A Kobold Revolution

This is the first ever Dungeons and Dragons adventure to be published in *Sapere Aude*. Roleplaying games are not a storytelling medium that most people are literate in. What is a d20, and what do you do with it when your Game Master (GM) says "make a Charisma check?" Games are a rich storytelling medium, one that grants its players the ability to craft a completely unique story with them as the stars. By publishing this adventure in the pages of *Sapere Aude*, I hope to show to you that roleplaying games are not just entertainment, but a medium of literary escape, social bonding, team building, and creative thinking every bit as potent as a novel, a play, or a puzzle.

A Kobold Revolution is not a typical Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) experience. It is not one in which a group of lawless adventurers enter a monster-infested dungeon, slaughter its inhabitants, and leave with their gold. This adventure provides the framework to tell the story of how five puny creatures stood up to a mighty tyrant, and how they prevailed and achieved their freedom—or failed, and were brutally suppressed. The outcome of the story depends on the actions of the players, and the players have total freedom in how they choose to act. This act of roleplaying invests the players deeply into the story and requires them to think cleverly about how their character would overcome the challenges placed before them.

The "adventure module" is an unusual art form, because it is incomplete. In that way, it is similar to the script of a play—though instead of being filled with concrete dialogue and stage direction, it is filled with charts, numbers, maps, and read-aloud text that encourages the reader to paraphrase and improvise as frequently as they wish. A D&D adventure is essentially the blueprint of a story—a freeze-dried, dehydrated story that is waiting to be brought to life by a group of four-to-six gamers sitting together around a table.

This dehydrated story is what you'll find below. A Kobold Revolution is based off of the handful of scribbled notes I wrote as an improvisational aid while I served as a Game Master—the referee and lead storyteller in a game of D&D. You can use this module in much the same way; instead of having to craft a fantasy epic from scratch when trying to play a roleplaying game for the first time, this adventure can help guide your story. Note that while this adventure can guide the course of story, provide it with a framework and a defined beginning and end, the very nature of Dungeons and Dragons defies prescribed narrative. The game is improvised from start to finish, and the players also have narrative agency. The Game Master is not an author of a novel, and the player characters will often enact plans ruin even the best-laid plans.

That is the joy of Dungeons and Dragons. That is what separates it from a night at the movies, passively watching a story play out on screen. Everyone has the power to tell a story, and everyone is always being surprised. When I ran this adventure for my players at the Sapere Aude Game Night, my favorite part was a cockamamie, improvised plan: the players brewed a poison to kill the despotic dragon Tyrannus, surrounded it in a magical illusion of a massive cake, and presented to him by declaring "Happy Dragon Day!" The prideful dragon ate it up, no pun intended.

Take this adventure and go tell a story. Read over the <u>D&D Basic Rules</u> to get a grasp of how to play, and don't be afraid to play fast and loose with the rules. They're more like guidelines anyway, just to provide a bit of structure in this game of make-believe. Seek out a handful of friends and few funny-shaped dice, and let yourself become kobolds for an evening. Lead a revolution. Take down the power-hungry dragon Tyrannus, and revel in the strength of little creatures. Tell your story—and have fun.

Note: In the time between this adventure being submitted to *Sapere Aude* and its publication, it was been accepted for publication by Kobold Press under the name *Down with the Dragon: A Kobold Revolution*. Below is an abridged version of the adventure that I ran at the Honors Program D&D Night in Spring 2017, including my original maps.

A Kobold Revolution

GM Introduction

Most kobolds do not live to serve dragons. No, most kobolds are little more than slaves, pinned beneath the iron claw of oppression—but in one isolated volcano, revolution is brewing. The lazy and decadent red dragon Tyrannus sleeps atop its treasure hoard while his kobold slaves toil in subterranean gold mines and mint new coins for his hoard. But on a day like no other, a sudden, violent riot in the mines threatens to bring the dragon to a fiery end. This is a single-session Dungeons and Dragons adventure for 3–5 pregenerated kobolds, perfect for convention play or for introducing new players to fantasy RPGs.

When text is presented in a gray box like this, read or paraphrase this text aloud to your players. This read-aloud text helps immerse your players in the world of the game, and can convey important scenic details to the players.

Summary

The red dragon Tyrannus enslaved a warren of about 500 kobolds and bent them to his will. While the kobolds initially rejoiced at serving a strong, capable leader, they soon learned that Tyrannus cared only about enriching himself. About 100 of these kobolds have been granted wings by the dragon for their loyalty, and now serve Tyrannus as his personal police, using fear and violence to keep the wingless kobold laborers in line.

At the beginning of the adventure, the player characters (PCs) toil in the mines, digging up gold to mint new coins for Tyrannus's hoard. Without warning, a riot erupts in the mines, killing the guards and throwing the lower levels of the lair into chaos. The kobolds have long yearned for freedom, and the PCs take this opportunity to seek Tyrannus's overthrow.

There are many ways for the PCs to overthrow their despotic ruler. Some are directly accounted for in the text, but PC creativity is strongly encouraged.

Monsters

Monsters found in this adventure are indicated with **bold text**, and their game statistics can be found in the <u>D&D Basic Rules</u> or in the online <u>Systems Reference Document</u>. The winged kobolds of the Dragonflight possess the following additional traits.

- **Armored.** Kobold soldiers wear ring mail and have an AC of 14.
- **Winged.** Soldiers of the Dragonflight are granted wings for their service, giving them a fly speed of 30 feet.
- Challenge Rating Increase. Kobold soldiers have a challenge rating of ½ (50 XP).

Factions

Several factions exist within the volcano, many of which pursue different agendas. As the Game Master, you can play up the conflict between factions to raise the stakes and increase the drama of your game.

Laborers. While most kobolds long for freedom, most lack the resolve to stand up to their oppressors. While many laborers are angry, they are disorganized, and riots are swiftly and brutally suppressed by Tyrannus's militia, the Dragonflight. About four hundred kobolds are laborers toiling in the gold mines beneath the volcano, and have the strength to overcome Tyrannus and his Dragonflight if they are organized. The riot that sparks this adventure is led by an angry kobold named Bright-Eyes, and while she is passionate, she lacks the skill to organize a riot into a successful revolution.

Artisans. Some kobolds eke out a marginally better existence than Tyrannus's laborers, mostly because they possess a special skill that Tyrannus believes can be useful to him. Only about 100 kobolds are artisans, and most live in fear of their special skill being suddenly deemed

worthless or dangerous. Most are sympathetic to the PCs' cause, but will only turn on the dragon if they think they will be safe if the revolution fails. The most important artisans described in this adventure are Glossk the alchemist and Chipper the storyteller.

Both artisans and laborers live in dingy caves near the surface of the volcano's magma lake.

Dragonflight. Some kobolds have a vested interest in maintaining Tyrannus's rule, and none are more ingratiated to their ruler than the Dragonflight. These kobold soldiers serve the dragon faithfully, and have been granted wings for their loyal service. The nearly 100 soldiers of the Dragonflight live in impressive stone towers on the elevated rings of the volcano. They are led by General Maul, Tyrannus's right hand—but little does the dragon know that Maul is constantly searching for a way to dethrone the dragon and take his "rightful" place as the new ruler.

Tyrannus. The despot himself, Tyrannus is an archetypical greedy dragon. He is lazy, self-centered, and unfathomably wealthy. He sleeps on a bed of gold and jewels, resting in a decadent and impractical 100-foot diameter silver dish, suspended hundreds of feet above the volcano's magma lake by thick iron chains. He is easily flattered, but ruthlessly slaughters anyone who would try to steal his gold. His fatal flaw is that he cares nothing for those beneath him, and does not realize that a massive riot has broken out in the mines until the PCs start enacting a plan of revolution.

Pregenerated Characters

Five pregenerated kobolds have been included in this adventure, and their game statistics and pictures are included at the end. A brief description of each is provided, but the players are recommended to further develop their characters themselves.

Chopper. A hot-tempered fighter. You were once a soldier of the Dragonflight, but your

wings were severed and you were thrown into the mines after you joined a revolt.

Beardo. An old, crippled wizard. You have seen countless revolts suppressed, and have secretly learned magic from the alchemist, Glossk. You desperately hope to see freedom in your lifetime.

Torch. A wise, even-tempered cleric. You have secretly healed rioters wounded by the Dragonflight. You worship a god of flame, and would love to see your god consume Tyrannus.

Stabby. A mistrustful rogue. You just love killing things. Doesn't matter what it is, but a dragon's head is an awfully prestigious trophy.

Plucky. An optimistic bard. When the watchful ears of the Dragonflight turn away from you, you sing protest songs to rally other laborers to your cause. You've heard forbidden tales of ancient kobold heroes and dragonslayers from Chipper the storyteller.

Adventure Start

Read or paraphrase the following text to introduce your players to this adventure, especially if they are new players. This introduction gives the players a chance to barter over which character they wish to play.

Kobolds are among the lowliest creatures in the world. They are small in a world ruled by the large, and weak in a world ruled by the strong. *You* are kobolds. You live in a family of about five hundred other kobolds—and you are ruled by a massive, fire-breathing dragon.

This dragon, Tyrannus, forces you and your kin to toil in mines beneath his volcanic lair, digging gold from the black earth and smelting the ore into coins for his overflowing treasure hoard. Many kobolds have joined Tyrannus as police and soldiers to save their hides, using the power granted to them by the dragon to keep laborers like you in line.

Which kobold are you?

At this point, reveal the character sheets and let the players decide which one they want to play.

Are you Chopper, the hot-tempered fighter? Beardo, the old wizard? Torch, the wise and even-tempered cleric? Stabby, the mistrustful rogue? Or Plucky, the optimistic bard who only sings protest songs?

The player characters begin in Area 1, the upper gold mines. After the players have chosen their kobolds, read the following to begin the adventure:

You kobolds find yourself deep in the mines beneath Tyrannus's volcano. Using picks and hammers, you and dozens of other kobolds toil at the wall of an empty lava chamber in search of veins of gold. Suddenly, the monotonous sounds of pickaxes against stone are interrupted by the sound of shouts, screams, and fighting! You turn to look, and see that some miners have turned their picks against the guards, and more kobolds are joining in the riot with every passing second.

You have your picks and the clothes on your back. What do you do?

Area 1: Upper Gold Mines

Miles of mining tunnels wind through the volcanic rock beneath Tyrannus's lair. The PCs are in the uppermost chamber of a new mining tunnel, and security is heavy. The cavern slopes downward to the south, eventually connecting to other networks of mining tunnels. A grand stone staircase in the north leads upwards to the heart of the volcano (Area 2).

Six winged **kobolds** keep watch over this tunnel, but are currently being mobbed by a group of 10 kobold **commoners**.

Fight. If the PCs want to use their mining picks and hammers against the guards, these improvised weapons deal 1d4 piercing or bludgeoning damage.

If the guards are defeated, the PCs are approached by Bright-Eyes, the leader of the riot. She is winded from the fight but eager to keep the riots going. If the PCs ask her motive or wish to help, she says:

"I've spent more years'n I've got scales serving that fiery gasbag. Too many years livin' in fear of the flames. If you wanna put his spark out as much as me, go topside and rally the rest of the kobolds. I've got plenty more hell to raise down here."

Bright-Eyes would love the PCs' help in organizing a real rebellion. If they go to the Kobold City above the mines and gain the support of the other commoners, they may be able to devise a plan to take down Tyrannus. This will give her time to free more laborers in the mines and organize a force to attack the dragon itself.

Flight. If the PCs wish to flee to safety, they are easily able to escape in the chaos. Escaping up the staircase is their best option, as it takes them to the kobold city and their homes. Escaping downward into the other mining tunnels is possible, but the riots will quickly spread to other parts of the mine.

Area 2: Kobold City

You rush up the stairs to the main level of Tyrannus's lair: the volcano's caldera. Kobold caves surround the pool of magma at the bottom of this massive cavern, choked by volcanic gases and scorched by heat. Your homes and all your possessions, including your weapons, armor, food, and what little silver you possess, are here.

About fifty feet above you is another tier of buildings, constructed on an outcropping of rock on the volcano's walls. In these stone fortresses live the kobolds blessed by Tyrannus, and all of them are soldiers in his service. These kobolds are known as the Dragonflight, and they fly about on leathery wings, a sign of their favor with the dragon.

And hundreds of feet above you, looming high above all, is the dragon's treasure hoard. A massive silver dish, suspended from the mountain's walls by three thick chains, overflows with gold, jewels, and opulent works of art. Tyrannus himself sits atop this treasure hoard, unconcerned with the hum-drum lives of lowly kobolds.

Your caves are nearby, and several kobolds mill about, doing business under the watchful eye of the Dragonflight guards. What do you do?

Area 2a: The PCs' Homes

All kobold homes are caves carved into the edge of the volcano. They are lit only by the glowing light of the nearby magma lake, and are furnished only with a bed made from a flat rock. The player characters can find all the items listed on their character sheets here.

Area 2b: Alchemist's Shop

Thick clouds of fragrant purple and yellow smoke pour from the mouth of this cave. You take a deep breath and walk inside, and find that the scented fumes mask the thick smell of volcanic sulphur outside. Through the colorful haze, you see a one-horned kobold stirring a black cauldron easily twice her size. She glances up and smiles, her face covered in wrinkles.

"Ahh... welcome, welcome. Coming for a charm to protect you from the heat? Or the riots? Heh heh...."

The alchemist, a cackling kobold named Glossk, possesses the ability to make a potion that could destroy Tyrannus forever, and she recognizes that now is the perfect time to strike. Her lack of respect for personal space and sinister laughter makes conversation with her uncomfortable at best.

Firescale Charm. Glossk was serious about offering the PCs a charm to ward against the heat. If any of the PCs ask for that charm, she fishes a glowing necklace of golden scales out of the cauldron and offers it for 30 silver pieces.

Buying this charm may not be possible unless the PCs agree to pool their wealth. Any kobold that wears this necklace gains immunity to fire damage.

Elixir Draconis. If conversation turns to the riots or dethroning Tyrannus, Glossk conspiratorially whispers that she has devised a recipe for an elixir that may spell doom for their overlord, and if the PCs can retrieve its ingredients, she will brew it for them. This potion transforms the imbiber into an ancient red dragon for 1 minute, after which they return to their original form. It requires three ingredients: a single gold coin from the hoard of a dragon, the dying blood of one of the drinker's own kind, and an ounce of molten lava.

However, there is a side effect that Glossk is not aware of: if the transformed user kills a dragon and claims its treasure hoard while under the effects of this potion, they are doomed to remain a dragon forever. Their mind quickly succumbs to a lust for wealth and power, and over time they become paranoid, seeing all other creatures as threats to their rule. Chipper the stonemason (Area 2c) knows the story behind this potion, and cautions the PCs against using it if they tell him about it.

Glossk also knows of another use for this potion, but only reveals it if the PCs ask for a way to poison Tyrannus. If the dragon is tricked into consuming the potion, it will undergo a horrible, painful, paradoxical transformation into itself! Over the course of 1 minute, a dragon that is "transforming into itself" is incapacitated and loses all damage resistances and immunities. In this case, it means that if Tyrannus is incapacitated by this potion, he loses his fire resistance, and can be destroyed by being cast into the magma lake.

Ingredients. A gold coin may be difficult to find, as common kobolds are not permitted to possess gold; their only currency is silver coins. A gold coin can be pilfered by sneaking onto Tyrannus's treasure hoard, the silver disc suspended above the lava (Area 4). It can also be

looted from the corpse of General Maul, Tyrannus's right hand (Area 3). The **dying blood of a kobold** can easily be found from a kobold near death, such as one mortally wounded in the riots in the mines (Area 1). Finally, an **ounce of molten lava** can be found in the magma lake (Area 2d). Glossk offers a steel cup and a pair of tongs with which to dip it in the lava.

Area 2c: Stonemason's House

You enter a kobold cave lit by a half dozen open-flame lanterns. The light of the flames dances on the walls, illuminating countless intricate carvings of ancient kobold mythology. At the far end of the room, a tall, scrawny kobold chisels at the wall.

Your footfalls alert him to your arrival, and he jumps slightly as he turns to look at you. "Ah! Hello!" he stammers. "What are you doing here? You're not with dragon are you? No. No wings. Good. You're not with the dragon. Right. What do you want?"

Chipper, the stonemason, is a young storyteller. His mentor passed down ancient tales of heroic kobolds who fought back conquering humans, elves, and even dragons. These stories are forbidden under Tyrannus's rule, and Chipper secretly carves them into the walls of his cave, hoping to pass them on to kobolds who will listen—ones who will try and free their people from the dragon's rule.

Chipper is a non-player character (NPC) that can serve many supportive roles in this adventure. He can serve as the mouthpiece for the people of the kobold city; instead of canvasing the town and speaking to minor NPCs, the PCs can interact with Chipper. If the PCs want an inspiring history of kobold dragonslayers, you can improvise the story of a grand kobold hero. (Perhaps named Crispy the Dragonslayer?) If your party has fewer than 5 PCs, Chipper can be convinced to help them out—use one of the unused character sheets provided with this adventure to represent Chipper.

Most significantly, Chipper knows a grim tale about a kobold who usurped a dragon by using magic, only to transform into the very evil she sought to destroy. If he is with the PCs when Glossk describes the *elixir draconis* or the PCs tell him about it, he imparts this story and urges them not to use it.

Area 2d: Magma Lake

The magma lake bubbles and fumes in the center of the kobold city. It is massive, hundreds of feet wide in all directions. Reaching the surface of the lava to get an ounce of magma is tricky; there is a 5-foot drop in elevation from the edge of the lake to the surface of the lava. A 2-1/2-foot-tall kobold will have a hard time reaching it.

If the PCs attempt a wild stunt to try and reach the lava safely, each kobold taking part in the attempt must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the creature is singed by the lava and takes 2d6 fire damage. If the PCs take a slower, safer option (like carving stairs into the stone), reward their ingenuity with easy success.

Area 2e: Tunnel Entrance

At some point, the PCs will likely seek a way to reach the dragon. They are all aware of the tunnels that snake upward through the stone of the volcano. By traveling through these tunnels, they reach the military barracks of the Dragonflight (Area 3), and then the top of the volcano itself, from which they can access the dragon's hoard (Area 4).

Area 3: Dragonflight Training Yard

This area can be found in the full text published by Kobold Press.

Area 4: Hoard of Tyrannus

You emerge from the tunnel and find yourself on the volcano's ridge. Cool mountain air bites at your scales, and wind whips at your clothes. But even over the howling of the wind, you can hear the low rumbling of the dragon snoring in his sleep. Near your feet is a thick metal ring which anchors a massive steel chain, each link bigger than your entire body. The chains descend into the volcano's crater, supporting the massive treasure hoard upon which the dragon sleeps.

Climbing down the chain requires a PC to make a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. Failure by less than 5 has no consequence, but failure by 5 or more (a result of 5 or lower) causes the PC to lose their grip and fall nearly one thousand feet into the magma lake below. Be sure the PCs are aware of this consequence. If they need a safety net, perhaps their falling form is spotted by a member of the Dragonflight, and they are caught in midair (taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall). This may have other consequences, but at least they aren't dead!

Interactions with Tyrannus are incredibly openended, and the decisions the PCs have made up to this point can lead to too many potential outcomes to predict here. Use your best judgment as a GM to improvise this exchange. Tyrannus's character description in the "Factions" section can help you roleplay the dragon.

Sleeping Dragon. Unless the mass riots have spilled into the Kobold City, the young red dragon Tyrannus is fast asleep on his treasure hoard. If the PCs are here to grab a single gold coin, the character that plucks the coin from the edge of the heap must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check, rousing the dragon on a failure. If a PC gets greedy and wants to search the hoard for valuables, they must make a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check to climb across the mounds of gold. On a success, they return with their arms full of treasure: 10d6 gp worth of gold and gemstones.

Arrogant Dragon. Tyrannus is utterly self-absorbed, and is pitifully weak to flattery. Nearly all actions except stealing gold or

harming him can be forgiven if a PC flatters him and makes a successful DC 10 Charisma (Deception) check.

Event: Down with the Dragon!

The final battle with Tyrannus can be found in the full text published by Kobold Press.

Conclusion

Tyrannus writhes in pain. His body spasms and lashes, spewing flame and crushing boulders in his death throes. His bestial roars of rage and pain echo through the volcano, and are then silenced. A breathless quiet hangs in the air. Then, in a deafening cheer, the silence is filled with the joyous shouts of your kin. You are mobbed by happy kobolds, hugging you, lifting you up above their heads, and showering you with praise and thankfulness.

Below is just one way the adventure could end, an optimistic ending in which the kobolds reclaim the dragon's treasure and the tyrant is deposed forever. How does your story end?

In the midst of the celebration that follows, a loud *CRACK* rings from above. All kobolds grow quiet and turn their eyes upward to mouth of the volcano—and the enormous silver disc upon which all of Tyrannus's vast treasure sits. One of the iron chains supporting the hoard has snapped; it slithers through the air like a headless snake. Time seems to move slowly as the disc lists to one side, and thousands of gold coins begin to pour off its slick surface. Kobolds run for cover as coins and precious gems rain down upon the city. Much of the wealth pours directly into the molten lake in the center of town, but as the storm of spoils subsides, another cheer rings through the mountain:

"Down with the dragon! Up with the kobolds!"

Of course, this adventure could end in many other ways, too. It could end in total disaster; the PCs might be burnt to a crisp and their revolution violently suppressed. Or the PCs could survive and the dragon could die, but at

such terrible cost that they must wonder if their pyrrhic victory was worth it. Or perhaps the PCs reach the ridge of the volcano and decide that revolution is too dangerous, and decide to flee down the mountainside and hide in the forests beyond.





















