

## Cameron Baker's Raiders of Ivywatch Playtest Notes

### Testers:

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I want to preface this by saying I only tested part of the adventure. My players only had a few weeks available! If somewhere in my notes I have written "my players didn't use this" it's mostly because of timing and scheduling constraints.

I only ran the following scenes:

Part 1: The Gate, Bombardment!, The Hawklords, Ivywatch Keep

Part 2: Side Entrance, The Chappel, Yslansh

### **Director Experience:**

Overall, I enjoyed the adventure! I like the combat encounters and the plot of saving a town from a lizardfolk tribe! It reminded me of *Against the Cult of the Reptile God!* Classic!

I think there are areas to be worked out. Mostly, the adventure isn't easy for a Director to run. The Director is expected to prep and read a LOT of scenes (especially in part 2) based on several contingencies that likely happen *during* the session. A few times, I found myself panicked because I had prepped the wrong encounter. This might be a problem only I experience, and could be fixed if it were fully implemented into a VTT.

The PDF also gives you a guide to Tullow Vale all at once in the beginning. I felt it was a lot to read, and didn't give me a lot of context for the adventure. [Note: My players didn't interact with those NPCs too much, so I'm sure I would have used them more if they did.] I feel like all the information up to page 6 could be presented in a better way.

The scene graphs were a good way to visually tell how each scene connected together. The swords iconography was great!

The "beyond saving" ticking clock mechanic was really cool. It never came up in my game because the heroes never took a respite (it got dicey in the final two battles) but I could see myself deploying this to great effect.

I think that trimming down the adventure would help a lot for the Director. There's generally a lot to read and prep and I think just going into the woods to find a lizardfolk cult is great! The rest of the story didn't click with my table. There are two whole adventures in this PDF, and I feel like I could only run one of them at a time. By narrowing the focus of the adventure, it would help the Director a lot. Often, I was confused as to which was the A-plot and B-plot. I think my players were as well.

I'll try to go over my table's notes in detail below.

## Part 1

### Scene 1: The Gate

I liked the encounter. It was a fun start to the story, and set a tone for the adventure.

Freeing hostages from capture is fun! I think the lizardfolk should have had more speed to give the heroes a real challenge. Maybe give them mounts?

Not many notes from the players on this encounter, they enjoyed it!

Lewin felt forgotten after this scene. It's written that he breaks the contract with the heroes and there isn't another reason to interact with him again.

### Scene 2: Bombardment!

This was a great montage test. No notes, ship it.

### Scene 3: The Hawklords

It was unclear to me which map to use for this encounter. Probably just needs to be reworded as "if the heroes got x result in the montage test, use y map". Also, none of the maps had a bridge, so I had to improvise. The VTT I was using didn't allow the bridge image file to be placed on the map.

It was not made clear where the NPCs should go. I think the reference maps should have specific squares where the monsters go instead of boxed ranges.

If Lord Thorton has a polder squire to save her at the last minute, (which I never had to use, to be clear) then why is she put in the battle? I know it would complicate the adventure, but if she has plot armor, then her life isn't really on the line. Maybe that doesn't matter to the players, because they won't know that, but from the Director's perspective, it feels like a cop out if I have to save her.

Loved the Iron Ball Drop mechanic! My players thought it was weird they couldn't somehow prevent it, which I kind of agreed with.

#### Scene 4: Ivywatch Keep

My players didn't engage with this really. They were laser-focused on the lizardfolk, and this didn't answer any questions on that front. To them, everything else wasn't as pressing an issue.

If you run this as a lizardfolk adventure, this scene could be Lord Thorton asking the players for help, and sending them on their way. As it is, I think it confuses the players as they're only thinking about the captured humans.

I think if the players took a respite here, it would have helped, however. Again, they never took a respite, so the adventure could have had a big shift.

They mostly didn't feel they needed a respite and felt like the captured humans was more important.

#### Part 2

##### Cracking the Fort

This was the biggest struggle for me. Based on one montage test, I had to prepare a lot of extra scenes ahead of time, most of which the players never used. It was very overwhelming. It should be easier on the Director. I know I could have run the next sections better had I focused on the path the players wound up in.

#### Scene 2: Side Entrance

I felt like the lizardfolk had a really good chance to succeed in getting away, and they were still able to take actions!

I'm not sure why the heroes needed to prevent the lizardfolk from fleeing, however. If they get away, what happens? During the encounter, I was desperately trying to find an answer. It would be cool if they unleashed another wave of guards or a terrible beast or something. Maybe raised the alarm!

#### Scene 5: The Chapel

This encounter might be impossible for the average party. My table had a really fast null, a troubadour who could grant extra movement, and a talent who could do the same. They barely made it to the hostages in time. It was a tough one. I felt the most comfortable with this encounter however. I think apart from the distance, it was well thought out, and I understood the purpose of each monster really well.

The players felt that getting the last few civilians was impossible, mostly just because of the distance. They worried that an average-speed party would have to double move to get the civilians, and that wouldn't be fun.

#### Scene 8: The Portal

Unfortunately for time, I wasn't able to run this scene.

#### Scene 9: Yslansh

This combat seemed very similar to scene 5. A lot of the combats in the adventure have the objective: save the captured civilians. I understand why that is narratively, but in play it feels a bit repetitive. I would merge the two into a larger encounter.

Apart from feeling the same, I enjoyed the encounter. However, the monsters were really spread out, and couldn't move any real distance away from the rituals, so they were rendered useless for most of the first round. The heroes were never really threatened as long as they stayed away from the baddies. I found my self activating monsters because I had to, and it was less tactical. If they were artillery minions, it would be a game changer.

Until...they started killing non-minions. Then it was a different fight. I could replace them with umbral stalkers and they could move around freely.

When the black obelisk showed up, it was epic! But a little too late! The heroes were already in position and could wrap up the encounter easily enough. Activating this on round 2 would be devastating!

Overall, love the encounter, just needs a few tweaks. If this were to replace The Chapel encounter, I wouldn't complain.

#### Final Notes:

I really enjoyed the adventure! There was a lot of it, and I feel I didn't get a good scope of what was the A-plot and what was the B-plot. Both are compelling, but don't fit together very well.

The story in the town feels like what the heroes do when they return with the freed hostages, and now have to deal with the politics etc.

Thanks again for letting me playtest this! I'll run it again in the future closer to the release!