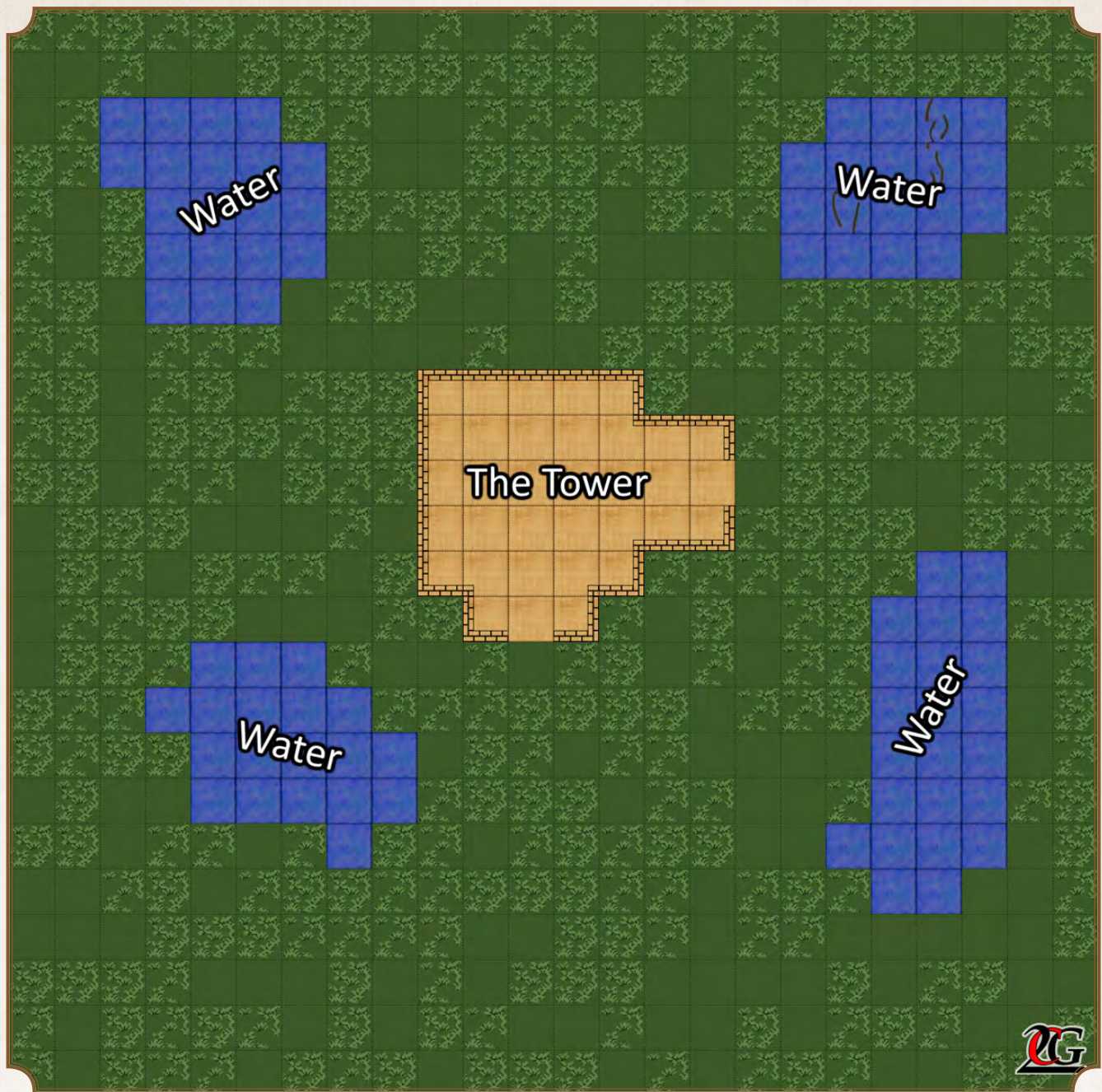
TERRAIN

The ground surrounding the tower, up to about 2 miles in every direction, is difficult terrain. As both dragons are young, this is not a magical effect yet, and simply the result of the swampy terrain. A thick fog hangs in the air at all times, causing everything more than 20 ft. off the ground to be heavily obscured, though the dragons' blindsight negates this penalty on anything within 30 ft. of them. Like the swamp, this fog is not magical, and can be dispersed with a strong wind, such as from the spell *gust of wind*.

The tower itself is largely intact, and the plant growth on the exterior means it can be climbed without undue difficulty. No skill checks are required to scale the tower; creatures doing so simply move as normal for climbing (half speed), unless they have a climb speed. The stairs in the interior are intact, and allow access to the upper level, which the dragons have converted into their roost. The roost itself contains quite a bit of treasure, which is detailed in the "Treasure" section.

TACTICS

Both dragons have identical statistics, and, to the casual observer, are indistinguishable. They use this to their advantage, flying out one at a time, potentially giving the impression that a wounded dragon has healed, and allowing them time to recharge their breath weapons. They start their attack while the players are still far out, swooping in just above the fog layer and using their blindsight to sense anything below. They must still make Perception checks to locate stealthy characters, but anyone not concealing their presence is easily spotted. The dragons use their breath weapons liberally, then retreat, taking turns attacking and retreating until the intruders are dead or driven off. One dragon remains near the tower at all times, watching over it. If the players make it to the tower undetected, they can potentially loot it and flee before the dragons realize, but if they are noticed, both dragons will return to their roost



and defend it to the death. The dragons will only respond to attempts at negotiation, they won't initiate any themselves.

The dragons rely on their breath weapons to deal damage, only using their claws and teeth against adventurers that make it into the tower itself, or against a foe that is immune to their Acidic Breath. If they lose half their hit points while fighting away from the tower, they will retreat and attempt to recuperate. If it takes the adventurers at least 1 hour to get there, the dragons can complete a short rest and spend their hit dice to recover their missing hit points before the heroes arrive. Traversing 2 miles of swamp requires about an hour and a half of travel time, unless the

party has some way to mitigate or avoid the penalties of difficult terrain, such as a Ranger whose favored terrain is swamps.

While they have good saving throws, the dragons have no way to deal with ongoing magical effects except for attacking the source of them. If one of the dragons is immobilized or disabled by a spell, the other will rush to its aid and attack the spellcaster. This can be a good way for the players to create a distraction while their rogue raids the tower, but it is certainly a risky proposition. If this happens, the next time the dragons attack the players they should focus their efforts on the spellcaster. They're quick learners.

TREASURE

The dragon's hoard consists of 700 copper coins, 7,000 silver coins, 2,100 gold coins, and 105 platinum coins. It also has an assortment of 10 gemstones (coral, garnet, and jade) each worth 100 gold coins, and a ceremonial electrum dagger worth 750 gold coins, adding another 1,750 gold coins in total value.

At your discretion, this is an excellent opportunity to give your players some magic items. Basic magical equipment is fine, such as +1 weapons or armor, but you might consider a single, powerful item instead. It can be almost anything—a staff, a weapon, a wondrous item—but if you give it some connection to the dragons or change its appearance slightly, it will be much more memorable. A *necklace of fireballs* where each bead is shaped like a dragon's head, or a powerful spear with a dragon-tooth at its tip would be some examples.

PLOT HOOKS

The tower's history is provided here so you don't need to come up with anything if you don't want to. If you do want to, you can easily tweak the location as you see fit to better match your setting, potentially tying it in to an ancient empire your

players are investigating (or that you want them to investigate), or making the tower the entrance to a dungeon or vault that holds something (or someone) they need to find. The dragons may or may not be aware of the entrance, allowing the players an opportunity to bargain with them and avoid conflict. You can also tie this in to a larger plot about dragons in your world; perhaps they are rare and these two moving so close to civilization is worth investigating, or maybe something is driving dragons out of their homes and forcing them to seek shelter elsewhere, something very dangerous indeed.

Young Black Dragons

Large Dragon, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 18 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 127 (15d10 + 45)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

Saves Dex +5, Con +6, Wis +3, Cha +5

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +5

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Damage Immunities acid

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious: The dragon can breathe air and water.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The dragon makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) acid damage.

Claw: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Acid Breath (Recharge 5-6): The dragon exhales acid in a 30 ft. line that is 5 ft. wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 49 (11d8) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Playing on the grid

If you're running this encounter with a battlemap, whether it's a physical map at your table or a virtual one using something like Roll20, you might want to avoid putting it out right away. Present your players with the situation, and if the dragons attack, have everyone roll for initiative, but don't bring out the grid unless you absolutely need to. Get their marching order, have them describe their formation, and you'll know which of them can be hit by a dragon's breath weapon. If the dragons land or the players get near the tower, you'll likely want the precision of a grid to measure distances and determine who is affected by the dragon's breath weapons. Of course, if your players love the grid and complain, you might have to bring it out sooner, but you're likely used to that. If you're running this encounter in a theater of the mind style game, then you should pay extra attention to where your players are relative to each other—you don't want them to feel like you're being unfair with how many of them get hit by a single breath weapon.



CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Black dragons favor swamps as their lairs, so it's natural to put them in one! If you want to use other types of dragons, you can alter the terrain to match. The important thing is to give the dragons a lair with lots of difficult terrain around it and plenty of room for them to maneuver and use their breath weapons. You could use a dense forest with green dragons, a desert with blue dragons, or a sulfur field near a volcano for red dragons. Just remember that not all dragons are created equal, and changing the type used in this encounter can make it harder or easier for the players to succeed.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-4,000 XP): Remove one young black dragon. Your players are going to have a tough time dealing with a single young black dragon, but it should be doable if they're smart. Give them opportunities to retreat if they get in over their heads, especially during their first encounter with the dragon, and consider pairing this with the easier tactics listed below.

EL 10 (+4,000 XP): Add a third young black dragon to the encounter named Sherrotez. This is going to give the dragons much more damage from their breath weapons, and if your players don't use magic or other techniques to disable and pin down at least one of the trio, they're going to have a very difficult time winning this fight. Hopefully by 10th level they've learned to be smart about battles like this, but if not, this encounter might teach them that lesson.

EL 12 (+8,600 XP): Replace one young black dragon with an adult black dragon. This change also makes the difficult terrain and fog around the tower magical instead of natural. 12th level brings a significant power increase to the players, and an adult black dragon can go toe to toe with that tougher party. While its breath weapon doesn't gain much power, its saving throw DC increases substantially, and the adult dragon has Legendary Actions and Lair Actions it can use while within its lair. Have the adult dragon save its frightful presence for creatures that make it to the tower, as those that succeed on a saving throw are immune for 24 hours, and if they're frightened while moving through the swamp, it won't impede them much.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Be less picky about breath weapon targeting, hit single characters, and generally use the dragon's Acid Breath a lot less. It's their hardest hitter by far, and the less it comes out, the better your players will do. If the party gets beaten up too badly, you can have the dragons open negotiations, asking the

players to surrender their possessions and then letting them leave. This puts them in the unpleasant situation of having to replace their gear without any money, or re-acquire it from a dragon's lair. If you go this route, be ready to improvise a bit and potentially deal with some disgruntled players. If your players get too upset about losing their stuff, feel free to read them this sentence out loud, where the author of this encounter takes full responsibility for any hurt feelings. Sorry players.

Harder: Acid breath everywhere. The dragons should prioritize targeting weak and fragile characters, as they've seen many adventurers and know that the robe-wearing staff-wielders are as dangerous as they are squishy. They shouldn't hesitate to retreat if they get low on health, taking to the skies and strafing with their acid breath irregularly to make them difficult to predict. They also might retreat for 5 or 6 minutes, giving the players enough time to relax before the dragons swoop back in for another few rounds of breath weapons, then retreat once more.

Lethal: Have both dragons launch a surprise attack, focusing their Acid Breath on the same target. Then retreat until both of them have their breath weapons ready again, and repeat. It's a brutal tactic, and one any self-respecting dragon would use all the time, if it could. If your players can't counteract the thick fog or hide from the dragons, they won't last long against this prolonged onslaught. If they make it to the tower, the dragons should still refuse to engage them up close, preferring to use their breath weapons and continue the hit and run onslaught. Only if the players start to grab treasure and make a run for it will the dragons swoop in to fight with claws and teeth.