

Cavern map



Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

DragonLance

Official Game Adventure

Dragons of Despair

by Tracy Hickman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE TALE

The history unfolds, wherein the heroes join in the story of the world of Krynn.

Chapter 1: The Road Travels East	2
<i>Wherein darkness spreads over the land, and your players move toward the ancient city.</i>	
Chapter 2: Lost City of the Ancients	12
<i>Xak Tsaroth, the great city, appears before you, swallowed by swamp.</i>	
Chapter 3: Descent into Darkness	19
<i>Beneath the buildings of Xak Tsaroth lies the greater city and its lost glories.</i>	
Chapter 4: Lair of the Dragon	24
<i>Khisanth herself, known also as Onyx, lies in the heart of the ruins, hoarding both treasure and knowledge of the old ways.</i>	
Epilogue	29
<i>Here the curtain falls on this part of the epic. Yet the tale continues: here greater deeds to come cast their shadows.</i>	

APPENDICES

Here are the tools of the story. That which is new is explained, as are encounters by fate alone.

Appendix 1: Rate of Exchange Table	29
Appendix 2: Treasures and Tomes	29
Appendix 3: Monsters and Men	30
Appendix 4: Random Encounter Tables	31
Appendix 5: Canticle of the Dragon	32

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PROLOGUE

A massive chair floats amid soft white light. The gold of its delicately carved frame gleams warmly. To the right of the chair, an ornate stand strains beneath a huge crystal globe. To the left of the chair, another stand holds a large book. Between the stands, an old man in brilliant white robes nods on a glistening throne. One hand rests on the globe, while the other lies poised on the book. The face looks as though the eyes closed only a moment ago. Yet the man does not move, nor does the thoughtful expression change. For this is Astinus of Palanthus, Lorekeeper of the World.

Astinus ranges across the face of the world, searching out the bravest deeds of men, recording the acts of greatness otherwise left unsung. This is the historian's historian: Astinus is there as history happens.

Yet the man has never left this chair.

You, Dungeonmaster, are the spirit of Astinus. You look upon your mortal body and again bid it farewell. For the greatest age in the history of this world called Krynn is about to unfold. You note its passage, walking unnoticed among the greatest of heroes, seeing history through the eyes of men and creatures, good and evil, feeling what they feel.

Now turn from the chair. Leave your mortal self again. Take up your polished staff. Walk softly into the light. Remember all.

At the end of this book is the technical information needed to play the adventure. Refer to these sections to become familiar with the new world of Krynn and all of its wonders.

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the tale



Sample file

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Chapter 1: The Road Travel East

"Dragons of Despair" is the first in the epic DRAGONLANCE™ series of modules. You may play this module by itself or as part of the grand DRAGONLANCE campaign.

"Dragons of Despair" is designed for a party of 6-8 player characters, levels 4-6. Encourage a good balance of character classes in the party — the adventure demands the skills of each class.

DRAGONLANCE contains a story. Players generally will spend the first part of their play gathering information about their quest. This information will direct them to the sunken city of Xak Tsaroth, where the dungeon part of the adventure takes place.

Much about the world of Krynn will be new to both you and your players. There are three important differences between standard AD&D™ campaigns and this universe:

1. Gold has no value in this world. Each place has its own currency and its own values for trade (these are explained in Appendix 1). What one country values may be worthless in another.

2. Clerical spells have not existed for nearly 300 years. Some people still call themselves clerics, still belong to worshipful orders; however, all of these have turned their backs on

the true gods in search of other, less demanding gods (which do not exist). These pseudo-clerics use the same combat table as true clerics but have no spell abilities. PC clerics brought into Krynn from other campaigns lose their spell-casting abilities at once. Never fear: it is the goal of this adventure to regain these abilities.

3. No dragons have existed in Krynn for over 1000 years. As a result, most people in this world smile when dragons are mentioned, believing they are only folktales to frighten children. Few believe that dragons ever did exist; almost nobody believes that they exist now.

Your adventures in Krynn begin with Event 1 below. As the world and history open before them, PCs face events (keyed to times) or encounters (keyed to places). Events and encounters will confront them at all stages of the adventure, and more than likely lead them to Xak Tsaroth (area 44) and an understanding of their important quest.

Players may wish to use PCs from the DRAGONLANCE story, detailed on character cards in the center of the module. It is generally an advantage for players to use these characters rather than bring their own into the campaign.

However, if your players insist on bringing other characters into this game, review them carefully and keep in mind the differences mentioned in this prologue.

All PC elves are Qualinesti Elves in this world. Other kinds of elves exist, but they come into the DRAGONLANCE story in later modules.

The equivalent of a halfling in this world is called a Kender. Kender look like wizened 14-year-olds and, unlike halflings, they wear shoes. These folk have two special abilities (in addition to the usual halfling abilities):

1. *Taunt.* Any creature the Kender taunts must save vs. Spells or attack wildly at once for 1-10 rounds at a -2 penalty to hit and a +2 penalty to their armor class. Kender are masters at enraging others by verbal abuse.
2. *Fearlessness.* Kender are immune to fear, either magical or non-magical. They are, however, curious about everything: a tendency that often gets them into trouble.

The text of the module refers to player characters in various shorthand forms: PCs, adventurers and/or heroes. Read boxed text sections aloud to your players.

Welcome to Krynn, and to the fantastic world of DRAGONLANCE!

Events

As opposed to encounters, which take place in specific areas, events take place at specific times. They may happen anywhere unless stated otherwise. The first event begins your adventure, then each follows at its stated time in the sequence below.

Event 1: The Adventure Begins. Your players stand at the location marked "X" on the Wilderness Map. Begin by relating the following to them:

The air surges fierce and sweet, carrying the clear musk smell of the woodlands. The soft murmur of stirring leaves, of insects, and of small animals fills the landscape. The clear highland sky blushes with the end of day and fades into starry sleep. This is home.

From this rock outcropping the valley below seems peaceful, untouched. Dense forests of pine carpet the mountainsides, varied only by thick aspen woods. The mountains, deep blue in the distance, circle the valley floor and form a soft highland bowl.

It is a wonder that any beautiful places are left in the world. Before the Cataclysm, the days were calm and ordered; nothing was unexpected. Now the world is changed: its change has taught two great lessons.

First, no beauty — not even that in this valley — is safe. All the riches of the past could not protect the ancient peoples. Gold has no value in the world now: it is too soft for swords or armor. Steel is the most valued metal of all, though each small kingdom has its own currency and exchange.

Secondly, no magic lasts forever: true clerics cannot be found, nor have clerics with miraculous powers been known to exist since the time of the Cataclysm—nearly 300 years ago.

Five years ago, you and your friends parted to search for a true cleric. Tonight, you meet on the road to Solace Town and report what you have found.

If the players are using the characters provided in the center of this module, they should now read aloud the backgrounds written on the backs of their character cards. Notice that Goldmoon does not begin the game with the party, but joins them shortly. Players choosing to play their own characters have no stories to tell.

After each player reads his background, run the following encounter:

None of you have found any sign of true clerics through all your travels.

The bushes to your left rustle. Suddenly, dark shapes scurry from the woods on both sides of the road. Their yellow-green skin pales against their heavy black armor; their twisted faces glare from the evening darkness. They crouch in a large circle about you, well beyond sword range.

A stout pony struggles up onto the road, sagging beneath a flabby figure much the same, although larger, than those who surround you. The pony rider suddenly turns his head toward you and yells, "Onyx demands the true crystal staff! Forfeit the staff or we die!"

Fewmaster Toede (Hobgoblin Lord). AL LE; MV 12"; hp 20; D 4; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; can leap up 1-3.

10 Hobgoblins (Advanced Troop). AL LE; MV 9"; hp 7; D 3, 5, 3x6, 7, 9; AC 5; HD 1-1; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8

Toede waits for no reply from the party: he has no intention of granting mercy. Roughly turning his swaybacked pony, he shouts, "Destroy them and bring the staff to me!" then gallops into the woods.

Left to Toede's business, the hobgoblins attack. Any who are captured know only that they were ordered to search the road at night and find a blue crystal staff.

When the combat is finished, proceed with the adventure. By now, the PCs are on the road east of Solace (area 1).

Event 2: Goldmoon Found. Roll 1d4. The result indicates how many encounters after the beginning of the game this event takes place.

Suddenly, soft music begins. Its source is a slim, beautiful girl. Lyre in hand, she slides gracefully to sit; nearby, a large plainsman raises a flute to his lips.

The girl's eyes are a bright sky blue, her skin a buttery tan. Most striking of all is the flowing white gold of her hair. Plush white furs trim her woven cape. A single feather folds back along the right side of her head.

Her voice clear as winter air, she begins to sing . . .

The Song of Riverwind is in the center of this module. If Goldmoon is a PC in the adventure, have the player read the lyrics aloud or, if he or she has natural minstrel abilities, sing them with the music provided.

If any PCs present at the event have taken any damage from previous combat, a strange thing happens: a crystal staff falls from a fold in Goldmoon's robe, rolls over to the injured PCs, and heals their damage (see Treasures and Tomes for the limits and effects of the staff). If no PCs have taken damage, then Goldmoon will simply put her lyre away in her pack and, standing, draw forth the staff.

If Goldmoon is a PC, her player may now take over the character and join the rest of the PCs. When she joins the party, her player should read the back of her character card. Then, as Riverwind offers his background, you should read the back of his character card to your players. If no one plays Goldmoon, she will follow Riverwind (who is always an NPC) and be an NPC herself for the rest of this module.

Unless the party takes some action to join with Goldmoon and Riverwind, they gather their belongings, bow to their audience, and leave. If players avoid Goldmoon and Riverwind, they may meet them again in Event 3.

Event 3: Goldmoon Seen Again. If Goldmoon does not join the party in Event 2, the PCs may still meet her later. Roll 1d6 every game day, adding 1 to the number for each day Goldmoon does not meet the heroes. When the result is 6 or more, the PCs glimpse Goldmoon and Riverwind in the distance sometime during the day. The strange musi-



cians will pause, nod, and give the PCs a chance to meet them.

Event 4: Reading of the Canticle. On one of the nights the party is camped (your choice), pass around the Canticle of the Dragon found at the end of this book. As though around the campfire, have each player read one verse aloud, from first verse to last, until they finish the poem.

Event 5: All Winds Turn Cold. On the fourth morning after the adventure begins, a chill breeze begins to blow from the north.

Event 6: Thunderclouds. During the fifth game day, thunderclouds hover angrily to the west, south, and north of the party.

Event 7: The Dragonarmies March. Just after dusk on the fifth game night, the dragonarmies begin to march and conquer all the lands to the south; every 4 hours thereafter, one encounter area falls into their hands. Treat areas that fall as Dragonlands (as area 43). In order to fall, an area must either border area 43 to begin with or have bordered a captured area in the previous hour. The general trend of captured areas should direct the PCs toward Xak Tsaroth (area 44).

If PCs are in a captured area, they see the front lines of the draconian army approaching at a movement rate of 9". This gives them the chance to flee the army toward Xak Tsaroth.

Two regions cannot be captured by the draconian army at this time: the Qualinesti Elflands (area 19) and the Darken Wood (22-26). Theirs is another story, to be told in future DRAGONLANCE modules.

Encounters

Encounters are those episodes in the adventure which are keyed to areas on the map. These encounter areas are bordered by dotted lines on the map. Think of them as a kind of "large dungeon room": whenever the PCs cross the dotted border into an area, the designated encounter takes place at once. Some areas have the same number: this is to create a further sense of uncertainty as your players follow their journey across their unnumbered map. If the PCs cross from one encounter area into one with the same number, simply repeat the encounter.

1. Solace Township

A warm autumn breeze rustles the great Vallenwood trees of Solace. The great road that wanders through the trees blazes in the bright colors of autumn. The richly stained buildings of Solace rest cradled overhead in the boughs of the trees.

Around 500 people live in Solace, not counting the farmers of the outlying fields. The town is built entirely in the huge boughs of mature Vallenwood trees. These trees grow to their full size very quickly.

Solace is primarily a farming community. It has no local government but is ruled by the Theocracy of Seekers from their central city of Haven, some three days journey to the west. As in all Seeker communities, Solace uses the Emas exchange system for money as well as trading in goods. Precious metals, other than silver, have no use here: bricks of gold may prop open doors or hold down papers.

All services that adventurers expect from a town of this size are available for reasonable rates. The exception is smithwork: Theros Ironfeld, town smith, charges usual rates for work on iron items but, because steel is so valuable, charges extra for weapons. (See Appendix 1 for trade values of steel and of Emas in this culture.) Because he works with precious steel, Theros is the most respected man in town.

1a. Inn of the Last Home

Read the first description as the players approach the Inn. Read the second if they enter, the third if the players are using the PCs provided in the module.

The Inn of the Last Home rests cradled high in the boughs of a Vallenwood tree — as do all the buildings here, for Solace is a tree town. Warm laughter tumbles from the Inn. The worn steps wind around the heavy trunk up to the familiar, carved door.

The Inn of the Last Home never changes. The polished wooden bar weaves about several living branches. An old man weaves stories in the corner and delights the crowd gathered about him. The delicate windows of stained glass behind the bar are being polished by Otik Sandath, the barkeeper. He turns and waves, smiling at you, and motions the barmaid in your direction.

The low murmur of voices fills the inn. The bartender turns thoughtfully to polish the glasses. At a far table, near the storyteller, a man and a woman sit together and speak quietly. Another man stands beside the now-silent storyteller while a small boy stares thoughtfully into the fire.

The barmaid steps toward you, smiles, and shows you to a table. Something about her seems familiar. The hair? The intelligent glint of her eyes? Could this be Tika, the little girl who swept the tavern floors a short five years ago? The Inn never changes, but surely its people do.

Otik Sandath (Innkeeper). AL LN; MV 12"; AC 10; HD 1; hp 6; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4

Tika Wayland (Barmaid). AL NG; MV 12"; hp 16; AC 9; HD 3; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (with pan)

5 Townspeople. AL var.; MV 12"; hp 3, 4, 5, 2x8; AC 10; HD 1; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4

The people in the Inn all speak in low hushed tones. Any NPC the PCs approach will react friendly 50% of the time. Each will reveal the following if questioned:

The barkeeper: "A magical staff! I bet it was forged by demons from the terrible Darken Woods. There are terrible mysteries in that place, there are! Och, what an evil place."

A man at a table: "Hooded men have been in town asking about that staff! An evil lot they were, too. I wonder if they were offering a reward."

A man by the storyteller: "A man of the Holy Guard rode through two days ago asking about that staff. He said that anyone who had it or had knowledge of it should make haste to the Capital of Haven and meet at once with the Prelate of the Temple there — but I certainly do not want to get involved!"

The Old Storyteller: "I foresee great and terrible destiny in your eyes. There is a Blue Staff which you must return to Xak Tsaroth. There, in but a few days hence, you shall face your greatest peril in contest for the greatest gift given to man."

A girl at a table: "It was probably found in Darken Wood. I hear that the ruins there are filled with wealth — and dangers to match. No one who has entered that place has ever returned to tell the tale."

A boy dreams by the fire, "I saw the white stag up near Prayers Eye Peak just a few days ago! If only I could catch it. He who walks the paths of the white stag is blessed, I hear tell."

2. Crystalline Lake

The blue of the autumn sky darkens on the deep stillness of the lake. The soft forests of giant Vallenwood border the serene waters on the east, south, and west shores. To the north, a patchwork of fields stretches toward the distant purple mountains.

3. Solace East Woods

The huge Vallenwood trees tower above soft forest paths. Sunlight dapples the floor of the woods, and sparrows and squirrels quarrel overhead. The musty smell of fallen leaves rises through the fragrance of late wildflowers.