

KEO7-06

Bright Scaled Horror

A One-Round D&D[®] LIVING GREYHAWK[™]

Keoland Regional Adventure

Version 2.3

by Charles Skidmore

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A delicate balance within Keoland has been destroyed, and an ancient enemy of the Empire has chosen this time to strike. Godakin Keep on the western border of the Empire has fallen to treachery and now flies a foreign banner. However, all is not darkness, as a powerful relic has been snatched from the grasping claws of the enemy and travels to the hands of the King. As a black tide surges eastward on the heels of the relic, a strange messenger arrives in the town of Black Top with a message of hope. Will a hastily convened council of heroes be able to take advantage of the message, or will it be drowned by the black tide of war?

A roleplaying intensive Keoland regional adventure for APLs 6-12, and Part Three of the *To the Last Man Standing* series. This is a direct sequel to KEO6-04 *Old Sins Cast Long Shadows* and KEO7-04 *Castlefall*. It is recommended that those adventures be played first if possible.

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®] rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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For questions specific to this document and your region please e-mail your triad point of contact (POC) at keolandpoc@adelphia.net. For LIVING GREYHAWK campaign questions email rpgahq@wizards.com.

RPGA SANCTIONED PLAY

Most likely you ordered this adventure as part of an RPGA even from the RPGA website, or you received it from your senior gamemaster. To play this adventure as part of the LIVING GREYHAWK campaign—a worldwide, ongoing D&D campaign set in the GREYHAWK setting—you must sanction it as part of an RPGA event. This event could be as elaborate as a big convention, or as simple as a group of friends meeting at the DM's house.

To sanction an RPGA event, you must be at least a HERALD-LEVEL gamemaster. The person who sanctions the event is called the senior gamemaster, and is in charge of making sure the event is sanctioned before play, runs smoothly on the date sanctioned, and then reported back to the RPGA in a timely manner. The person who runs the game is called the table Dungeon Master (or usually just DM). Sometimes (and almost all the time in the cases of home events) the senior gamemaster is also the table DM. You don't have to be a HERALD-LEVEL GM to run this adventure if you are not the senior GM.

By sanctioning and reporting this adventure you accomplish a couple of things. First it is an official game, and you can use the AR to advance your LIVING GREYHAWK character. Second player and DMs gain rewards for sanctioned RPGA play if they are members of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS program. Playing this adventure is worth two (2) points.

This adventure retires from RPGA-sanctioned play on December 31, 2007.

To learn more about the LIVING GREYHAWK character creation and development, RPGA event sanctioning, and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS, visit the RPGA website at www.rpga.com.

PLAYERS READ NO FARTHER

If you are planning on playing this adventure, stop reading now. The rest of the information in this adventure is for the DM only. If you read farther than this section, you'll know too much about its challenges, which kills the fun. Also, if you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, reading beyond this point makes you ineligible to do so.

PREPARING FOR PLAY

To get the most out of this adventure, you need copies of the following D&D books: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*.

Throughout this adventure, text in ***bold italics*** provides player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you, including special instruction on running the adventure. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text. Full information on NPCs and monsters are given in the *Appendices*.

Along with this adventure you'll find a RPGA Table Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your senior GM directly after play. You'll also find a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure Record (AR).

LIVING GREYHAWK LEVELS OF PLAY

Because players bring their own characters to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportionate to the modified average character level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To determine this modified Average Party Level (APL) follow the steps below:

1. Determine the character level for each of the PCs participating in the adventure.
2. If PCs bring animals that have been trained for combat (most likely dogs trained for war), other than those brought by virtue of a class ability (such as animal companions, familiars paladin's mounts) or the warhorse of a character with the Mounted Combat feat, use the sidebar chart to determine the number of levels you add to the sum of step one. Add each character's animals separately. A single PC may only bring four or fewer animals of this type, and animals with different CRs are added separately.
3. Sum the results of step 1 and 2, and divide by the number of characters playing in the adventure. Round to the nearest whole number.
4. If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the level of challenge the PCs face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience and gold a PC can gain at the end of the adventure. If a player character is three character levels or more either higher or lower than the APL at which this adventure is being played, that character receives only one-half of the experience points and gold for the adventure. This simulates the fact that either the PC was not challenged as much as normal or relied on help by higher-level characters to reach the objectives.

Furthermore, a PC who is four or more levels higher than the highest APL supported by the adventure may not play the adventure.

Mundane Animals Effect on APL		# of Animals			
		1	2	3	4
CR of Animal	1/4 & 1/6	0	0	0	1
	1/3 & 1/2	0	0	1	1
	1	1	1	2	3
	2	2	3	4	5
	3	3	4	5	6
	4	4	6	7	8
	5	5	7	8	9
	6	6	8	9	10
	7	7	9	10	11

LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Four or five 1st-level characters may find the challenge of an APL 2 adventure difficult. Suggest the following to these groups to help increase their chances of success:

1. Enlist a sixth player.
2. Advise characters to buy riding dogs to help protect them, and fight for them.

TIME UNITS AND UPKEEP

This is a standard one-round Regional adventure, set in Keoland. Characters native to Keoland pay

one Time Unit per round, all others pay two Time Units per round.

Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12 gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50 gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100 gp per Time Unit. Characters that fail to pay at least Standard Upkeep will retain temporary ability damage until the next adventure, must buy new spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may suffer other in-game penalties (or possibly gain in-game benefits) as may be detailed in this adventure.

A character who does not pay for at least Standard Upkeep may also avoid the above-described penalties by living off the wild. If the character possesses four or more ranks in the Survival skill and succeeds at a Survival check (DC 20), the character will heal temporary ability damage as if he or she paid for Standard Upkeep, may refill spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may restock up to 20 arrows or bolts if the character has at least four ranks in Craft (bowmaking). The player is allowed to Take 10 on this roll.

More information about Lifestyle and Upkeep can be found in the "Lifestyle and Upkeep" section of Chapter 3 of the *LIVING GREYHAWK Campaign Sourcebook*.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Godakin Keep on the western border of Keoland has been sacked by an enemy force of unknown origin. When word of the troubles reached the ear of King Kimbertos, he responded by sending first a squad of Royal Standards to investigate and then following up with a band of adventurers when the Royal Standards were killed to the last man.

The adventurers were given a specific set of orders. They were to scout the Keep in force and determine what had befallen it. If the Keep was in enemy hands, the adventurers were to sneak into the Keep through a hidden passage and attempt to destroy a pair of stone seals underground that would flood Keep by letting the Javan River in.

The heroes that journeyed to Godakin Keep discovered that the Keep had indeed fallen into enemy hands and a foreign banner flew from the ruined towers. When they made their way into the Keep, they discovered that some Royal Standards were still alive and being used as sport for the conquerors, a race of creatures known as the Marru.

Moving to complete their mission the heroes were able to destroy one seal rather easily but then stumbled upon the real reason for Godakin Keep's construction; The Vault of the Hollow.

The Vault of the Hollow is a magically created cyst demiplane that opens underneath Godakin Keep. In the early days of the Empire the Silent Ones discovered a powerful relic and decided that the relic was too important to risk moving, as an ancient prophecy hinted that exposing the relic to sunlight would yield horrible results.

In order to safeguard the relic the Silent Ones created a test and enlisted a guardian. The guardian was an Old Brass Dragon named Illiasnirath. Illiasnirath's price for guarding the vault was an oath from the King and from the Silent Ones that all Dragonkind would be allowed to roost in Keoland without fear of attack. The knowledge of this oath became the purview of the Silent Ones and through the years they decided that the threat to the relic was nonexistent, and so common knowledge of this oath faded.

Unfortunately, King Kimbertos Skotti unknowingly violated this oath when he commanded several groups of powerful adventurers to hunt down and kill the Black Dragon Aulicus because Aulicus delivered a prophecy that detailed King Kimbertos' death.

Aulicus fulfilled a very important role within Keoland. At any given time one dragon who resides within Keoland holds the mantle of the Dragonkind Prophet. This mantle can belong to any type of dragon, simply passing to another available dragon when the current Prophet dies or leaves the Kingdom. The Dragonkind Prophet is known to relate many visions, and the existence of the Prophet is the reason that Dragon Rock in Niole Dra exists. Dragon Rock is the location that the Dragonkind Prophet must journey to in order to give its pronouncements. Unfortunately it had been several hundred years since a prophecy had been delivered and so knowledge of Dragon Rock's purpose was lost to all but the most learned of scholars.

With Aulicus' death, the mantle of prophecy has since passed to the Brass Dragon Xasnelre, who is the direct descendant of the guardian Illiasnirath from the Vault of the Hollow. Xasnelre lives a quiet existence in the Good Hills of Keoland, subject of many rumors throughout the area.

The forces of woe now moving through the Kingdom are now seeking to kill Xasnelre. Their goal in this is to both slay a metallic dragon who

might oppose their goals and to move the mantle of prophecy onto the dragon who has sided with them, a half-brass, half-blue monstrosity known as Sullinax.

The leader of the forces now sweeping across Keoland is calling itself "The Returned", and has started to band together disparate tribes of demihumans and other disaffected peoples, offering them a new place in its empire when the fighting is finished. A group of giants loyal to the Sakhut from Geoff have accepted The Returned's offer and are now the vanguard of the force seeking Xasnelre.

Meanwhile, the relic was safely removed from the Vault of the Hollow by the adventurers and spirited away ahead of the swarming forces of woe that are starting to spread across the land.

The removal of the relic from its resting place, the death of the dragon Illiasnirath, and the invasion of Keoland have stricken such a blow to the Balance that agents of the Balance have been forced into action in an effort to prevent the situation from worsening. Limited in their ability to interfere, one of these agents arrives in Black Top in the Good Hills to warn the Keoish people of the threat they face and to guide them towards meeting their longtime neighbor Xasnelre before the forces of The Returned find Xasnelre and kill him

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

In the Introduction the heroes are brought up to speed on the most recent occurrences in the Kingdom and introduced to each other. They are summoned by Stoakdor Neheli, who has taken up temporary residence in Black Top in order to better assist the Kingdom in its time of need. The heroes are introduced to the Agent of Balance.

In Encounter One, the heroes begin their search for the roost that belongs to Xasnelre. Using magical means and with the assistance of the Agent of Balance, they find Xasnelre's lair.

In Encounter Two, the heroes enter the lair of Xasnelre and must navigate a series of mostly harmless traps and tricks while Xasnelre attempts to judge their sense of humor.

In Encounter Three, the heroes meet with an illusory Xasnelre and are given the opportunity to explore his lair and steal from its horde, allowing Xasnelre to judge their inquisitiveness and greed.

In Encounter Four, Xasnelre puts a task to the heroes that requires them to work together to

succeed, allowing him to judge their ability to cooperate in the face of adverse circumstances.

In Encounter Five, Xasnelre appears to the heroes in the flesh and listens to their mission. Based on the heroes' performance in the earlier encounters, Xasnelre will either trust the heroes or not. Interrupting the conversation will be a small force searching for Xasnelre to kill him. Xasnelre will ask for the heroes to convince the interlopers to leave and will provide them with an opportunity to play a series of pranks in order to drive off the search party. Alternately, the heroes may simply attempt to kill the invaders.

In Encounter Six, the heroes watch as Xasnelre is overcome by the mantle of the prophet and begins to spout a prophecy. At the same time, the elf scout Talkia accidentally sets off a complicated trap and requires the heroes to aid her.

In Encounter Seven, If the heroes have gained his trust he will ask one of them to accompany him as a rider to Dragon Rock, where he will relay the prophecy to the Kingdom as a whole

In Encounter Eight, the heroes return to Blacktop in order to relay the success or failure of their mission.

PREPARATION FOR PLAY

This adventure is designed as a roleplaying-intensive excursion into some of Keoland's most important lore. As such, this is NOT an adventure designed to be run at a midnight madness slot, or without some mild preparation.

The most important adjustment for you to make as a DM is to determine if any of the heroes have played KEO7-04 *Castlefall*. This adventure is a direct sequel to KEO7-04 and if the players have the chance to participate in each adventure sequentially they will understand more easily.

This adventure is designed with; at most, one combat and that combat can be avoided or shortened. So it is essential that you keep your players entertained because they will not have the opportunity to simply smash things unless they have veered wildly off the beaten path. If that happened, you're on your own.

This adventure contains more than the usual amount of read-aloud text. This is intentional, to help guide DMs through an adventure that already requires more than the usual preparation time. Once you are familiar with the adventure, feel free

to remove or modify the read-aloud text to suit your individual table.

There are several locations where illusion use is prominent. Unless otherwise noted, all Will save DCs to piece illusions are **APL+15**.

INTRODUCTION

The summer sun rises fast and hot over the Good Hills Union that runs for a lengthy stretch of Keoland's territory. Boasting the Kingdom's highest points of elevation, the Good Hills Union is also home to some of the more well known Halfling and Gnome clans still living within the country.

The Good Hills themselves are the site of many momentous meetings in the Kingdom's history. It is among these gently rolling hills that Suel and Demihuman were able to meet in peace with the intercession of their Oerdian neighbors. It is here that many hasty councils of war were convened during Keoland's imperialistic expansion, and recently it has held many meetings on the subjects of taxation and the renewed pressure from Count Manz of Cryllor to root out what he claims are bandits from the hills laying waste to his trade routes.

These meetings often take place in the historic town of Black Top. With a population of under a thousand people, Black Top is often more of a seasonal meeting place than a year-round theatre of discussion.

Today, however, Black Top is a bustle of activity. The sleepy little meeting town has been practically overrun by a haggard looking force of Keoish Royal Standards, their horses nearly lathered to death from the forced march that carried them here. The Royal Standards are quickly and efficiently erecting a wooden palisade around the town, drafting the town's craftsmen into the effort. By the look in the eyes of many, this preparation has been going on around the clock, and the palisade is not nearly half complete.

Adding to this, it is plain to your eyes that the townsfolk have no comprehension of what has caused the Royal Standards to descend upon their town like a horde of ants. Frightened people wonder openly if they should flee Black Top or stay with the protection of the Royal Standards. What could be so horrific that

necessitated the erecting of defenses and the silence of the formerly friendly Royal Standards?

You have come to Black Top because of a strange summons you received from a Royal Standard scout while traveling two days ago. Apparently you are not the only one so summoned.

Give the heroes **Player Handout One: Drafted!**

When the heroes look for the Long Blade, they are easily directed towards it, as it is the largest of the Inns in town. As the heroes approach it, they will see that it has obviously been taken over as a staging quarters by the Royal Standards. A pair of Keoish banners fly from poles by the door and four Royal Standards stand guard at the front door. As the heroes arrive they will be interrupting a meeting with several local figures of import and some new comers.

In the meeting are the following people, with short descriptions and roleplaying guides for interacting with the heroes.

- **Field Marshal Perrinac Rhola** Field Marshal Perrinac Rhola is a typical looking member of the suel aristocracy. As commander of the western forces of the Royal Standards, he is in charge of the soldiers present. He wears a battered and dented suit of Keoish Full Plate, but is currently holding his Warhelm. The Warhelm has a single large horn mounted on it, which seems to faintly crackle. The dull roar of far off thunder can be heard when standing close to Perrinac.

Perrinac is a popular commander, stern in punishment and lavish with praise. He is quick to cut through bureaucracy and has a keen intellect. He does not particularly like or trust those who lie outside his chain of command, including Silent Ones, Knights Dreadwalkers, Adventurers, etc. He will react favorable to any hero who is an active member of the Keoish armies.

- **Chancellor Stoakdor Redlee Neheli** Stoakdor Neheli is a Sueloise man with reddish blonde hair worn long and hung in a ponytail. He is thin and has pale green eyes which are currently lined in red from either lack of sleep or crying. Stoakdor Neheli is a mage and diviner of no small water. He is of learned mein and deliberate speech. He is a powerful figure

of the nobility of Keoland, and is thought by his detractors to be a practitioner of black magics.

- **Blaif Rinnar.** Blaif is a gnome who wears comfortable looking clothes and carries no visible weapons. He wears an ostentatious medallion of office and is the currently elected First Speaker from the Good Hills in the Court of the Land. He has dark hair, dark eyes, and a ruddy complexion.

Blaif is a well spoken and articulate gnome. He is possessed of a quick wit and is not above directly attacking those who oppose his viewpoints with verbal barbs aimed at whatever may be imperfect in their features. Blaif is a bit of a political bully but has the interests of Black Top at heart.

- **Talkia** Talkia is a strange elven woman dressed in the traveling garb of a mercenary or sellsword. She has pale green eyes and lustrous red hair, with several dangling silver earrings hanging from each ear. Hanging around her neck is a partially concealed (spot check **DC 15**) golden pendant with a ruby set within. Talkia has a large black squirrel that either sits in her overcoat pocket or perches on Talkia's shoulder where appropriate.

Talkia is quiet and reserved, seemingly out of place with the other three. She speaks quietly and deliberately, always thinking deeply before answering a question posed to her.

The heroes will be directed inside, where they will see the following exchange.

The Royal Standards on guard duty quickly scan your paper and send you inside the Long Blade. The inn has been hastily converted to a staging ground for the Royal Standards, and four people stand within, in the midst of an animated conversation. Two Suel men are arguing with a diminutive gnome and an elven woman.

As you enter, their conversation comes to an abrupt end. The woman and the gnome move to separate tables, obviously relieved.

The larger of the sueloise men is wearing a set of full plate, and is seated at a long table that is now covered with maps. A warhelm with a

large bone horn attached to the front of it holds down a corner of the map. His bearing quickly marks him as some kind of officer.

The leaner of the two sueloise looks at you and smiles, sketching a courtly bow before speaking with an educated accent.

“Greetings, travelers. I am Chancellor Stoakdor Redlee Neheli. What service can I perform for you today?”

The heroes may have had some kind of interaction with Stoakdor (likely in KEO5-01 *For Want of a King*). If so, he will immediately recall them and appear relieved that their missive summoned capable help. Stoakdor will quickly explain that they sent out scouts on each major road with orders to give the missive to any and all they encountered. The heroes are the only people to arrive, although Stoakdor hopes that they will not be the last.

When the heroes ask what they can do to help, or about the condition of Black Top, or the conversation falters, Stoakdor will introduce the heroes to Field Marshal Perrinac Rhola.

Turning and bowing, Stoakdor waves towards the man in the chair.

“Friends, this is Field Marshal Perrinac Rhola. He can explain the situation here a bit more precisely than I can.”

Nodding, the Field Marshal stands and smiles at you, his blue eyes twinkling.

“Thank you for answering our summons. The situation here is uncertain. We have received word of a large force of raiders overwhelming and destroying farmsteads to the west. The town of Kilm has been entirely destroyed and burned to the ground. The Royal Standards are here in Black Top to build a defensive structure and to form a base of operations. Our goal is to find out what force dare bare blade against the Lion Throne.

To that effect, we need capable scouts. As you seem to be the sort of people we need, I hereby deputize you into the Keoish Royal Standards with the brevet rank of Field Scout. You may draw upon the armory for any reasonable gear required.

Your mission is to travel westward towards Flen and determine what, if any, hostile forces are in the Good Hills.”

The heroes may have quite a few questions at this juncture. From here until the heroes try to leave the Inn, this is a free form roleplaying encounter. Each important NPC is detailed below.

Field Marshal Perrinac Rhola

Friendly towards: Most humans, anyone in a military metaorg, Rholan nobility, those obviously capable of physical combat, and anyone who claims to have taken part in KEO7-04 *Castlefall*.

Neutral towards: Neheli nobility, sanctioned spellcasters (recognized clergy, silent ones, NAW), demihumans who aren't arrogant.

Unfriendly towards: unsanctioned spellcasters, belligerent demihumans, insolent members of a military metaorg.

Appropriate skill checks:

Spot DC 15: The Field Marshal's uniform is highly decorated with medals of valor. The horn of his greathelm seems to crackle with tiny bolts of lightning, and when standing near him distant thunder can be heard.

Spot DC 45: The Field Marshal is wearing very subtle yet effective makeup. Unfortunately in one spot near his neckline the makeup has run, and one or two small blue specks that could possibly be scales are visible. If asked about this, Perrinac will cover it up, saying that it is the remains of a childhood prank.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 15: Field Marshal is a relatively new title granted by the Lion Throne, meant to be filled by capable men beholden only to the King. Of the four Field Marshal posts given, they are split halfway with Rhola and Neheli warriors drawn from the most elite of the Royal Standards. Perrinac Rhola is in charge of the Royal Standards on the western border of Keoland.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 30: Perrinac Rhola is from the March of Middlemead and has been known to be a close advisor to the Margrave of Middlemead, Lord Kharn. Lord Kharn is, at best, tepid towards King Kimbertos and has long been a proponent of limiting the powers of the Lion Throne, leaving responsibility in the hands of individual lords.

Sense Motive DC 25: (may only be made when speaking to Perrinac)

As he speaks, the Field Marshal's eyes dart time and again to the elven woman in the

room. Each time, he grimaces slightly as he does so.

If pressed about his reaction, a **Diplomacy DC 20** will have Perrinac tell the hero that he doesn't trust many elves after a bad personal experience, and that he doesn't like how this elf just mysteriously showed up recently, claiming to be a representative from the Dreadwood.

In general, Perrinac is serious about his duties and wants the best possible for the people of the region. He is very concerned over the goings on in the region. He does not like Blaif Rinnar or Talkia, and barely abides by Stoakdor's presence but does so because the man is nobility.

Possible questions and answers for Perrinac:

What exactly do you expect from us?

"First and foremost, to come back alive. A dead scout is useless information. Evade what trouble you can, and help those who might need it to reach safety."

What can we expect to find in terms of opposition?

"This is unknown. We've heard rumors of stone giants and worgs, but those could easily be ramblings of frightened peasants."

"Why aren't you telling the populace what is going on?"

"We want to avoid full scale panic. In a week, Black Top will be as secure as possible and easily defensible should we need it. We don't want streams of refugees pouring east over some unfounded rumors."

"I'm already in the Royal Standards."

"Excellent. You're promoted and now in charge of your companions here. Report to me immediately when you have more information. Consider yourself permanently detached from your regiment; you are now a member of the 10th Lion's Maw. Serve with pride."

"Who are the others over there?"

"Blaif Rinnar is the gnome, he is First Speaker to the Court of the Land, he hails from Black Top. The elf is Talkia and claims to be here from the Dreadwood searching for something. You've met Stoakdor."

When the heroes are done, they may speak to any of the others in the room.

Chancellor Stoakdor Redlee Neheli

Friendly towards: All nobility, all sanctioned spellcasters, all members of a military metaorg

Neutral towards: demihumans, unsanctioned spellcasters,

Unfriendly towards: Human of Touv descent. Stoakdor will be exceedingly rude and distant to any he meets.

Appropriate skill checks

Spot DC 15: Stoakdor is obviously a wizard of some sort. He wears a robe lined with many pockets, has a small traveling spellbook, and wears nothing encumbering.

Spot DC 30: Stoakdor's eyes are very weary. He doesn't seem to have slept in many days.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 15: Stoakdor is the brother of Baron Jharmok Neheli of the Barony of Shelspring, and has in the past expressed interest in succeeding his brother when he steps down. Stoakdor is a keen ally of King Kimbertos, and has been doing his best to put a fresh face of the Neheli family forward in light of several damaging events that have shaken the family over the last few years.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 30: Stoakdor is well out of his usual stomping grounds. His presence here is unexpected, to say the least,

Stoakdor Neheli is a noble mage in an unusual position. He has put himself at undetermined personal risk in order to do something at Black Top. He is eager to help and agrees with most of Perrinac's plans and precautions. He likes demihumans little more than Perrinac but respects that this area has been home to their kind long before the Kingdom was formed.

In general, Stoakdor will be eager to help the heroes with anything that he can.

Possible questions and answers for Stoakdor:

What in the name of all that is holy are you doing here?

"Well friends, my stake out here in Black Top is a bit personal. One of my apprentices makes his home in the town of Kilm, near Godakin Keep. Milliken Tarvis was granted leave by me to attend to his family. While he was there, he sent a warning to my distant cousin, Holphin Neheli. He claimed that Godakin Keep had been sacked and was flying a foreign banner."

If you see any sign of my apprentice in your travels, please bring news to me."

"Godakin Keep?"

"It's on the western border of Keoland, on the Javan river. It has apparently been quiet for months and now something horrible has happened there. Perrinac refuses to give any details."

"Who are the others?"

"Blaif Rinnar is the gnome, he is First Speaker to the Court of the Land, he hails from Black Top. The elf is Talkia and claims to be here from the Dreadwood searching for something."

After speaking with Stoakdor, the heroes may speak to whomever they wish.

Blaif Rinnar

Friendly towards: demihumans, particularly gnomes. Generally anyone who shows a good attitude and is friendly.

Neutral towards: most half-orcs, but is willing to judge each individually.

Unfriendly towards: No one. Blaif is a consummate politician.

Spot DC 15: Blaif is wearing comfortable and stylish clothes, and wears an incredibly ostentatious and gaudy medallion of office. He is immaculately groomed.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 15: Blaif is First Speaker to the Court of the Land and is regarded very highly by those he meets. He is a political animal but he often attempts to convert his opponents to his views rather than see them ridiculed or destroyed. Blaif believes that every enemy turned into an ally is twice as valuable.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 30: Blaif has some extensive martial experience, serving as a deepwarden before taking his elected position. It is rumored that he brought word of a drow incursion to Black Top, allowing defenses to be created and the raid to be repulsed without a single loss of life.

Blaif Rinnar is an always-smiling politician. If there's an open hand, he is shaking it, if there is a baby around, he's kissing it. He doesn't like the intrusion of the Royal Standards and the refusal of Perrinac to tell the population of the dangers they are facing. Blaif wants each inhabitant to be able to choose for themselves what to do in the face of

this problem. When roleplaying Blaif, smile a lot and do your best to remind the heroes that you're a valuable cog in the machinery of the land. If you are his friend, you're going places.

Can we help you in any way?

"You sure can. You can convince that stuck up Field Marshal that this is still Keoland, and that its citizens deserve the right to fair choice. Ah, forget it. The sun will sooner rise in the west."

Actually, there is. If you bring any information back to me about what you find I can better prepare my friends and family for what the Royal Standards obviously believe is coming. I don't want to see them hurt because of some secret order demanding silence."

Were there any problems in the area before the Royal Standards came?

"Well we actually did have some outlying shepherds report seeing giants, or giant tracks. They're typically not a problem, as there are only a small handful of giants in the Good Hills and they always keep to themselves. We've even traded with them on occasion, something the big folk get all upset about. They seem to forget sometimes that the Good Hills has always been a place for neutral meetings."

"Who are the others/is the elf?"

"The humans...well, they're typical big folk. Big ideas, big problems, right now. The elf I really don't know. She came in here late last night, begged a room from me, and then asked to be allowed to meet Perrinac. She claims to be from the Dreadwood. I think we were about to get to her problem when you walked in."

Blaif winks and smiles.

When the heroes are done with Blaif, they may talk to whomever they wish.

Talkia of the Dreadwood

Friendly towards: no one, yet.

Neutral towards: other elves, although she remains suspicious of them.

Unfriendly towards: everyone else.

Spot DC 15: Talkia is obviously an elf maiden. She has pale green eyes and lustrous red hair that is tied into a triple braid. Several silver dangling earrings hang from each ear. A golden necklace is partially visible through the well worn garb she

wears. She wears no visible armor but carries a sword and has a bow leaning against the table.

Spot DC 30: Talkia is actually wearing armor, although it is so fine and thin that she is wearing it underneath her traveling garments. A small book peeks out from the corner of her traveling backpack, and a large black squirrel sits unobtrusively behind her pack, gently playing with some loose leather straps. The necklace Talkia wears appears to be exceedingly well crafted.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 15: The Dreadwood is a vast place, and home to many things. Talkia is obviously not a dreadwalker.

Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty or Metaregion One) DC 30: Rumors have persisted through the years that there is an elven enclave within the Dreadwood that pays fealty to the Lion Throne. They are reputed to be exceedingly fair of skin due to the lack of direct sunlight they receive.

Who are you and what are you doing here?

“I am Talkia of the Dreadwood. My business here is my own.”

(If there is an full-blood elf in the party, read the following)

“Tin delei dehti illia xas. Firra du ret lilla.” (Elven; translated directly as “I am seeking and guarding. It is of small concern to you.”)

Isn't it sort of unusual for one of your folk to be involved in a situation like this? Perrinac said you are looking for something.

“As I said, my business is my own, but since you must know, I am searching the Good Hills for my sister, who has run away”

(This is an outright lie. A **Sense Motive DC 25** will reveal this. If pressed, Talkia will look exasperated and shake her head, indicating that she has no more to say.)

In all cases, Talkia is reticent and quiet. She has very little to say to the heroes and wants nothing to do with them until after the following event.

The Agent of Balance

If the heroes are faltering, appear bored, or accept the mission and make to leave the inn, the following occurs.

The overwhelming heat of the day is quickly brushed aside. The sounds and smells from outside the inn suddenly disappear and a

steadily increasing bright light begins to materialize over the table in the center of the room.

With an audible sigh, a creature floats though the light and hovers in midair. It is unlike anything you have ever seen before.

Its main body is composed of ever expanding blue cylinders which are spinning in opposite directions. It has no legs and its arms are composed of more spinning cylinders, each rotating in a different direction. Where its head should be is simply a pair of glowing orbs. It has no visible mouth or other sensory organs. When the cylinders of its body touch you can hear a faint grinding of metal on metal.

With a voice that resounds directly into your head like the ringing of a church bell, it “speaks”.

“Peace to you, collected flesh mortals. I am the one known as Quillarinx, and I am charged with the persecution and destruction of those who would usurp their rightful place in the cosmos by challenging the gods themselves.

Balance in all things must be preserved, and this location is a nexus for the events to come. This nexus draws you all towards it, and it will occur. It is inevitable.

However, the outcome of this nexus has not been decided. Beyond the swirling and tangled skein, my kind cannot see. What we do see is that the forces of Woe have struck a malicious blow and the scales are not even.

By their actions, we are free to react in turn. The forces of Woe have slain the great Brass dragon Illiasnirath, who would have been an agent of Weal and undoubtedly an ally for you. Now these same agents of Woe seek to carry out the extermination of Illiasnirath's bloodline.

My action restores the balance and allows you assembled mortals to choose your own fate. To the west of here lies a rock formation that resembles an opened hand when struck by the dawn sun.

Within that rock formation, the brood of Illiasnirath makes its lair.

The forces of Woe have sent a corrupted agent of Weal and his followers to find and slay the brood of Illiasnirath.”

As the words echo from your mind, the creature disappears, and the sounds and smells of the outside world once again pour into the inn. The Field Marshal looks at you and sits down stunned.

Stoakdor looks at you, fear in his eyes.

"I believe you have a new mission."

The Agent of Balance is an Inevitable, called a Varakhut. A hero who makes a **Knowledge (Planes) DC 25** will know of these creatures and a rough general description.

The heroes are once again free to decide what to do and who to talk to. They can acquire any reasonable traveling gear from the Royal Standard Quartermaster with a writ that Perrinac's will gladly sign.

The heroes have some traveling to do, and an unsure destination. Blaif Rinnar knows the location of the rock formation the inevitable spoke of. He will gladly provide the heroes with a rough map of the area.

If the heroes have any full blooded elves in the party, Talkia will pull them aside as they leave and say the following.

"It seems that you are called by great outside forces. Be wary, they rarely act directly."

ENCOUNTER 1: A NEEDLE IN A STACK OF NEEDLES

The rock formation that the heroes must find is thirty miles or so to the west, in an exceptionally craggy area of the good hills. If the heroes are landbound, it will take them at least two days to get there. The map they receive is by no means perfect and the heroes must make a successful **Survival DC 20** check at the beginning of the second day of travel in order to find the rock formation. Each failed check adds 8 hours to the time needed to find the formation. Each failed check adds a +2 circumstance bonus to the next check as the heroes search more and more of the area. If the heroes go past six days without finding the cave, the forces of Woe find Xasnelre and kill him. The heroes have failed.

If the heroes use magical transportation then adjust the necessary time accordingly. The Survival check will still be necessary in order to locate the cave entrance.

Use of Divine or Arcane magic in order to locate the cave is acceptable per each spells' text.

When the heroes have succeeded at locating the cave, read the following.

Your search is over. A rock formation that wouldn't be worth a second glance clearly resembles an open palmed hand in this light. The "hand" has a small cave mouth that is centered in between the second and third figures.

When the heroes move towards the cave:

An eagle's cry resounds overhead. Looking up, you can see a lone bird circling far overhead.

The heroes should have an idea that they are being watched. Any attempt to catch the eagle or otherwise interact with it will fail, as the eagle will simply disappear if something gets within 50' of it.

The cave mouth is at least 50' off the ground, and located on a sheer cliff face. Heroes must make a **Climb** check **DC 25** in order to get to the cave. The heroes are not rushed or pressured during this climb.

When the heroes actually enter the cave mouth:

The cave mouth seems unremarkable other than its' out of the way location. A strong thermal wafts upwards from a crack in the placement of the rocks below.

The cave itself is small and cramped. No more than six feet in height, it is barely wide enough for two of you to walk abreast. The tunnel travels for fifty feet or more into the cliff face and then descends sharply into darkness.

From this point on the heroes are in a dragons' lair. The lair has been extensively prepared with illusory magics. You should familiarize yourself with the properties of illusion and how they are countered. Capable or lucky heroes may see through these illusions and so you may have to adjust as necessary. The important point in each encounter from here on is that the heroes be allowed to act as they desire and they will be judged by Xasnelre.

When the heroes move along the cave:

As you walk, a monstrous draconic head roars out from a hole in the wall in front of you. It bellows at you. From here you can see that it is covered in scales the color of burnished Brass.

“Fools! Who dares intrude upon the lair of Xasnelre the almighty? Answer, and begone! This land is not for mortals to tread upon!”

The heroes are being confronted by the first of several *permanent images* that Xasnelre has cast in his lair. Allow the heroes any appropriate saving throw to interact with the image. Whatever the heroes answer:

Have the heroes make four Will separate saving throws. They are having *detect evil*, *detect good*, *detect law* and *detect thoughts* cast upon them. Heroes may attempt **Spellcraft** checks against a **DC 40** to attempt to determine what any of the spell effects washing over them are.

“Begone! I’ve had enough of your blather! You are unworthy to bathe in my presence until you have passed the Trials of the Dragon. Step forward, if you dare, and choose your path! I will give you a word of warning though...splitting up is a bad idea!”

With a puff of acrid smelling smoke the head disappears and three passages stretch out before you. Each is marked with a glowing rune at its entrance. Serpentine laughter resounds off the walls ahead of you.

The glowing runes are Draconic and read “Fake, False and True”. Any hero that reads Draconic may easily decipher them.

ENCOUNTER 2: TRIAL OF THE DRAGON: PATIENCE

This encounter takes place when the heroes pick one of the three paths to walk upon. In reality Xasnelre is already two steps ahead of any who would breach his lair. Each of the three paths is identical; they are only made to look different through clever use of *hallucinatory terrain*.

This encounter is freeform and is designed to allow you to play with your heroes a little bit. Depending on the setting of your play you may choose to stretch this path out or condense it. The primary events that take place are the following tricks and traps that Xasnelre has set in front of the heroes in order to dissuade them from going further. After each trap or trick, there is some flavor text that Xasnelre will yell down the hallways.

Mud Trap

This trap is set off when the heroes touch the gem or the door.

The corridor stretches out ahead of you, moving to worked stone. An intricately carved green gem rests in a notch along the west wall, shedding a sickly light down the corridor, to a closed door.

CR 0; mechanical, location trigger; manual reset; DC 20 reflex save avoids; 10 ft. deep (0d6, fall cushioned by mud); search DC (14+APL); disable device DC (14+APL)

“Wipe your feet before you enter my home, filthy animals!”

Poisoned Dart Trap

This trap is set off when the heroes move towards the bed in the room or examine the chest (which is an illusionary *permanent image*)

Ahead of you is a marvelously carved bed, crafted from the finest mahogany. A small chest with a large padlock sits at the foot of the bed. A small ladder leads downwards from the south side of the room to a ledge.

CR 0; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +15 ranged (1 plus poison, dart); multiple targets (1 dart per target in a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. area); poison (Sleep Poison, DC 15 Fortitude save resists, Sleep/Sleep); Search DC (15+APL); Disable Device (16+APL).

“Lying down already? What an ungracious host I am! I shall send up my servants with pillows and blankets for you, you look so weary!”

Tasha’s Hideous Laughter Trap

This trap is triggered when a hero touches the ladder leading down to the ledge.

CR 0; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm* covering the ladder); multiple targets (20’ spread in the ladder) automatic reset; spell effect (*Tasha’s hideous laughter*, 7th-level wizard, DC 13+APL will save); Search DC (17+APL); Disable Device DC (18+APL).

“You find my home amusing? Perhaps I should play the court jester when we meet? You are quite the undeserving guests so far!”

Although these traps are listed as CR 0, they are counted in the adventure summary towards experience gained because they are designed to dissuade and test the heroes.

Xasnelre is primarily watching the heroes to see how they react to having small and harmless pranks played upon them. If they don’t comment at

all, or make amusing comments, he will be favorably disposed towards them. If they react negatively by saying angry things to him or themselves he will be negatively disposed towards them. Mark down the heroes' result here.

As noted above, feel free to extend or shorten this encounter based on your time constraints and the fun the players are having.

Positive

Negative

ENCOUNTER 3: TRIAL OF THE DRAGON: AVARICE

This encounter takes place when the heroes have faced at least three harmless traps in Xasnelre's lair.

Yet another door opens before you and you are taken by surprise because suddenly the corridor has ended and before you is a large natural cavern. The ceiling is well over a hundred feet overhead, and several exits can be seen around the room.

The most striking feature of the room is what can only be described as a dragon's hoard splayed out everywhere. Piles of golden coins lie in heaps and fine gems and works of art sit next to suits of armor and weapons. Floating globes of golden light ring the room, and strategically placed prisms divide the light into a riot of rainbow colors on the walls.

From behind the largest pile of coins walks a four legged creature of legend. Its scales are the color of burnished Brass, with magnificent pearl white horns jutting from a majestic faceplate. A thin cord of electricity plays over the horns.

Sitting with a grace that cats can only envy, the dragon wraps its wings and tail around itself. Golden green eyes examine you carefully. The head of the dragon raises at least thirty feet off the floor.

"Greetings, small ones. I am Xasnelre. Now, what possessed you to be so curious and persistent?"

Xasnelre is, of course, an illusion. The creature before the heroes is a *permanent image* being

controlled by the real Xasnelre, who is hanging from the ceiling. Xasnelre is *improved invisible*, *nondetectable* and is using *ventriloquism* to throw his voice as necessary. Heroes who interact with the *permanent image* are entitled to a Will save DC 20 + APL in order to determine it is fake. Practitioners of the Art will determine that this illusion was crafted at a master level that few could match. If the heroes determine Xasnelre is an illusion you will have to ad lib accordingly.

Xasnelre is a Brass dragon. He is playful, inquisitive, and persistent. He will talk to the heroes at length and attempt to divine their purpose here. If treated with respect he will plumb the heroes for all the information they have. Xasnelre is an exceedingly intelligent and witty example of Brass Dragondom, and you should do your best to impress the heroes with the width and breadth of his knowledge. Xasnelre is up to date on all of the most important goings on in Keoland, including the fall of Godakin Keep and the death of his progenitor Illiasnirath. Xasnelre is well aware of the creatures filtering through the Good Hills and has no plan on leaving his roost or becoming involved in the coming conflicts.

Entertain the heroes for as long as you can. When the conversation bogs down, have the following occur.

Without warning the golden globes in the room stop shedding their regular light and shift to a deep shade of crimson. A far off gong rings. A very human look of surprise and fear passes over Xasnelre's draconic features. With a deep nod to you he speaks.

"Please, enjoy my hospitality and stay here. I shall return, something has set off one of my alarms on the lower levels."

With a mighty push, Xasnelre heaves himself out of one of the larger openings. All around you the golden light returns and the gold and gems of Xasnelre's horde glitter. A faint melody plays from a harp resting upon a marble stand, and a suit of dwarven crafted full plate begins a full parade display.

This is once again a test. The heroes are being watched to determine if they attempt to steal anything from Xasnelre's hoard. If they refrain, Xasnelre will judge them positively. If they steal from him, he will judge them negatively. Mark the results below.

Positive

Negative

ENCOUNTER 4: TRIAL OF THE DRAGON: COOPERATION

After ten minutes, Xasnelre will return.

As quick as he left, Xasnelre returns.

“Ah, thank you for waiting. Somehow a mountain goat wandered into the lower passage. I returned it to the outside world.

I sense the truth in your words, yet I must see the proof in your actions. Please, come with me. I must place a test before you.”

Xasnelre nods for you to follow him through a set of open stone doors.

The room he leads you into is tiled entirely with red and black marble. In the center of the room is a wooden lattice, slick with moisture. At the top of the lattice is a single arrow embedded into a block of dark wood.

“My father put this here. I am bound by his word to not touch it first. Until now I have had no visitors worth of such a test. Use no magic, and remove the arrow from the wood, then bring it to me without breaking it.”

This test is a simple test of the players' ability to work together. The lattice is thirty feet on a side, and rises to thirty feet tall. Shaped like a pyramid, it is covered in slick oil. The arrow is contained in the topmost block.

Climbing to the top of the lattice requires a series of **Climb DC 18+APL** checks. Calculate climbing speed per the rules in the PHB.

Once the heroes reach the arrow they will realize that it has a unique problem. The arrow cannot be removed by one person because the construction of the lattice is such that two people must reach in from opposite sides of the lattice and then pull.

Both heroes must then succeed on a **DC 15 Strength, Knowledge (Architecture and Engineering)** or a suitable **Profession** check. Then the heroes must climb down. If a hero falls while holding the arrow without securing it (such as placing it in a quiver) it has a 35% chance of breaking in the fall. If a hero at the top of the lattice throws or drops the arrow down, a hero at the

bottom must make a **Dexterity** check **DC 10** (or snatch arrows attempt)

If the heroes bring the arrow down safely, they are successful. If they give up or the arrow “breaks”, they fail.

It is important to note that the arrow the heroes retrieve is not actually the arrow that Xasnelre will speak about later. This is, as usual, another illusion. If the heroes realize that it is an illusion, the encounter is considered a success.

Success:

“Most excellent. You are gifted members of the lesser races indeed.”

Failure:

“Ah well, not everyone can succeed every time, I suppose.”

ENCOUNTER 5: TRIAL OF THE DRAGON: MERCY

This encounter takes place when the heroes are done with the lattice in Encounter Four.

Again, the golden lights of the hoardroom go crimson. This time, Xasnelre's expression is one of anger. With a flash Xasnelre is off through a passage.

Within a minute Xasnelre's voice rings loud through the caverns.

“Manlings, I require your aid! A force of giants led by an Archon has breached my lower passages! I sense pervasive evil about them. If you wish to gain my trust, enter the southernmost door and fire the traps there as the giants pass. We must drive them out!”

The southern door leads to an amazing sight. The cavern wall is solid, yet the heroes can see through it (think of one-way glass in interrogation rooms). As the heroes move through it they pass a series of levers and switches, each operating a trap of some variety.

There are three switches, each labeled in Draconic. They read “Scythe”, “Oil”, and “Deadfall”.

Again this section is open ended. Feel free to add more switches and commentary from Xasnelre as desired.

The enemy forces enter.

Four stoop shouldered giants led by a man with a dog's face prowl through a short corridor. The effect you see is similar to the ant's nests that merchants sometimes sell in Niole Dra. You can see them, but they can't see you. The lead giant steps into alignment with the first switch.

When the players pull the first lever:

Pulling the first switch, you watch as a series of large blades scythe out of the wall, each scoring a series of paper thin cuts on the interlopers. Xasnelre's voice booms out.

"Feel the sting of my talons, foul ones! None of you shall live to see another day! Flee if you value your hides!"

The Archon in front snarls back.

"The might of The Returned shall crush you!"

The Archon then turns to the giants, who are obviously loathe to go onwards. You can hear his next words clearly.

"Onward you brutes, or there is no homeland for you. The Returned demands this drake's death."

The giants move forward. With a few twists and turns they are aligned with the second lever.

When the heroes pull the second lever:

Pulling the second lever, boiling oil begins to seep into the corridor with the giants. The Archon seems unaffected but the skin of the giants begins to boil and bubble. They howl in pain as Xasnelre taunts them.

"The fires of my breath are twice as hot! Come no closer, bad servants of a bad master! The valley wants you not!"

The Archon snarls upwards, saliva flying from his lips.

"The blue drakes shall feast upon your bones, young one! You are powerless against the might of the Marru and the Packmaster!"

The dog man spurs the giants onward, each now suffering from serious wounds. Within a matter of minutes they are aligned with the third switch.

If the heroes pull the third switch:

Pulling the switch yields a sting of falling rocks. The Archon avoids the worst of the

barrage but the giants have no room to dodge. The rocks break the foot of one and the arm of another. The third passes out as a large rock hits him on the head. Xasnelre crows.

"You shall come no further! My weight shall crush you utterly as the mountains."

Looking back at his depleted force, the Archon, kicks the unconscious one back to wakefulness and he and his troops begin to beat a hasty retreat. Within a few minutes they are out of the cave and suddenly the cave mouth they leave through collapses.

ENCOUNTER 6: TRIAL OF THE DRAGON: BASTION

This encounter takes place when the heroes have driven off the intruders. If the heroes have discovered Xasnelre is an illusion previously, this text will require some ad-libbing.

Returning to the hoardroom, Xasnelre glides in and nods at you. Then with an audible pop, his form disappears and a small bronze leaf flutters down from the ceiling. The leaf quickly grows and unfolds, until suddenly you are faced with the stretching form of a horse-sized brass dragon. Smiling at you sheepishly, the dragon speaks.

"Did you expect me to really greet you personally? My, the tales they must tell you folk. Now, what did you want here again?"

This is the opportunity for the players to state their case to Xasnelre. If they were judged favorably in the previous encounters, and helped to repel the invaders, then Xasnelre will listen to their plea and respond in kind. He will offer to aid the Keoish forces against the invaders.

Xasnelre will then ask the heroes to retrieve the arrow from the lattice and pass it to him. If the heroes failed the lattice test, then they will find the arrow sitting on a silver platter besides a pile of gold coins.

Xasnelre will speak.

"Now you see, this arrow is very important. It's the last arrow of the legendary Orc archer Naillek. He was a scourge of the land and a terror of the Suel. Naillek traveled with a powerful troll witch-doctor named Yilsiah. Together they were the largest single thorn in the side of Keoish expansion in their time.

Yilsiah healed Naillek's wounds while the mighty orc slew the finest elven archers of the dreadwood.

Finally, Naillek met his match. The famed elven general Talkia stalked the evil pair with her sisters, Indurian and Selvdril. The five met in combat in the land over what is now Godakin Keep. The arrows flew back and forth for days as the quintet battled, each unable to kill the other. Finally, Talkia called upon Corellon Larethian to blind the troll witch-doctor Yilsiah, causing the troll's healing spells to fail. The arrows that pierced Naillek and Yilsiah were too much to be borne, and the pair died on the banks of the Javan, but not before Naillek invoked a powerful death curse.

He vowed that these lands would see thousands of years of darkness if his bow ever saw the light of day after his death. The elves called for the assistance of the Silent Ones, and together they built the Vault of the Hollow, where Naillek's bow was buried."

Xasnelre reaches out to touch the arrow. As his delicate claw does so his eyes roll up into his head and he falls over. Twitching and spasming, Xasnelre speaks in the common tongue.

"When the king becomes common,

Ruled by the desires of his lesser,

An ancient foe returns to master the land.

And end to all beginnings, and a beginning to the end,

A bright-scaled horror unearths all secrets.

The reborn lion rules with iron,

forged into a great and terrible sword.

A great disappearance heralds the final act

The curtain falls on king and country,

The end of days sees the walls raised

Failure of the will leads always to slavery."

This prophecy has been uttered before, it is known as the second verse of the prophecy of Azmarender. As the heroes contemplate what they have heard, a loud commotion will be heard from one of the adjoining rooms that the heroes have not ventured into. A familiar female voice will call out.

"Xasnelre? Help! Your vaultdweller has gone berserk!"

Xasnelre will remain unmoving, caught in the throes of his prophecy. It is up to the heroes to save the person in the next room.

The room the commotion is coming from abuts the Hoardroom to the northwest. There, the elven scout Talkia is trapped by Xasnelre's unliving guardians.

When the heroes venture closer read or paraphrase the following.

The room the commotion is echoing from is large, at least 130' by 60'. Studded on each wall are complex crystal growths, each the color of thunderclouds. The room has several columns made entirely of the same crystal spread about. As you watch, an arc of lightning shoots out from one of the crystals on the wall, runs through a column, and then runs into a crystal formation on the far side of the wall.

Next to one of the columns you see the elven woman from Black Top, Talkia. With a sword drawn, she faces off against an unliving monstrosity. As the creature reaches down to crush her, both of them are knocked off their feet by an arc of lightning. As the smoke clears you see the creature rise to its feet and move towards the unmoving form of the helpless Talkia, crumpled at the base of the center pillar.

This room is a complicated means for Xasnelre to practice his ability to avoid the lightning breath of his most hated enemy, a Blue Dragon. The creatures set within are immune to the lightning being thrown about.

When Xasnelre activates the Bastion Room, each of the columns glows with a single rune. To deactivate the lightning and the golems within, Xasnelre must press each rune in order while avoiding their attacks.

Normally it would be no problem for Xasnelre to save Talkia at this point but as he is caught in the throes of prophecy, he cannot help.

There are several ways to defeat the bastion room.

1. Never enter. Callous as it may sound, the heroes may choose to not get involved. It's dangerous to go wandering about a dragon's lair, and perhaps this elf is getting just what she

deserves. If the heroes do this, award 0 XP for this encounter, and after five rounds the room shuts down. Talkia, unfortunately, will be very dead.

2. Enter the room, retrieve Talkia, and leave the room. Although the heroes cannot be sure if the guardians will follow them or not, removing an unconscious woman from a room full of lightning is never a bad idea. If the heroes simply find a way to get Talkia out, the golems will not leave the room. The lightning will continue to blast about the room for 10 rounds and will then shut down, as will the golems. Award full xp to the heroes for using creative thinking to realize that not every challenge requires brute force.

3. Enter the room and kill the golems. Brutal and difficult, destroying the golems is the most straightforward way to save Talkia. If the heroes choose this route and are successful, award full XP. While there were more subtle ways to solve this challenge, sometimes the heroes are the hammer and every problem looks like a nail.

4. Shut down the crystal columns. On each column is a glowing glyph. It takes a standard action to activate a glyph on a specific column. The solution to Xasnelre's glyph's is detailed below. If the glyphs are properly activated, they shut down the Bastion Room and all the golems present return to inactivity.

Xasnelre's Bastion Room Puzzle

Being the incredibly narcissistic dragon that he is, when Xasnelre constructed the room he had the solution keyed to the most important thing in his life: himself. Knowing that he might someday bring other friends or dragons into the room to spar, he made the solution to the puzzle fairly simple...if you can read draconic. Each of the outer eight pillars has a glyph on it that randomly changes each time the room is activated. These glyphs spell out "Xasnelre".

The center column has all eight glyphs written upon it, and when the correct glyphs are pressed in the correct order, each glyph lights up on the center column accordingly.

The Lightning Nodes

Each node as detailed in **DM AID 1: The Bastion Room** is given a number. On each round, a random number of these nodes will fire, creating a *lightning bolt* between them. The lightning fires from one numbered node to the corresponding numbered node on the opposite side of the room,

passing through any and all crystal columns unhindered.

If the correct glyph is pressed on a column, all lightning that hits that column will stop as it hits the column rather than pass through. In this manner, it encourages

The nodes are marked as an X on the map, and numbered with corresponding roman numerals. It is important to note that the crystal node VII is actually set just above the doorway the heroes enter.

At each APL, a random selection of nodes fires per round. Roll a d10 randomly to determine which node(s) fire.

APL6: 1 node per round, 5d6 *lightning bolt*. DC 14 Reflex Save for half.

APL8: 2 nodes per round, 5d6 *lightning bolt*. DC 15 Reflex Save for half.

APL 10: 3 nodes per round, 7d8 *lightning bolt* DC 17 Reflex Save for half

APL 12: 4 nodes per round, 10d6 *lightning bolt* DC 18 reflex save for half.

Setting up the Bastion Room

Randomly assign each column in the room to a letter X,A,S,N,E,L,R,E. For the purposes of the puzzle either "E" can be pressed at the appropriate time in order to solve the puzzle.

Any hero who can read draconic can automatically see the word "Xasnelre" spelled out on the center column. Heroes who are without such means to read Draconic are allowed to make an **Intelligence** check **DC 15** to piece together that the writing on the column is distinctive and probably tied to the dragon intimately. In the worst case scenario the heroes can simply attempt to match individual glyphs on individual columns, pressing them one at a time. If this is the case, it simply takes a **Spot** check **DC 8** on each attempt to locate the appropriate glyph that should be pressed next.

Defeating the Bastion Room

The nodes and the golems shut down if the puzzle is completed. The golems can be destroyed normally, but this does not stop the nodes from firing. If a hero directly attacks a crystal node, they may be destroyed. They have hardness (=APL) and (APLX2) HP.

If the heroes fight the Golems:

APL 6 (EL 9)

Flesh Golem (2): hp 93; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 8 (EL 11)

Stone Golem hp 128; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 10 (EL 13)

Iron Golem: hp 156; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 12 (EL 16)

Greater Stone Golem: hp 334; see *Monster Manual*.

Tactics: (All APLs) Kill and Kill again! Find the nearest thing and smash it to bits! Never leave the Bastion Room.

At APL 10, the Iron Golem is immune to all lightning effects, meaning that it is not slowed as per the *monster manual*.

Developments: Talkia will only be killed if the heroes choose not to interfere. She starts the combat crumpled at the base of the center pillar, and the lightning will not kill her while the heroes are actively working to rescue her.

After the combat, Talkia will come back to consciousness after a minute or if healed. Undoubtedly the heroes will have some questions.

What are you doing here?

"I am here to help protect the bloodline of Illiasnirath. The Brass Drakes have long been a friend to my people and unlike King Kimbertos, we remember our pledges. I came here to ensure that only the worthy folk found Xasnelre's lair, and to attempt to persuade him to help the Kingdom."

"What do you mean about King Kimbertos?"

"Only that he violated a sacred oath handed down from generations ago allowing all dragons safe roost within Keoland. When he ordered Aulicus hunted and slain, he brought this doom upon us all."

"Doom? What doom?"

"Something is coming from the west, and powerful forces will be needed to combat it. Pray to your gods that Xasnalre can help us."

"Are you the elf from Xasnelre's story?"

"Yes I am. My sisters and I hunted the Darkarrow Naillek and his troll witch-doctor

Yilsiah. That arrow is the last one Naillek fired, the one that nearly killed me."

Talkia drops the sleeve on her shirt, revealing an ugly black scar, still seeming to fester with poison.

"Such was the magic of that befouled bow that it causes me pain hundreds of years later. It is a foul weapon, and I honor the sacrifice of those who tried to keep it from daylight."

"What happened to the bow?"

"It was taken from its resting place and passed along to important hands. I believe your King has it now."

"How can we trust you?"

"You must make up your own mind in that matter. Is it so hard for you to believe that a powerful dragon would place someone in a nearby town to alert him in time of troubles? That agent contacted me."

"Who is that agent?"

Talkia smiles and shakes her head.

What is that room and what were you doing in there?

"It is the Bastion Room, a room created by Xasnelre and some of my people in order to help train him to against the weapon of his most hated enemy; Blue Dragonkind."

When the heroes are satisfied, move on to Encounter 7.

ENCOUNTER 7: DRAGONBACK

This encounter is Xasnelre's judgement on the heroes, and mortalkind in general. If the heroes were judged positively then he will aid Keoland, if not then he will seek to continue his reclusion by leaving the Good Hills and flying to the elven lands in the Dreadwood.

Calculating Xasnelre's Favor

Encounter Two: Were the heroes judged favorably? Did they take the relatively harmless traps with good humor and stoicism, or were they angered?

Encounter Three: Were the heroes greedy? Did they attempt to steal from Xasnelre's hoard?

Encounter Four: Were the heroes zealous in defending Xasnelre from evil? Did they actively help repel the interlopers?

Encounter Five: Were the heroes judged favorably? Were they able to demonstrate cooperation to achieve a goal?

Encounter Six: Were the heroes proactive? Did they help someone in distress?

Wildcard: Did the heroes entertain Xasnelre? Did they speak to him with respect and attempt to sway him through words rather than through violence? Did they provide him with any amusement?

If the heroes are judged unfavorably:

Suddenly as soon as it is upon him, the fit of prophecy leaves Xasnelre. With a startled jump resembling that of a dog waking up from a bad dream, he jumps to his feet.

Looking at you distrustfully and without a word, Xasnelre digs into his hoard and withdraws a pair of spherical objects. He then pushes off through a tunnel and is gone.

Talkia grimaces at you and shakes her head.

"A dragon's tests are many and varied. You have been found wanting. Pray that Xasnelre changes his mind and comes to the aid of Keoland."

If the heroes are judged favorably:

Suddenly as soon as it is upon him, the fit of prophecy leaves Xasnelre. With a startled jump resembling that of a dog waking up from a bad dream, he jumps to his feet.

"Friends, and I name you that, I must go. The mantle of prophecy has fallen upon me and I must travel to Niole Dra to deliver these words. However, I am not foolish enough to believe that your King will leave me unmolested for delivering him more bad tidings. I wish one of you to fly with me, upon my back, to Niole Dra, where we will pass on these words. You must choose among yourselves who will fly with me, for you are all worthy.

With your kindness, generosity, and spirit, you have shown me that the short lived races are deserving of friendship and respect. Beyond that, they are deserving of aid in the upcoming times of crisis. Together we must convince your King that these troubles are far worse than he sees.

Evil has set foot in my lair, it is no longer home. Take what trinkets you can, they are a gift from me. There is one burden that I ask you to bear, one that is too delicate to risk to dragonflight."

Rooting through the largest pile of coins, Xasnelre reaches and pulls something out. Claspng it tenderly in his hands, you see a marvelous sight: a pair of scaled eggs.

Each is about the size of a large watermelon, with a tough skin that resembles rough stone. The surface of one shell is quite clearly the same color as Xasnelre's burnished brass scales...and the other is the color of molten gold.

"You must take these, they are no longer my burden to bear. A warrior cannot carry his children into battle and so I ask that you use your judgement to bring these to a good home. The Brass one is indeed mine, laid by my mate years ago.

The Golden one...well, honestly I have no idea where the golden one came from. One evening I dreamt of a god of the sun, and the next morning the egg was here. I have warmed it and guarded it since.

Take them someplace safe. Who rides with me to Niole Dra? I bring tidings of war, and I dare not fly alone."

The heroes are likely a little surprised at this turn of events. The eggs are, in fact, dragon eggs. One is Brass and one is Gold. A hero can make a **Knowledge: Arcana DC 15** check. Success indicates that both eggs are FAR larger than any reportedly known. That is, they appear that they should have hatched long ago.

Once the heroes choose who flies with Xasnelre, take them aside and read them this.

With a few words, Xasnelre creates a seat for you by the shifting of his scales. By simply claspng your legs as you might a horse bareback, you are able to ride securely. With a few deep breaths and a running leap, Xasnelre bursts out of his lair.

The land flies beneath you at an epic pace. Before you can blink Black Top recedes in the distance and the rolling grasslands of the March of Middlemead are under your feet. Far under your feet. This is surely a moment you will remember for the rest of your life.

An hour passes wonderfully, with the hot sun glinting off Xasnelre's scales. Then without warning Xasnelre banks hard and turns about. His head turns back to you and he is forced to yell to be heard.

"Arm yourself! Danger!"

Looking past Xasnelre's head, you see two black shapes in the air. Xasnelre turns and dives again, making full speed towards Niole Dra.

The sun shining clearer, you can see that they are not black shapes.

They are blue.

Niole Dra is approaching.

The rest of the heroes now have to return to Black Top and decide what they are doing with the dragon eggs.

ENCOUNTER 8: RETURN TO BLACKTOP

The journey back to Black Top is quick and uneventful. The work progresses on the Palisade and it is almost complete when the heroes arrive.

Ask the heroes who they take their information to and what they do with the dragon eggs. Play it by ear as there are many possibilities here, including attempting to keep the eggs for themselves, or taking them to another organization such as the Knights of the Watch or the Silent Ones.

Feel free to use or modify the following:

Field Marshal Perrinac

"Thank you, scouts for your fine information. We hope to have gained an ally in a time of need. I shall report your findings directly to the King. "

If he is given the eggs:

"This.....this is beyond compare. I will see to it that they are escorted to the safest location in the kingdom personally. If these hatch true, perhaps the days of Keoland being friends with its dragon allies have begun."

Stoakdor Neheli

"Ah yes...interesting indeed. You did an outstanding job in finding the lair and protecting the young dragon. With any luck he

will consent to aid us. I hope you made a good impression upon him, yes?"

If given the eggs:

"Oh my. I cannot accept these, they are far too tempting. Do not make me choose, I beg you. I say you take them to an agent of the Silent Ones, or directly to the King. They are far too precious to be left in unsecured hands"

As stated, other possible targets for the eggs are the various knighthoods, or perhaps even a thieves' guild. Carefully note on the critical event summary where the eggs were given to.

CONCLUSION

Your work in the Good Hills will never be forgotten. The days of rumors of dragonkind are over, and Keoland has met its newest inhabitants, for good or ill.

The town of Black Top continues to grow, quickly becoming a fortified bastion against whatever comes its way. To the west, trouble brews.

The End

EPILOGUE

"My Lord Count, a missive for you."

Count Ignaz Manz turned from where he was signing the last of today's proclamations. Today was the day the remaining Gyri refugees had been hoping for. With one sweep of his pen, Count Manz made them citizens of Cryllor and Keoland, giving them rights and duties accordingly. The streets were a riot of celebration.

Nodding to dismiss the servant, Count Manz turned over the strange envelope he now held. Created of a black parchment, it felt burned or charred yet didn't seem damaged.

Examining the seal, Count Manz paused.

A green lion rampant.

As Manz fingered the seal, he could sense a palpable aura, another presence in the room. Closing his eyes, Manz broke the seal.

A familiar voice behind him spoke

"Greetings, King Manz."

EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each character.

Encounter 2 (APL+1)

Bypass Xasnelre's traps without becoming angered or frustrated.

APL 6: 210 xp.
APL 8: 270 xp.
APL 10: 330 xp.
APL 12: 390 xp.

Encounter 5 (APL+1)

Help Xasnelre repel the invading giants.

APL 6: 210 xp.
APL 8: 270 xp.
APL 10: 330 xp.
APL 12: 390 xp.

Encounter 6 (APL+4)

Rescue Talkia from the Bastion Room

APL 6: 300 xp.
APL 8: 360 xp.
APL 10: 420 xp.
APL 12: 480 xp.

Story Award

Befriend the Brass Dragon Xasnelre.

APL 6: 210 xp.
APL 8: 270 xp.
APL 10: 330 xp.
APL 12: 390 xp.

Discretionary Roleplaying Award

APL 6: 210 xp.
APL 8: 270 xp.
APL 10: 330 xp.
APL 12: 390 xp.

Total possible experience

APL 6: 900 xp.
APL 8: 1,125 xp.
APL 10: 1,350 xp.
APL 12: 1,575 xp.

TREASURE SUMMARY

During an adventure, characters encounter treasure, usually finding it in the possession of their foes. Every encounter that features treasure has a "treasure" section within the encounter description, giving information about the loot, coins, and magic items that make up the encounter's treasure.

The loot total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if the foes are plundered of all their earthly possessions. Looting the bodies takes at least 10 minutes per every 5 enemies, and if the characters cannot take the time to loot the bodies, they do not gain this gold. If you feel it is reasonable that characters can go back to loot the bodies, and those bodies are there (i.e., not carted off by dungeon scavengers, removed from the scene by the local watch, and so on), characters may return to retrieve loot. If the characters do not loot the body, the gold piece value for the loot is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

The coin total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if they take the coin available. A normal adventuring party can usually gather this wealth in a round or so. If for some reason, they pass up this treasure, the coin total is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

Next, the magic items are listed. Magic item treasure is the hardest to adjudicate, because they are varied and because characters may want to use them during the adventure. Many times characters must cast *identify*, *analyze dweomer* or similar spell to determine what the item does and how to activate it. Other times they may attempt to use the item blindly. If the magic item is consumable (a potion, scroll, magic bolts, etc.) and the item is used before the end of the adventure, its total is subtracted from the adventure totals below.

Once you have subtracted the value for unclaimed treasure from each encounter add it up and that is the number of gold pieces a characters total and coin value increase at the end of the adventure. Write the total in the GP Gained field of the adventure certificate. Because this is a Regional adventure, characters may spend additional Time Units to practice professions or create items immediately after the adventure so this total may be modified by other circumstances.

L = Looted gear from enemy; C = Coin, Gems, Jewelry, and other valuables; M = Magic Items.

Encounter 7:

APL 6: L: 0 gp, C: 900 gp, M: See AR

APL 8: L: 0 gp, C: 1,300 gp, M: See AR

APL 10: L: X gp, C: 2,300 gp, M: See AR

APL 12: L: X gp, C: 3,300 gp, M: See AR

Total Possible Treasure (Maximum Reward Allowed)

APL 6: L: 0 gp, C: 900 gp, M: 0 gp – Total: 900 gp (900 gp).

APL 8: L: 0 gp, C: 1,300 gp, M: 0 gp – Total: 1,300 gp (1,300 gp).

APL 10: L: 0 gp, C: 2,300 gp, M: 0 gp – Total: 2,300 gp (2,300 gp).

APL 12: L: 0 gp, C: 3,300 gp, M: 0 gp – Total: 3,300 gp (3,300 gp).

ITEMS FOR THE ADVENTURE RECORD

Special

Dragonrider: You are the hero whom Xasnelre delivered to Niole Dra on dragonback. Your name quickly lands on the lips of everyone in the capital. For the next three Keoland Regional scenarios you receive free Luxury lifestyle as various inns and nobles vie to have you as their guest. Additionally, some celestial hand guides you towards greatness. You receive a permanent +1 bonus on your Leadership score.

Finally, the dragonride seems to have had a physical interaction with your being. Your face takes on a slightly bony and rigid feel, and the backs of your hands sprout small brass colored scales. You receive a permanent +2 natural armor bonus but there are some in Keoland who may take pause at your appearance.

Dragonfriend: The Brass Dragon Xasnelre has named you a friend to Dragonkind. Any metallic dragon whom you meet will automatically be Helpful towards you. Until this AR item is removed by some other means, you receive a +2 circumstance bonus to all Saving Throws made against an effect created by a dragon that wishes to cause you harm.

A Dragon Egg!: You have chosen to keep a dragon egg given to you for safekeeping for yourself. Contact the Keoland Triad at keolandplots@hotmail.com in order to determine the effect this has upon your character, if any. Void this AR item if your party gave the dragon eggs to anyone at the end of the adventure

Take What Trinkets You Can: Xasnelre has given you unrestrained access to his Hoard, an unprecedented gift to a mortal. You may give yourself (Access: Adventure) to any one magic item from the DMG valued at 20,000gp or less. Alternately, you may give yourself (Access: Adventure) to any one item from an AR played within the last 52 TU of your character log. Note the appropriate use on this AR. This must be used immediately.

Item Access

APL 6 (all of APLs 2, 4 plus the following):

- *Memento Magica (1st)* (*Races of the Dragon; Adventure*)
- *Memento Magica (2nd)* (*Races of the Dragon; Adventure*)
- *Softhands Gloves* (*Races of the Dragon; Adventure*)
- *Dragonbone Bow* (Any Strength bonus up to and including +4) (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)

APL 8 (all of APLs 2, 4, 6 plus the following):

- *Spellflinging Spear* (*Races of the Dragon; Adventure*)
- *Idol of the Dragon (Brass)* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)
- *Dragonfang Gauntlets* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)

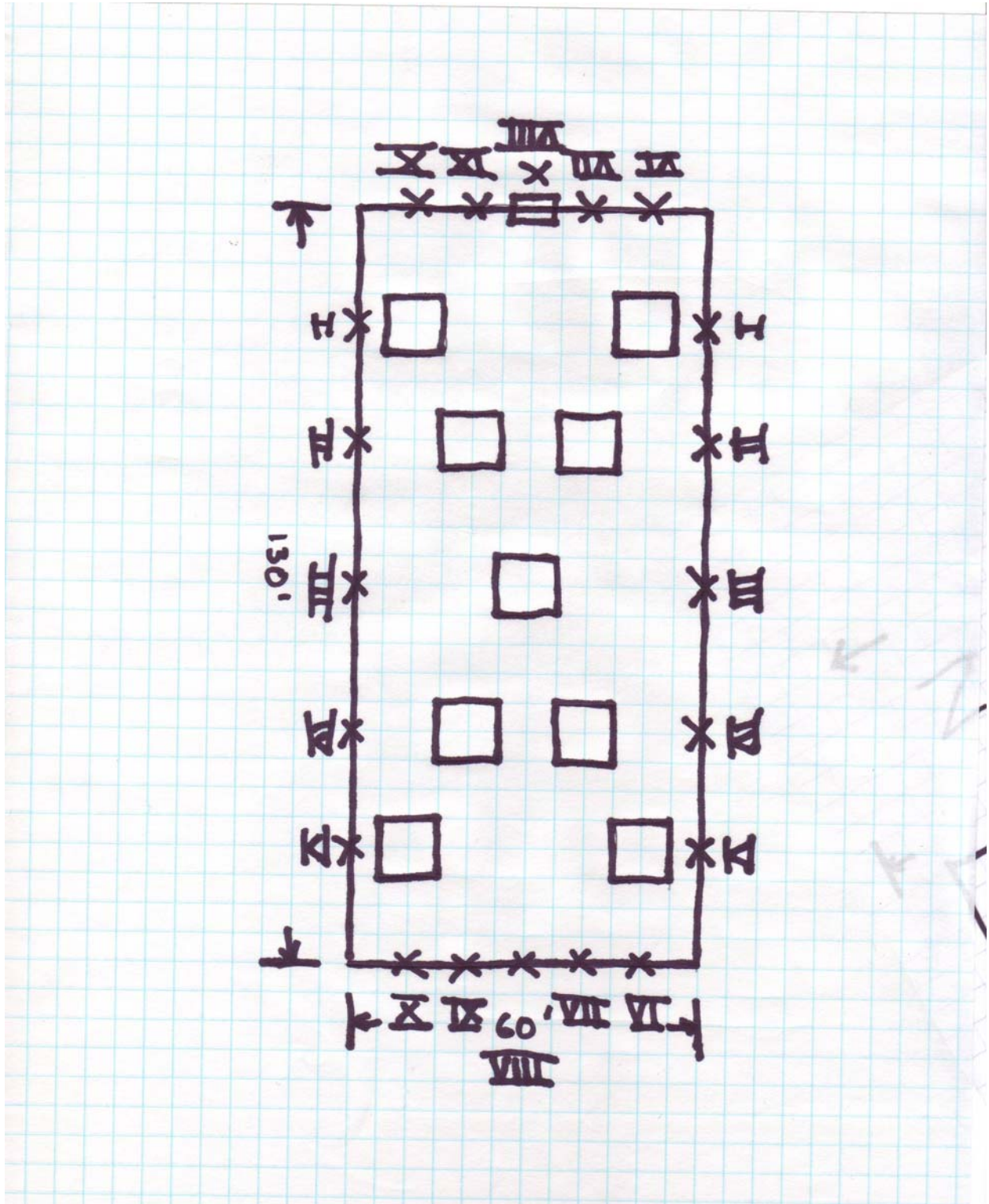
APL 10 (all of APLs 2, 4, 6, 8 plus the following):

- *Bulwark of Antimagic* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)
- *Bow of the Mighty Dragonhunter* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)
- *Blue Dragoncraft Leather Armor* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)
- *Blue Dragoncraft Chain Shirt* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)
- *Blue Dragoncraft Full Plate* (*Draconomicon; Adventure*)

APL 12 (all of APLs 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 plus the following):

- *Ring of Dragonshape (Draconomicon; Adventure)*
- *Blue Dragonhide Mantle (Draconomicon; Adventure)*
- *Wheel of Fortune (Complete Scoundrel; Adventure)*

DM AID: MAP #1 – BASTION ROOM



PLAYER HANDOUT #1 – DRAFTED

Two days ago a Royal Standard scout crossed your path on a road in the Good Hills. He handed you a copy of this letter and rode on without answering any questions.

Attention:

Those receiving this letter are required by royal decree to travel to the town of Black Top with all haste. Failure to comply will result in execution per the Royal Conscription Act of CY 212. All summoned are to report to the Long Blade in Black Top upon arrival.

Field Marshal Pennine Rhola

The letter is sealed with the Keoish Royal seal.

CRITICAL EVENT SUMMARY: KEO7-06 BRIGHT SCALED HORROR

1. Were the heroes successful in befriending Xasnelre? Yes No

2. Did Xasnelre offer to fly one hero on Dragonback?
Yes No
If so, list player names/PC names here:

3. Did the heroes rescue Talkia from the Bastion Room and hear her story?
Yes No

4. Who did the heroes give the Dragon Eggs to, if anyone?

5. Did any hero threaten or attempt to attack Xasnelre?
Yes No
If so, list whom here:

Notes: (Add anything that happened that might be considered out of the ordinary – Strange occurrences, results that may not fit the above, etc):