

Seizing the Means

Environment

Deep forest

Monsters

Kobold harrier (8)

Gaunt green dragon

Suggested level

13 (Hard difficulty for party of 4)

Treasure

Staff of power

Introduction

Kobolds have gone through a metamorphosis several times in the history of this game we all love. Back in the day the doglike creatures were hateful and murderous, particularly towards fey creatures like pixies and gnomes. Since then kobolds have become more draconic – but they still have a mad on for gnomes.

Like so many other creatures, the gods have had a hand in kobold development. Sometimes benefactor, sometimes detractor, the cruel indifference of deities shapes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual qualities of kobolds. Individually, they're considered weak and subservient. But in large numbers kobolds can be a formidable threat.

Kobolds learn to adapt and even thrive, despite the best attempts of gods and mortals to keep the little reptilian humanoids down. They're clever and plentiful, making up for their vulnerabilities through sheer numbers and devious traps.

So what happens when a band of kobolds, fed up with being put down by the majority of entities in the multiverse, discovers a way to steer the course of their own destiny? With all the changes wrought to their species over time, what will their future hold when they seize the means of their own development?



Description

The adventurers find themselves in an ancient forest, en route to their next goal. Travel through the primeval woods is a challenge without a path to follow, the huge gnarled trees and twisting roots encroaching on all sides and thick moss carpeting the forest floor. Even with the sun (or suns!) at the zenith, only the faintest slivers of light slice through the thick canopy.

Characters who succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check discover a distinct lack of signs of any wildlife beyond birds and small rodents. Any sort of larger game is conspicuous by its absence. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes the thickets in the area are unnaturally overgrown, with small gaps and passages winding throughout these abundant

bushes. The thickets block sight, and it is difficult terrain for any creature attempting to move through.

In addition, a creature moving through thickets must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw once each round it's in the thicket or take 3 (1d6) piercing damage from the thorns. Creatures moving within the thicket who succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check hear shambling sounds from deeper within the thicket, while small birds and rodents eye such creatures curiously.

Eventually, whether making their way through the thickets or when the party makes camp, a low-hanging fog begins to creep over the ground, tendrils of acrid vapor snaking through the thick vegetation.

Creatures exposed to the fog must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. At the end of the hour, poisoned creatures can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success.

Creatures traveling through the thicket who succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check manage to navigate using the small unnatural passageways and find their way to a large clearing 150 feet in diameter deep, deep within the woods.



An enormous mound, covered in thick, lush moss, rises from the ground against the farther perimeter of the clearing. The mound rises 20 feet high at the top of the heap.

Characters who succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check notice two round, dark patches near the base of the mound. The acrid fog emanates from these two holes, clinging to the ground and spreading out to the forest.

Whether the adventurers discover the mound on their own,

or hunker down in the woods surrounded by the prying eyes of small animals and the claustrophobic atmosphere caused by the dense trees and acrid fog, characters who succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check notice other sets of eyes watching them from the branches of trees above. There are four kobold harriers observing the party warily.

While in the trees, the kobold harriers have three-quarters cover. They speak only Draconic, and if hailed they will bark back in that language. Characters who succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check intuit these kobolds do not have a threatening demeanor. Instead they appear somewhat sheepish and guarded. If they can be coaxed down from their lofty perches, they will glide down to the ground on winglike membranes that stretch from wrist to ankle. Each kobold is bright green, with a crest that begins near their eyes and continues down their spine.

One of the kobolds, Zux, asks the party for help. Any character who spoke Draconic will get the attention of Zux. If no character spoke Draconic, she'll attempt to communicate with the most wizardly looking character.

In lieu of spoken language, Zux points to the mound and tells an elaborate tale through pantomime and gestures.

The mound is actually a **gaunt green dragon** in a magical slumber, covered by millenia of forest growth over its coiled body – but it is indeed waking up. The surrounding region is becoming inhospitable and affecting the kobolds' way of life.

“Kobold tunnelled up from the Big Dark. Kobold found the green dragon asleep in mound! Kobold promised to serve but boss never woke up. Not even for shinies! Kobold big magic borrowed power boss's power. Now kobold fly and breathe death. But boss starting to wake up and kobold scared to get eaten and give power back!”

Generations ago, this kobold tribe discovered this green dragon, Invidiadorax, when they tunneled up from beneath the earth. Characters who succeed on a DC 25 Intelligence (History) check recognize the name from extremely ancient history. Called Envy of Gods, Invidiadorax was contained within its lair by heroes of myth. According to the myth, the heroes set out to destroy the terrible wyrm, and neither they nor the dragon were heard from again. Feel free to substitute myths and legends from your own setting for history on Invidiadorax.

The story is very old and obscure, and only the most knowledgeable characters ought to have heard it at all. If the party agrees to help Zux, she will summon her tribe's shaman, who will arrive with dozens of kobolds. The shaman is a kobold with the knowledge of how to siphon power from Invidiorax and bestow it to the tribe, which has been passed down for many generations of kobolds (a handful of years).

The shaman has tried many times to put the dragon back to sleep, but has no real magical ability. Nevertheless, they will attempt to enact a ritual and maybe with these adventurers' help it will work!

The shaman arranges crude talismans and charms, and characters who succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognize this ritual appears to have no discernible arcane connection. The shaman is completely certain of the ritual's efficacy, and any magical characters in the party reinforce their belief that it will work.

Helping the shaman complete the ritual is a skill challenge requiring five successful skill checks before three failed skill checks.

Characters can attempt a particular skill check only once each, and only if they are proficient in the skill. The skills are Arcana, History, Medicine, Nature, Performance and Religion.

Encourage players to describe how they are using their skill to help the shaman, and consider giving them the opportunity to use other skills if they can describe how it would help, within reason. If the skill challenge is successful, Invidiorax remains in its magical slumber. The poisonous fog, dangerous overgrowth and absence of wildlife subsides over the next few weeks.

As a reward, Zux offers the party a *staff of power* as a reward. The kobolds assume the staff is magical but are totally unable to use the item. The staff belonged to one of the heroes who confronted Invidiorax, a wizard who perished along with their companions in the epic battle where they were able to put the wyrm into stasis.

If the ritual fails, the Invidiorax awakens. The gaunt green dragon bursts forth from the mound, shaking the growth of centuries from its wan scales. It immediately snatches up several kobolds in its Hungry Jaws, ravenous from untold years without sustenance, and turns its greedy gaze upon the party.

Complications

Where to begin?!

Characters might very well notice, then stalk, ambush and kill the kobold harriers before anyone can get a word out. If that's the case, you've still managed to introduce a strange new kobold and give characters a change to navigate some tricky terrain.

If the tribe is assembled for the ritual, characters might be tempted to take arms against the gathered kobolds. They are much weaker than the party, but even the weakest creature poses a threat in numbers.

Even a couple of kobolds, along with the kobold harriers and gaunt green dragon, quickly becomes an extremely Deadly combat encounter. Assuage jittery characters by describing how meek the kobolds are, especially since the party is helping them.

Meeting and interacting with Zux can raise lots of questions, too. These kobolds are experimenting with using

Invidiorax's blood to cause mutations in their tribe. Within their warrens there might be all sorts of different, new kobolds, perhaps signaling a growing threat.

Skill challenges can be tricky to implement as well. Often players want to cast spells, use class features and so forth. It's important to be explicit from the get go that this is a challenge for the characters' skills. Layering on narrative elements during a skill challenge – from both you and the players – helps turn what is essentially a handful of dice rolls into a colorful storytelling experience.

Lastly, there is a lot to draw the attention of curious characters in this encounter. The history of Invidiorax, possibly more treasure, and how exactly the kobolds were able to siphon and use the draconic power are all great hooks for further adventures.

You can add to your world's culture and lore by exploring draconic history, or create your own new myths to help bring your setting to life.



Did you enjoy this encounter?

There's 55 more encounters waiting for the right moment to enrich your campaign world inside *Out of the Box: Encounters for 5th Edition*.

Each of the encounters in the book has full-color art and maps. The ArcKnight pack expands encounters further with flat plastic pawns and battlemats with transparent object and terrain pieces.

The stats for **kobold harriers** and the **gaunt green dragon** are over at [Nerdarchy the Website here](#). But for a fast and dirty version of these monsters use the following:

For **kobold harriers** use kobolds with these changes: increase hit points to 28 (8d6), add fly 20 ft., damage resistance to poison, a Flyby feature, and the kobold harrier falls at the end of a turn if it's airborne and the only thing holding it aloft is its flying speed.

For the **gaunt green dragon** use a young green dragon with these changes: decrease hit points to 88 (16d10), halve all its movement speeds, its Poison Breath has Recharge (6), and when the dragon does damage with its Bite attack it gains 5 temporary hit points.

Progress on the book and other items from the Kickstarter is moving forward very steadily. Everyone on the team feels confident we'll deliver on the pledges ahead of the estimated delivery date.

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