
THE HODEKIN HEIST

INTRODUCTION

Take your players into a cave system – a good old fashion dungeon – to find the treasures within.

This isn't your normal delve into a dark place to fight bad guys room by room. In fact, there's only one big combat in this adventure if your characters play their cards right. It's their job to slink around this subterranean society and make off with as much of a dragon's hoard as their able to – despite a dragon being much too high a level for the advised level 3 characters. They must make the most of their surroundings, maybe find allies, and understand the politics of the area to really put the battle in their favour.

THE STORY IN SUMMARY

Cagey Mouth is not remarkable in any way and so is a little explored mountain. Some have stumbled upon it an entrance, once or twice, but they only bring back disinteresting tales of collapsed caves, drown passage ways, and little else. The journey to and from is too difficult and overgrown, with little reward, for many people to decide to make.

That is until a strange creature turns up, in the stomach of a dead direwolf. The intrigue and spark of adventure sends off your players to the direction of Cagey Mouth, where they find another dead creature.

They must travel through the waterlogged, maze of tunnels to make their way into the cave system proper. A polluted and twisted place. There they'll find the society of Hodekin, alive and well. Trapped inside the cave by two things: the water and their *leader*.

The leader forbade exit from the caves – or even attempts to go near the water. He's worshiped as a feared, living god. The Hodekin are forced to farm mushrooms and dig deeper into the caves to find gold and gems, or else be murdered.

Their leader is Nexaraxis, a young green dragon. There is no possible way for the level three players to best his power but if they set the stage for their battle perfectly, they might stand a chance. Helping free the Hodekin, helping themselves to the dragon's hoard, or just simply nipping in and out with a prized possession, whatever the players do they will certainly leave with a story to tell.

HODEKIN

Not much is known about the Hodekin, and their entire species may well be confined the insides of Cagey Mouth.

They're similar to Kobolds though more feline; where Kobolds have longer snouts, Hodekin have smaller ones with sharper teeth. Hodekin tails are not strong but are apposable and can be used as a fifth limb.

BACKGROUNDS

ITINERANT

Those with arcane capabilities tend to show up right when you need them. You travel from town to town, offering minor magics as a service. Cleaning stained clothes, reattaching broken axe heads, turning over flowerbeds. Whatever services you can offer to the people who need it (and are willing to pay).

Feature: *For services rendered*

When you arrive in a town that you've not previously been to (or have not been there within the past ten days), you can spend some of your down time proffering your services. These are almost always required and generates 3d6 copper pieces.

BEAST HUNTER

Pest control in this world is more than just evicting mice or unwelcome bees; vicious giant badgers tunnelling under homes, Allosaurus making nests in chimneys, and parasitic flesh-worms are all infestations you make your living from.

Feature: *Dangerous world out there*

Your face and arms hold enough scars tell a story that distinctly says *beast hunter*. The nicks and scrapes prove your adept and experience in the trade enough that strangers will often approach you with details of pests they've seen in the area; moles trampling farm lands, wolf packs moving into the area, or gnolls nesting nearby.

Whilst you may not want to take on these extermination jobs, after a few conversations you'll always find enough information to know the lay of the land around the town and which beasts lurk where.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Get your players to a remote town however you like. If they've chosen one of the above backgrounds, maybe it's because they're doing their normal rounds of the towns and villages in the local area. Alternatively, use one of the hooks below.

Halfling Gold. An old song, sung with a familiarity that no one really listens to the words, talks of an Halfling family who amassed a large amount of gold, only to realise that it did not make them happy and so flung it into a mountain. Another version of that song has been found in an old hymn book, and it includes slightly more information on who that family was...

DOWNLIN NEAR RANGE

Downlin near Range is a Halfling village where they keep to themselves, out of the way of the taller folk. They're happy here and enjoy the visit from the occasional travellers but wouldn't fancy them sticking around for too long. ("With Tall people come Tall problems," as Nanna Bigheart is known to say.)

For a place to rest the group are recommended to stay at the Eight Mugs, even if it's just for some food.

THE EIGHT MUGS

This is the only drinking establishment in the village because the halflings like to get together and natter. A fire roars in the middle of the room, with comfortable chairs and tables around it. Six of the eight tables are taken by good natured halflings, talking between themselves and between tables alike. Everyone here is friends.

The name is quite literal as the tavern does only have eight mugs. The halflings share one per table. They find this brings them closer together as they don't drink that much anyway. When the players arrive, there are only two mugs left. The bartender, **Oswalt Stoutman** – beginning to show grey roots and good humoured – only laughs at the players predicament. "You'll figure it out!"

Eddie Stoutman – young and excitable – rushes into the Mugs. “Pops, come and look at this! I found a *whole direwolf!*” His dad, Oswalt, and a number of others are intrigued enough by this that they follow the halfling child out.

Indeed, on a sleigh that Eddie is pulling closer, is the bloated body of a huge wolf. Its legs and head drag along the floor limply, too big for the sleigh.

It transpires that Eddie was out “*hunting rabbits*” with his slingshot (rarely successful) and found the dead beast. Eddie was a little further out from town than he was supposed to be, and he tries to go around that detail. (Later on, if the players can gain his trust, he’ll tell them where he was.)

Eddie prods the wolf with a stick. The wolf jiggles a little and then SPLAT explodes sending chunks of rotten meat in all directions and a powerful smell.

Inside the stomach of the direwolf is a near whole, dead creature that no one recognises. Quite small, no larger than a five-year-old human. Cat-like snouts and ears. Furry skin that looks leathery in the bald parts. No one has seen anything like this. In fact, it’s a **Hodekin**.

The Hodekin clutches onto a coin. **Nanna Bigheart** – old and wise – takes a look at the gold and thinks she remembers the iconography on it; a very old halfling family’s heraldry is on one side of the coin and a very old date and unit of currency on the other. She half remembers the family as being treasure collectors. They’re long gone now though. Who knows what happened to their piles and piles of gold.

TOWARDS CAGEY MOUTH

All clues point towards the north east. That’s where the direwolves are known to hunt (Eddie especially knows this). The flowers stuck to the fur of the wolf are known to Nanna as a kind used in tea, but difficult to find at the base of the mountains. Another Hodekin is found along the way, dead but without wounds. Poisoned, it seems.

Once at the foot of the mountains, the landscape changes quite drastically. Thorny vines have taken up as much space as they can between rocks and bent earth. A fog rolls around their feet and the whiff of strong garlic gone rancid washes over them sometimes. The path is entirely covered with these impassable vines, *except* for the small path way the escaping Hodekin managed to make, ruffling the untouched barbs.

Following this path takes them right up to the Mouth.

The fog inside the cave is quite thick and does a good job of hiding the declining floor of the cave. This is not a big cave though. Towards the back of the cave is an open pool of water sitting quite still. A dawdling adventurer might not even spot it considering the fog. The body of another dead Hodekin floats, facedown. Lungfulls of the poisoned water killing him before he even reached the surface.

WATER

The water is rancid, stinking similar to the gas of the fog. It is poisonous to drink. If the water finds its way inside a character, have them make a Constitution saving throw, or else become Poisoned until they vomit it back up. After that, they still find themselves woozy, explaining any low rolls they make for the night.

A series of tunnels separates the group from the rest of the cave. Most of these tunnels are flooded, but there is the occasional air hole. The tunnels are all pitch black.



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A play test adventure by HaikuShane.

FORBIDDEN GROTTTO

As the group leaves the water, they are almost immediately attacked by the arthropods that live down here. There are two threats; the most obvious is the tainted cave spiders who dash towards the characters as soon as they see them. The aim of these spiders is *Must eat food. Very hungry*. If damaged severely, the individual spiders will retreat to the ceiling's shadows. They are greedy though and will attack again if the opportunity for surprise arises.

Hodekin bodies can be seen hanging from the ceiling in webby cocoons.

The second threat is not yet visible but for the dark holes in the walls, about the size of your fist. Out of reach of the spiders, inside are tainted green cockroaches will dash out and try to inject anything passing with a paralyzing poison. The character must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 10) or become Paralysed within the next three rounds, for 1d4 hours. After something has been paralysed, the cockroaches will leave the holes en masse to protect their latest meal from the spiders who are keen to steal the prey. The cockroaches will not leave their protective holes otherwise.

The spiders have a meagre antidote that will reduce the effect to simply *Poisoned*.

The continued passage through the grotto is blocked by tree trunk sized vines. Cutting them raises Nezaraxis's awareness that someone is making their way into the cave.

The Vines

The vines are grown as part of the dragon's lair.

Those with the ability to speak to plant life can ask them to move aside – these vines are sickly and tired and won't put up much fuss. They will hint at their terrible controller but won't outright mention him ("he might hear...").

Past the vines are squat tunnels, requiring squeezing by medium sized creatures. It eventually opens up into some heavy moss and fungus patches, revealing an enormous cavern. The characters are hidden whilst in this overgrowth.

THE FARMING CAVERNS

This mossy overgrowth and fungus reaching three or four feet tall in some places stretches on for about nine hundred feet – about three football pitches – and is about two hundred and fifty feet wide.

The cave reaches up into darkness. Dotted alongside the walls of the cavern are small lights in openings. From the ground, it's not clear how big these openings are. They're actually quite small inside and are home to the Husbandry Hodekin.

The Husbandry Hodekins' job is to head into the water pits and bring water to the "fields" as well as taking care of the fungus. The pits refill every few years, and of late the water is some fifty feet down a sheer drop that the Hodekin scale as carefully as they can.

There are also a few dozen giant rats they've reared in pens, but they're almost exclusively reserved for Nexaraxis. The breed quickly but never quickly enough to sate Nexaraxis. A huge pile of slaughtered rats are stacked near the entrance to the corridors which are ready to be taken through to the dragon's lair.

They work throughout day and night (though, none of these people have ever seen the sun, so the concept is alien to them) as the fungus are can quite delicate. Rotten or decaying fungus needs to be quarantined quickly, or else entire crops stand to perish.

Rotting fungus is caused by the tainted green roaches. The roaches will often make their way into this cave to eat the fungus. Their droppings are filled with the paralysing agent they inject their prey with, which infects the fungus. Eating perished fungus has a similar affect to the roaches' bites. A quarantined batch of fungus is visible in part of the fields.

It's a hard, cold life for these Hodekin. Though, they rarely want for food and so are a little podgier than other Hodekin throughout the tunnels. The rat meat, of course, is never considered a possibility to eat, though it is said that the snivelling Gemshiners sometimes get it.

Moving around the edges of the tunnel are a three Zealot Hodekin. It's quite easy for the players to avoid them, and they're making quite a lot of noise bullying other Husbands so are easily spotted.

Talking to the fearful Husbandry Hodekin won't cause too much of an alarm – they don't want to be the one tell the Zealots that there are intruders, they just want the players to go away. They can reveal some information though:

- The Zealots don't usually patrol. They're only here today because some Hodekin tried to escape. ("There's no way out though..! Wait... how did you guys get in here?")
- They're furious with the laziness of the Pitheads. ("In the past three months they've only sent *one* lot of new tools! How are we supposed to farm all this land with these rusted things? We're working our arses off here, whilst they take it easy!")
- They're not great at describing Nexaraxis as not many have actually seen him. Just horrid rumours and stories of how huge and terrifying he is. "Some say he has gemstone skin!"

An exit from the farming area can be found to the east. It takes the players to the *Territory Corridors*.

WATER PITS

The water pits are just off the side of the farming lands.

Husbandry Hodekin

As "*Kobold*" (*MM. p195*), but with:

AC: 13. Hit points: 3d6 (11). Str: 10 (0) Con: 11 (0).

Rusted pitch fork/spade. Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 10ft, one target. Hit: 6 (1d4+4) piercing damage.

These Hodekin spend their lives working the fungus fields to provide everyone with food.

Biggest desire: better tools!

Rivalry: Pithead Hodekin because they're so lazy! They need to make the tools faster! C'mon!

Feelings towards Nexaraxis: for each conversation that starts up, roll a d20. On 3 or lower, this particular Hodekin adores the dragon. Otherwise, they are filled with fear for him.

It is a large dome shaped room where water naturally drips from the roof. It falls into the incredibly deep holes which make up the pits.

At the bottom of one of the pits is a light source – a glowing, blue orb. It is about 30 feet under the water. It is a Driftglobe.

THE TERRITORY CORRIDORS

This series of corridors goes between each of the areas that the different Hodekin live, a cross road between them all.

As everywhere, vines lace the walls, making the whole area more cramped than it needs to be. Thick vines block passages and act as perfect hiding spots.

There are six Zealots who like to patrol the corridor, nipping between each of their zones to ensure that the Hodekin are doing what they're supposed to be. This means that at certain points, there are no Zealots in the centre of the cross roads.

The Zealots wear pristine armour, adorned with gem stones. This is because they are the only ones allowed to see their dragon overlord and he prefers to see only pretty things.

If your group is patient, and they watch from some hidden outcrop, explain that they seem to be on a patrol. Within a few minutes the coast should be totally clear for which ever tunnel they chose to take. For added drama, have the players do a group Stealth check.

There are road signs nearer the cross over point, however they're written in Draconic. A good Intelligence check might have the character recognise or decipher a word (maybe it looks similar in Common or one of their other languages).

The cross roads lead:

- To the farm lands, with the Husbandry Hodekin
- To the metal mines and smithies, with the Pithead Hodekin
- To the jewellery quarter, with the Gemshine Hodekin
- The "apartments", where the Zealot Hodekin live
- The heavily guarded path to Nexaraxis' lair

THE APARTMENTS

These aren't fancy apartments, but they're lavish compared to the makeshift living stations the others have. There's no denying that they're still underground hovels, but they have been made more comfortable.

Soft beds of giant rat fur, glided drawings and pieces of crude art work on the walls, even lavatories that shoot waste down into the mining caverns below.

There are typically Zealots around here, sleeping or hanging out.

Zealot Hodekin

As "Kobold" (MM. p195), but with:

AC: 15. Hit points: 4d6 + 3 (15). Str: 12 (+1) Con: 12 (+1) Wis 11 (0).

Multi-attack.

Sharpened short sword. Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. Hit: 8 (1d6+5) piercing damage.

Bow. Ranged weapon attack: +5 to hit, range 80/320ft, one target. Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing.

These hodekin are elite guards for Nexaraxis, with steadfast loyalty out of pride and respect for their God. Often used by him to spread propaganda.

Biggest desire: To serve!

Rivalry: All other Hodekin – paranoia that they're not impressing Nexaraxis enough, and so attempt to just be meaner to prove their devotion.

Feelings towards Nexaraxis: Deepest love and respect. Not one of them will turn against him.

They will always attack the characters on sight and will fight to the death (making it clear they die proudly as martyrs).

METAL MINES

A great deal of the cave system's heat comes from the roaring fires of the smelts. These are located very near the beginning of the Pithead territory for this very purpose, in fact.

The Pitheads mine downwards looking for three things: gem stones, which they leave in a chamber for the Gemshines to collect, metal ores, which they smelt themselves, and coal. Over the past century, the mines have gotten down quite deep with constant work being done to dig them out. Coal fires the furnaces, which are in constant use, dripping out molten metals.

The Pitheads are decent at their job, having made lifelong careers out of it. Rumours and propaganda spread by the Zealots of the Pitheads' laziness couldn't be further from the truth. Their tooling sheds – ready to be taken to the Husbandry and Gemshine Hodekin – are full to brimming. It's the Zealot's job to move the tools to their respective places, but they chose not to... Arming the Husbandry with sharp tools all at once seems unwise, and at the moment the Husbandry anger seems pointed at the Pitheads – which keeps them from being angry with Nexaraxis or the Zealots. The Gemshiners do get their tools as requested, but with a delay. Due to this, they too find the Pitheads lazy.

The Pitheads know that they have a reputation for being lazy and do everything they can to fix that. They've no idea their goods are being hidden away in storerooms and not given out; they simply assume that even the numbers they're producing aren't enough. It's quite upsetting, thinking that the great Nexaraxis thinks of them as lazy.

Some information they might share:

- They've dug up tonnes and tonnes of gold. It's somewhere within the tunnels. Probably with the Nexaraxis – he can't get enough of it!
- They know that Nexaraxis can breathe heated poison – and that he once filled the tunnels with it and wiped out hundreds of Hodekin. They needed to reopen the Wind Tunnel to clear it.
- He knows everything. Whenever they're slacking or talking about the world outside the cave. Rumour says he can hear from within the walls. The Zealots always appear quickly after an indiscretion.
- Many will show distress that they're trying so hard to work more efficiently, but it never seems enough for the others.
- Jealousy of the Gemshiners for getting so much credit for the Pitheads' work.

Like always, any Hodekin that spot them will not be very eager to turn them into the Zealots (through fear of even talking to them). They will be very keen to not be seen with the group though, battling against their yearning to hear anything about the outside world.

Pithead Hodekin

As "Kobold" (MM. p195), but with:

AC: 13. Hit points: 3d6 + 2 (13). Str: 12 (+1) Con: 14 (+2).

Pickaxe. Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. Hit: 7 (1d4+5) piercing damage.

These Hodekin are soot covered and their coughs echo throughout the tunnels.

Biggest desire: More praise! Why is the work we do never enough?

Rivalry: Gemshine Hodekin. *We dig all the gems up! All they do is polish them and Nexaraxis loves them for it!*

Feelings towards Nexaraxis: for each conversation the players start up, roll a d20. On 3 or lower, this particular Hodekin believes they can win over the dragon with hard work and admire him greatly. Otherwise, they are filled with fear for him.

If the characters are curious about the mines, they're quite accessible. They should quickly find the sealed gate out of the Window Tunnel. The mining tunnels are sheer downward slopes, which the Hodekin descend with ropes and steel brackets embedded in many places. However, it's still very dangerous. Within the mines, your characters might find something from the Discovery table.

d6	Discovery
1	A chunk of 1d4 kilograms of raw gold.
2	Body of a fallen, long dead Hodekin.
3	A boarded-up entrance, with tainted cave spiders beyond.
4	An exiled Hodekin (thought to be dead).
5	One rough gem stone, worth 1d100 gold.
6	A small wooden box of useful tools.

WIND TUNNEL

This way has been sealed due to the huge gusts of wind it sends reeling through the cave. Past these doors, the wind comes from the depths, freezing cold and with shocking force.

It doesn't come from the outside. It actually comes from an isolated rift to the Air Realm, deep, deep down.

They sealed this because it drops the temperature by sending harsh winds through the entire cave system. It was opened once after Nexaraxis's breath flooded the cavern.

It is locked with a key which the Zealots carry.

If the door is opened, a number of Zealots will make their way to it to find out why and close it within a few minutes.

JEWELLERY QUARTER

The Gemshiner Hodekin live and work in the Jewellery Quarter. Their job is to take the gems brought to them by the Zealots and cut them, shine them up, and often times set them into a gold or silver trinket (which they also carefully mould themselves).

It's no secret that Nexaraxis finds these Hodekin the most useful. To show his appreciation, the dragon will order more food sent to them and allows them access to the Crystal Pools to swim and relax. The others are certainly not given these gifts.

There are gems and gold filings all over the place here. You'd never know they were rare goods on the surface world. Piles of sparkling rubies are in one corner, untouched. "Nexaraxis doesn't care for rubies."

There are clear groups within this cavern causing rifts amongst the Gemshiners. None of them trust each other, and they're all fighting for the praise of Nexaraxis. Even within the small groups that form, jealousy and suspicion can still be found.

The Zealots, of course, have a strong hand in stirring this pot.

Gemshiner Hodekin

As "Kobold" (MM. p195), but with:

AC: 11. Hit points: 2d6 + 2 (8). Dex: 12 (+1) Int: 14 (+2), Cha: 13 (+1).

Sharpened chisel. Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. Hit: 3 (1d4+1) piercing damage.

They are most identifiable by their large lenses (for seeing impurities with) and their blistered hands from work related injuries.

Biggest desire: Find the most perfect gem and set it amongst the most beautiful gold.

Rivalry: Gemshine Hodekin. They fight amongst themselves endlessly as they attempt to produce better trinkets for their lord.

Feelings towards Nexaraxis: for each conversation the players start up, roll a d20. On 3 or lower, this particular Hodekin is slightly annoyed they have to given up their work to someone else. Otherwise, they are filled with respect for his keen eye.

Some information they might share:

- There's a small hole in the Crystal Pools and you can see right into Nexaraxis' lair. It's normally quite a big secret, but this Hodekin just can't handle the excitement of seeing their liege!
- The Needlebright Shiners have been waiting for *days* for their new tools. "Whilst they're using blunt equipment, my gems will be perfect! Nexaraxis will finally learn my name!"
- The Twitchless Shiners have a secret stash of tools – they tell the Zealots they need tools when they don't – risky business!

THE MISSING TOOLS

Gemshiner's value their tools greatly. They have tiny blades which are incredibly sharp, the better to crack between the amethyst and whatever ore it's affixed to. Large, iron rods, used for smashing up larger pieces of rock down. Even razor-sharp swords they use for sawing.

The downside of these tools is that once they blunt – within three or four uses usually – they become useless. The Gemshiners are in constant need of renewed equipment.

There is a pen where the Zealots take these tools from the Pitheads and store them, only eeking them out to the Gemshiners when they're polite enough. (Often saying that the Pitheads are working slowly, and there's not enough tools to go around.)

If the characters find this storage pen, then they can help themselves to the tools which look very similar to some of the weapons they're used to; daggers, swords, maces, and axes. Each of them is a +2, non-magical weapon.

The downside is that they'll probably only last a short while, or a few blows. (Oddly, they may well blunt as soon as the characters leave this adventure if you're not interested in giving them +2 weapons just yet.)

The storage pen is locked, but most Zealots carry a skeleton key.

CRYSTAL POOLS

The entrance is guarded by Zealots. Access given only to those with permission.

These pools are filled with harmless and delightful jellyfish which float around the waters aimlessly. Whilst creatures lazy around in the pools, the jellyfish approached and gently massage them (hoping for tiny bits of food to fall off). It's quite lovely.

Within the pool, difficult to find when it's not being looked for is an outcrop into a smaller cave. Vines grow in this small room too. A small hole – about the size of a finger, allows viewing through to the next room; there, unaware of the peaky hole, is Nexaraxis. His lair has a thick layer of his poisonous smog. It's clear that it could cover a full-grown man. He's eating a giant rat.

RECONCILING THE HODEKIN

The biggest way the adventurers can turn the tide of battle against the dragon in their favour is by recruiting the Hodekin.

The Hodekin "tribes" have been forced to hate each other by the pampered and power-sated Zealots who are just following the dragon's manipulative orders.

If the players can make the Hodekin see that, then they might have a good chance of turning them against the dragon – even if that just means opening up the Window Tunnel or sharing where the Crystal Pool peaky hole is.

Unlike kobolds, the Hodekin only love their dragon master out of fear. They would not be living in this awful cave system with nothing but fungus to eat if they weren't forced to. Outside there's adventure to lure them, safety for their families, and sunlight might be interesting to glance upon. *Escape* is a large motivator for a few of the Hodekin.

Like kobolds, gathering their *own hoard* is a motivator for many of them too. Of course, whilst subjugated they can't do anything of the sort. All the food they produce, ores they mine, and decorations they work on are spread around or given to the dragon. Outside they could start their own towns and build their own armies. *Greed* is a motivator that could be played on.

Revenge is a good motivator to play on too; Hodekin have been left to starve to death or been flung into the mines head first as punishment for no crime at all. It's time to stand against the fight our oppressor!

With the Hodekin on side – even just one or two of the groups – the fight against the dragon will be easier.

NEXARAXIS' LAIR

The green dragon lies in wait – or lies asleep if he's not been disturbed – within his lair proper.

THE TUNNELS

The path to the lair has many Zealots guarding the way. Of course, Nexaraxis hasn't put them there for protection (as they're all too distracted to bother uprising against him), but in fact has them there to stop is adoring fans making their way through to him. Nonetheless, the adventurers will need to make their way through these (rather wide and well decorated) tunnels to get to Nexaraxis.

The tunnel is covered with vines, as most of the cave system is. A potential sneaking route into the lair could be climbing the vines and travelling within their cover.

SEEING NEXARAXIS UP CLOSE

If Nexaraxis is still asleep, then he's immediately visible curled up like a cat on his bed of gems, gold, and crowns. These otherwise hard items make quite a comfortable resting place for a creature as large as the dragon is.

If Nexaraxis has been alerted enough to the rumblings around his caves, then he is awake and is not visible within the lair.

Poisonous green smog lingers about five feet into the air.

Nexaraxis is a young green dragon. Despite that, an intelligent character (maybe one who's seen a dragon before) would recognise that he's not quite as big as they would expect. This is mostly because a dragon isn't supposed to live exclusively off

Nexaraxis

Skinny, young green dragon. Lawful evil.

AC: 17, **HP:** 126. **Speed:** 40 ft. Fly: 80 ft.

STR: 18 (+4), **DEX:** 14 (+2), **CON:** 16 (+3)

INT: 16 (+3), **WIS:** 11 (0), **CHA:** 15 (+2)

Skills: Deception +5, Stealth +6, Perception +4.

Poison immunity.

Darkvision (120ft). Blindsight (20ft).

Languages: Common, Draconic.

Challenge: 8 (3,900XP)

Actions:

Multi-attack.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

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

Poison Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales poisonous gas in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

fungus, giant rats, and the occasional Hodekin. They're also supposed to have miles to roam around in, but this dragon has chosen only this cave system to prowl.

He is garishly adorned with a great number of emeralds and crowns worn as bracelets.

NEXARAXIS'S HUNGER

There are two mounds to be seen in the lair, each poking above the smog; the treasure collection and then pile of bones from food Nexaraxis has eaten. This entire area is difficult terrain.

If the characters interfered with the food supply, Nexaraxis is more sluggish than normal. It has the following effects on him:

- Nexaraxis loses his multi-attack attribute meaning that he can only attack once per turn. He will still attempt to attack multiple times, but the attacks are weak and easy to dodge.
- His speed is reduced to 30 feet (walking, flying, and swimming).

THE SMOG

The smog reduces the breathable oxygen considerably, meaning that creatures within it will immediately begin suffocating. However, it is only a blanket of smog; the air is breathable again above five feet (good for elves, not so good for gnomes). The smog also restricts visibility; anything that is completely covered in the smog acts as if invisible. Similarly, visibility through the smog is heavily obscured, giving the creature a condition similar to being blind.

The smog can be buffeted away with magic or even by swooping a cloak in the air. Within a couple of rounds it will return to encompassing the environment unless the removal affect continues.

Nexaraxis spends enough time in this smog that he has learned well to hunt within it. He sneaks up to his prey within the smog, then blows it away to expertly pounce.

If the characters have unblocked the *Wind Tunnel*, then the smog will only stay around for one round in a short area before dissipating. Throughout the dragon's lair there will be a wind which blows somewhere between a calm wind and a strong gust. These winds have the following effects:

- If the dragon begins flying, a strong gust blows and he is knocked prone onto the ground and that ends his turn. When this happens, characters who aren't on the ground fall too, leaving them prone.
- Nexaraxis' poison breath does not work as he expects. If he uses it, then the wind disperses the breath so quickly that it is near useless. The targeted characters will take only 1d6 damage.

REPERCUSSIONS

THE DEATH OF NEXARAXIS

You did it! You killed the slaver dragon. Without their reason to stay, the Hodekin eventually find a way to tunnel the flooded caverns into the mines, drying them out and making an easy passageway to the top world.

There is a ridiculous amount of treasure to be taken from this cave, and it belongs to your characters now, if they're able to keep a hold of it. The eagerly departing Hodekin will not keep their story to themselves. Soon the cave with a dragon's hoard will be widely known and over less scrupulous adventurers will come to take "their share". The heroes of Cage Mouth will not stay anonymous for long as they may well be the target of any number of thieves and greedy kings looking for their "taxes".

ESCAPE!

Nexaraxis is too strong for such a small group of novice adventurers – we knew this from the very beginning! Hopefully not too many friends were lost along the way, but now is the time to flee the cavern.

Nexaraxis laughs as they run, now even more confident in his rule. Knowing how weak the people in the above world is now, he may start asking his miners to mine *upwards*. Once outside, this strong headed and cunning dragon may well start making political and forceful strides that no one notices until it's too late.

The Hodekin remain enslaved.

TPK

You can decide if you want to kill off your entire party or not.

Nexaraxis sees the benefit in having some topsiders working for him. He does not wish to leave, and he could never trust his Hodekin to leave without spreading rumours of the freedom of the above world. Instead he might offer a hand of mercy in exchange for some work. He can, of course, pay them well...

However, you chose to end this scene, your players will know of this cave. Maybe in their future adventures they might bring new characters to clean it out.

CREATURES

TAINTED CAVE SPIDERS

Medium Beast. Unaligned.

Armor Class: 14. Thick, dark exoskeletons which crunch as swords penetrate. Weapons sometimes miss due to their bodies being slick with moss.

HP: 5d10+4. Speed: 30 feet. Climb: 30 feet. Travels webs and vines without difficulty.

Blind Sight: 15 feet. Darkvision: 90 feet. Passive Perception: 14. Detects vibrations anywhere within the vine network it uses.

Strength: +2. Dexterity: +3. Constitution: +3. Intelligence: -4. Wisdom: +1. Charisma: -3.

Stealth: +7.

Languages: --

Immunity to poison. Resistant to Paralyzing effects, thanks to centuries of living alongside such threats.

Pincer. Melee. +5 to hit, 1d8+4 piercing damage. Have the target make a Constitution save (DC 13), or become poisoned for 1 hour. Additionally, take 1d6 + 2 poison damage (half on a save).

Web. (Recharge on 5 or 6.) Ranged, 30 feet/60 feet. +5 to hit. Target is restrained, until they make a Strength check to break out of the web, using their action. The web can be attacked and has an AC of 10 and has 5 HP.

Hide amongst vines. (Bonus.)

Tactics. The spiders know that the tainted roaches are hiding just inside those holes, and that they'll jump out and attempt to paralyse anything that passes. The spiders want this to happen, as it gives them a better chance to steal the prey. To this end, they will try to *web* targets against a wall.

Retreat becomes an option when the spiders feel they're clearly out matched. They may well hide until the advantage returns to them. They're also not greedy – once they have a decent sized target, they'll stop attacking and try to retreat with their meal.

Butchering the spiders might yield some anti-paralysis medication.

TAINTED GREEN COCKROACH

Small beast. Unaligned.

Armor class: 11. Most of their defence comes from staying well within cover and their agility.

HP: 3d8+4. Speed: 25 feet. Fly: 25 feet.

Blindsight: 15 feet. Darkvision: 30 feet. Passive Perception: 11.

Strength: -2. Dexterity: +2. Constitution: +1. Wisdom: -4. Intelligence: -4. Charisma: -4

Stealth: +4.

Languages: --

Immunity to poison. Immunity to paralysis.

Needlelegs. Melee. +3 to hit. 1d6 +2 piercing damage. Target should make a Constitution save (DC 14) or become paralysed for 1d4 hours.

En masse. Melee. +3 to hit. 3d6 +2 piercing damage. Target must be paralysed. A number of roaches dart from their hiding place to attack the target, attempting to rend flesh from them to take back to their hole.

Tactics. They will stay in the cover of their hole until a creature approaches close enough. They will rarely leave the hole, unless they're quite sure it's safe.

Retreat is their default behaviour. They will always prefer waiting for easy food to come their way, rather than fighting for it.

Butchering the roaches may provide glands with paralyzing juices which can be applied to weapons.

MAP

1. Forbidden Grotto. Poisoned water eventually leads out of the mountain. Two tainted spiders live here, starving. Many tainted cockroaches hide in holes and crevices. Access to *Farming Caverns* is only via a tight passage way through the vines.

2. Farming Caverns. Rocks of various heights fill the cavern, each covered in half-nutritious mushrooms. Thick weeds cover the circumference. Husbandry Hodekin are at work here. Two Zealots patrol and bully others. A small room to the south-east is filled with poisonous mushrooms. The rat pens hold giant rats, with a pile of them slaughtered alongside. These are ready to go to Nezaraxis.

3. Water Pits. Deep pits of clean water. A Driftglobe glints at the bottom of the one of them, very difficult to reach.

4. **Territory Corridors.** Patrolled by Zealots, but with a predictable pattern if watched for a while. Vines fill the caverns offering good hiding spots (for Hodekin and characters alike).
5. **Apartments.** Where the Zealots sleep. Some decorative items might be worth something.
6. **Metal Mines.** Three large furnaces burn at all times. Three mine shafts go down, with stairs for easy access. The Zealots rarely travel too far into this room; the heat is uncomfortable for them. One of the shafts will lead to the Wind Tunnel.
7. **The Wind Tunnel.** Barred and boarded, the gate can only be opened with a key. Zealots hold the key. On the other side is a rift to the Air Plane. Annoyed elementals will rampage through the cavern if opened.
8. **Tool Room.** Zealots store the tools created by the Pitheads (and required by the Husbandry and Gemshiners) in here. The room is stuff full of well-made but fragile items that could be improvised as +2 weapons. The door is locked. Zealots hold a key.
9. **Jewellery Quarter.** Gemshiners work here. Piles of luxury stones and gold chunks are transformed into trinkets.
10. **Crystal Pools.** Relaxing and filled with harmless jellyfish. For those that know about it, there's a secret peeky-hole into Nezaraxis' lair.
11. **The Lair.** Nexaraxis roams here. Two piles reach above his poison mist; one of bones and the other of treasure.

