
1.03 – Buzzsaw

Level 1 Encounter (100 EXP/character)

Plot Points

- There's big money to be made going after a nearby Atal-Ashi hive.

Read the following:

After a long night on the river, you drag your raft onto the bank and collapse from exhaustion, too worn to post a guard or make a camp. You awake in the late evening, pleased and surprised that nothing came along while you slept.

The river is wide and slow here. You stay mostly to the center, sure that Elven slave-takers will be prowling the banks. The quiet desolation of the shores is a testament to how few communities have survived the Elven raids. You pass a number of ghost towns, some charred, others simply abandoned. With so many boats on the river, the fishing is poor and you find yourselves forced to make occasional stops to hunt and forage.

Note that the Needlefang Drake Swarm underwent significant revision in the 11/19/09 errata.

Setup

Monster	4	5	6
Needlefang Drake Swarm	A	A	A
Spiretop Drake	B, C, D	B, C	B, C, D
Guard Drake	-	E	E

Have the PC's make a Perception or Nature check (DC 10). Place the characters in order from lowest to highest on the numbered spaces below. Characters that fail the check are surprised for the first round of combat. It is not possible to surprise the drakes.

You form a skirmish line and slowly make your way into the underbrush, looking for berries, roots and small game. A tiny lizard, no more than eight inches tall creeps out from under a bush, cocking its head at [character in position #1].

[He/She] briefly considers shooting it, but it doesn't look like it would make much of a meal. After a few seconds, it is joined by another lizard, then another... and [character #1] is suddenly faced with a rapidly growing swarm. They hiss and make ready to attack.

The Spiretop and Guard Drakes will appear on the map at the end of the swarm's second action. They will act on following rounds.

As you hack your way through the swarm, you hear the terrifying cries of larger drakes charging into the fray. They bear the same markings, but seem more intelligent.

Tactics

The Swarm will fight to the death and will savage fallen characters rather than move on to new targets. The other drakes prefer hit-and-run tactics and will flee when they become seriously injured.

Resolution

Have the PCs make a DC Nature or Intelligence check:

These creatures are Atal-Ashi drakes, an especially pernicious breed that bands together in "hives." A hive can produce hundreds of the tiny drakes each season. Those that survive will grow to adolescence, swapping gender as needed to maintain proper ratios. The flying drakes were male, the snapping drakes female.

Somewhere out there, however, is a mated pair of full adults laying eggs in a cave or dug out wallow. Unless checked, a hive can threaten farms and small towns. For this reason, the dukes have posted a standing bounty on them: 10 gold for the heads of the adolescents, 100 gold for the adults.

Loot

60gp for Drake heads (obtained at Ostlea Hollow)

Encounter Map

Monster Stat Blocks

Needlefang Drake Swarm		Level 2 Soldier
Medium natural beast (reptile, swarm)		XP 125
HP 38; Bloodied 19	AC 18; Fortitude 15; Reflex 17; Will 14	Initiative +7 Perception +7
Speed 7 Immune fear; Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerability 5 damage from close and area attacks.		
Traits		
⚙️ Swarm Attack • Aura 1		
The needlefang drake swarm makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its turn in the aura.		
Standard Actions		
⊕ Swarm of Teeth • At-Will		
Attack: +8 vs. AC Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, or 2d6 + 2 damage against a prone target.		
Other Powers		
‡ Pull Down • At-Will		
Action: Minor 1/round. Attack: +3 vs. Fortitude Hit: The target is knocked prone.		
Str 15 (+3)	Dex 18 (+5)	Wis 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 10 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		
Monster found in Monster Manual 1 and Compendium		

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Guard Drake		Level 2 Brute
Small natural beast (reptile)		XP 125
HP 48; Bloodied 24	AC 15; Fortitude 15; Reflex 13; Will 12	Initiative +3 Perception +7
Speed 6 Immune fear (while within 2 squares of an ally)		
Standard Actions		
⊕ Bite • At-Will		
Attack: +6 vs. AC Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage, or 1d10 + 9 damage while within 2 squares of an ally.		
Str 16 (+4)	Dex 15 (+3)	Wis 12 (+2)
Con 18 (+5)	Int 3 (-3)	Cha 12 (+2)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		
Monster found in Monster Manual 1 and Compendium		

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Spiretop Drake		Level 1 Skirmisher
Small natural beast (reptile)		XP 100
HP 29; Bloodied 15	AC 16; Fortitude 11; Reflex 14; Will 13	Initiative +6 Perception +3
Speed 4, fly 8 (hover)		
Standard Actions		
⊕ Bite • At-Will		
Attack: +6 vs. AC Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.		
⊕ Snatch • At-Will		
Attack: +4 vs. Reflex Hit: 0 damage, and the spiretop drake steals a small object from the target, such as a vial, scroll, or coin.		
‡ Flyby Attack • At-Will		
Effect: The spiretop drake flies up to 8 squares and makes one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The drake doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of the attack.		
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 18 (+4)	Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 3 (-4)	Cha 11 (+0)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		
Monster found in Monster Manual 1 and Compendium		

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GM's Notes

Try to make the distinction between the Atal-Ashi Hive Drakes and run-of-the-mill drakes.

Lore – Atal-Ashi Hive Drakes

Atal-Ashi hive drakes were first recorded in the journals of Thuliarimis, an Elf who wrote extensively of his travels in the western part of what would become Ontanath (the Human kingdom the PCs are currently within) and the Kritun islands off the coast. He described them as “wingless lizards, sharp of fang and claw, large as a horse and surrounded by their many smaller get.” It is believed that the Atal-Ashi were confined to the larger islands until hatchlings made it to the mainland, hidden away on trading vessels.

Atal-Ashi drakes can switch gender as the hive requires, though this is less common among the full adults than the adolescents. Most hives are formed when six to eight adolescents strike out on their own from an overpopulated hive. Hormonal changes in the alpha male and female cause them to become much larger than the adolescents.

The mated adults prefer caves for their nests, but have adapted to houses and barns where they are available, making them a threat to isolated farms. Assuming sufficient game, the adult female will drop three to five clutches over the course of a year, producing as many as four hundred eggs.

Unlike many reptiles, Atal-Ashi drakes do not practice cannibalism, even among the young, nor do they fight for dominance. Part of what makes them so dangerous is their teamwork within the hive. Beast handlers report that Atal-Ashi drakes are nearly impossible to train, especially as they transition to the next stage of adulthood.