

TP1 Tribute Time

By Dan Hass



The Tofarian Empire provides security and commerce to the vassal communities that serve it. But the cost... Can heroes rise to alleviate the suffering associated with the Empire's requisite tributes? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 1st level characters. Episode 1 of *Tyranny in Purple*.

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Adventure Summary

TP1 Tribute Time is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 1st level characters. It is designed to run using only the *Basic Rules (BR)* and *DM Basic Rules (DBR)* (these are a free download [here](#)). It also utilizes the free *Unearthed Arcana Feats (here)* and *Wardrow's Feat Compendium (here)*. The DM and players should get a strong exposure to D&D 5th Edition and if it is going to be a primary hobby the *Player's Handbook® (PHB)*, the *Monster Manual® (MM)*, and the *Dungeon Master's Guide® (DMG)* are necessary investments.

While the encounters include scaling for 1-8 characters, parties of 1 or 2 PCs and 7 or 8 PCs are fringe circumstances that may play oddly. Specifically, parties of 1-2 are highly susceptible to a single bad die roll, and 7-8 can slow play dramatically. Ideally a party will be 3-6 PCs.

It is set in the *Dimgaard Campaign Setting* (the *Dimgaard Campaign Guide* is a free pdf available at [drivethrurpg.com](#)), but could be set in other campaigns. The Digital copies of the encounter maps are available [here](#).

Dimgaard Philosophy

Dimgaard's primary principle is that D&D should be an entertaining experience. In particular, it should be fun and interesting. The "best" D&D is a collaborative storytelling event where the DM provides the framework and supporting details, while the players contribute by roleplaying the heroes (their characters) that results in epic tales.

"Epic" implies that the heroes be challenged and that success is a question to be decided by the heroes' deeds and choices. *The Lord of the Rings* is only an epic because the reader doesn't know until the final pages if Frodo, Aragorn and the rest will achieve their objectives or die, fruitless, in their efforts.

A great Dimgaard session (and really any D&D session) is where there is the finest line between success and failure and the heroes *just* manage to win (occasionally, just surviving is "winning"). But for those narrowest of victories to have true meaning, they cannot be foregone conclusions, and likely there will be times when the PCs fail – Boromir comes to mind or Gandalf's expedition to Isengard where he was captured.

Preparing the Adventure

It is always a good idea for the DM to read through an adventure before running it. *TP1 Tribute Time* is no different. There are some rather complex encounters that will benefit if the DM spends a few minutes deciding how she will play them. *TP1 Tribute Time* can be run with a lot of interaction between the PCs and NPCs depending on the inclinations of the players and DM. The module deliberately gives **just enough** information about NPCs to move the plot along, leaving a lot of room for a DM to individualize these to her campaign. It makes things smoother if the DM spends a few minutes deciding how she will deliver the NPCs' interactions. Some DMs revel in the opportunity to assume the personas of multiple NPCs over the course of a session while others prefer a summary approach. The decision is a matter of style and showmanship. Similarly, many players look forward to opportunities to interact "in character" while others prefer to summarize. Neither approach is "correct"; both are valid ways to collaboratively build a story, but the DM should try to anticipate her players' preferences (and decide her own) and prepare accordingly.

A battlemat or dungeon tiles may be helpful, but not necessary.

Items for Review

- BR/PHB: hunting traps, surprise.
- Feats (*WFC*). Trained Reflexes
- Creatures (*DBR MM*). bandit, commoner, guard, jackal, mastiff
- Spells. *command, guidance, sacred flame*

Running the Adventure

TP1 Tribute Time is made up of five encounters. An encounter is "something significant that happens" (on average an encounter should take 20 to 40 minutes of game time). Generally, these will fall into two categories: roleplaying or combat. Often the decision as to what type of encounter it will be is based on the PCs' actions. Sometimes a combat encounter may evolve into a roleplaying encounter when mistaken identities, misunderstandings, or action based on false assumptions are corrected, thus ending the violence. Other times conversations, interrogations, or negotiations can become heated and erupt in violence changing a roleplaying encounter into a combat encounter.

Dimgaard gives the DM opportunities to reward good roleplaying. Good roleplaying can generally garner players an easier path

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to achieving the desired outcomes. However, it takes stellar roleplaying to completely avoid combat. Dimgaard is a dark and violent place where opponents with short tempers often find violence the most direct route to achieving their goals.

The encounters in *TP1 Tribute Time* challenge PCs in different ways. The combat encounters are expected to meet the definition of **hard** (*DMG* p.81), but additionally there are encounters to test the PCs' ability to deal with diplomatic situations and pose difficult questions about their characters' morals.

Modification "Exploits"

Technically each encounter uses a **medium** XP budget per the encounter building guidelines. And for many parties a **medium** encounter may turn out to meet the definition of hard as PCs may be built for roleplaying and the party may not have optimized their tactics.

Modifications have been made to the creatures which do not increase the calculated CR of the creature but do increase the challenge of the creature. These are denoted with a ¹. These are not intended to be used with all parties, nor does a DM need to use every suggested modification. The DM should gauge the effectiveness of the party and decide which of these to use (keeping in mind the definition of **hard** encounters).

Adventure Background

The Tofarian Empire demands tributes of various kinds from the communities it subjugates. Further, the tributes can be altered based on the needs of the Empire. Usually, the tributes are trained soldiers, slaves, crafted goods, and raw materials. The tributes occur annually unless there is a special levy.

The slave tribute is particularly nefarious. Although the Empire precludes the common ownership of slaves (reserving it as a right exclusive to Tofarian nobles), the reality is that Tofarians' only concern is that the tribute is met. The byproduct of the policy is that neighboring communities often resort to raiding neighboring towns to fulfill their slave quota.

In the town of Chogneaux, it is time for the tribute. Chogneaux has trained a contingent of young people as soldiers in accordance with its obligation. But there is resentment among the populace. This sentiment is

always the case near tribute time, but this year the Empire has imposed an additional levy of slaves that has fostered greater than normal resistance. The citizens had already gathered their expected quota by capturing vagrants, criminals, and other undesirables, but at the last moment they were notified of a special increase in their obligation, and members of their community that have friends and family have been coopted.

The Tofarian Empire

The Tofarian Empire is an evil presence in the world. Slavery is a fundamental economic force for them. The obligation of every community to their Tofarian overlords always includes a quota of slaves. In addition, each community must provide a quota of trained soldiers for the Empire's army.

True Tofarians comprise only about 5% of the Empire's population. They control the subordinate population by isolating them and controlling politics, economics, and travel between communities.

In addition to the regular taxes, Tofarians impose special levies for one-time events – monuments, preparing an invasion, certain celebrations, etc. With these levies, they target communities that have demonstrated enough strength that they are concerned the community could become a disruption to Tofarian rule.

The army's loyalty is ensured by a variety of strategies. First, the home community of every soldier is recorded, and treason or cowardice results in the execution of innocent peasants in the soldier's home village. Second, the Tofarian forces are organized into armies of about 5,000. Each has a marshal and staff that answers to the Imperial staff, and a great deal of rivalry between marshals (and their armies) is deliberately fostered to prevent combined armies from revolting.

Only a single army is allowed near the capital of Tofarmus. It is the Imperial army. It enjoys benefits beyond normal armies, is led by the Emperor personally, and is about 15,000 strong. The Imperial army is dispatched only in cases of treason, or a front-wide defeat that could expose the heart of the Empire.

Baron Reolus must manage the unhappy citizenry. And now his son, Ragno, is joining the number who are unhappy with their domination by the Empire.

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The Chogneau Resistance

Chogneau came under Tofarian domination when the Empire exploded out of the Dragon Teeth Mountains into northeastern Dimgaard about fifty years ago. Baron Reolus' grandfather (Baron Eudes) was the noble, and, faced with the overwhelming Tofarian expansion, immediately agreed to vassalage. The resentment among the Chogneauxians has varied over the past three generations but has never evolved into open revolt.

The recent special slave levy may change that. The reason given was the discovery of important resources that require an extraordinary workforce to extract. It was implied that some of these minerals and timber would go to benefit Chogneau, but there was no formal promise associated with it.

Historically, Chogneau has managed its slave tribute by culling undesirables from its population, and scouring the highways for vagrants. (Often, these are probably just travelers who unfortunately encounter special Chogneau sheriffs.)

The suddenness with which the special levy was imposed has not allowed time for Chogneau to complete its usual process. The twenty additional slaves were determined by a lottery of all adults in Chogneau. Several of those chosen had families and friends who could not sit idly by as they were enslaved.

Several of the lottery losers were secreted out of Chogneau along with some of their close family and friends. They established a hidden camp a few miles from town where they could be supplied by allies still in Chogneau until some plan could be found to resolve their situation – possibly simply rejoining Chogneau after the tribute is sent away.

Not only have the villagers recognized the opportunity to replace beloved locals with the PCs, but Baron Reolus has as well, and he sends the town watch to take the PCs into custody for that purpose.

As the PCs attempt to prevent becoming part of the slave tribute they encounter disaffected youths who direct them towards a fledgling "Resistance".

Tofarian agents who have been monitoring the situation step in to impose the Empire's desires.

Rests

The PCs are expected to complete 6+ medium or hard combat encounters without taking a long rest. Even short rests should be cautiously allowed since many PCs' resources recharge on a short rest.

Once the action starts, the PCs can't take a long rest. If they insist, the action continues and prevents the rest.

Adventure Outline

The adventure begins with the PCs just outside the village of Chogneau – a tributary of the Tofarian Empire.

In Chogneau, the PCs find that an unexpected demand for additional slaves from Chogneau has left the residents desperate enough to try to capture the PCs as substitutes for the villagers who have been flagged for enslavement.

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Starting the Adventure

The PCs should be new adventurers. As such they have an indefinite amount of downtime prior to play (although, few resources to spend). The *PHB* 187, *DMG* 127, and the *Dimgaard Campaign Guide* all have suggestions for downtime activities and the DM may develop some of her own.

PCs' Resources

Managing the PCs' access to extraordinary equipment is another tool to modulate the difficulty of the encounters. If PCs are underpowered, downtime can contribute resources (potions, scrolls, etc.) to increase their effectiveness. Stronger parties may not need this type of support.

Downtime and New 1st level PCs

1st level is extremely fragile. This is especially true of new characters who haven't even had the chance (or resources) to acquire things like *potions of healing* that can save a 1st level party from a party wipe. These challenges can be interesting, and it is not recommended that a DM overtly violate this structure by awarding extra starting equipment or starting wealth to spend on additional equipment.

However, a DM can ameliorate this by awarding some downtime that incorporates options that require no payment – for example, Sacred Rites (*DMG* 129). A DM could also construct new downtime. For example, a friendly spellcaster from a new character's background or class training in exchange for services rendered to an organization prior to the first session; an Acolyte's religious organization casts *aid*; or a new ranger or druid is sent off with a supply of *goodberries*; or any PC could begin his career by benefiting from an Inspiring Leader (*PHB* 167) of the DM's design; or any PC could begin with a charm (*DMG* 228) that provides a one-time benefit of a cantrip like *guidance*. These resources won't have an impact past the first session, but could make a difference.

Of course, PCs can begin the session having already utilized features of their character – a druid can begin with *goodberries* cast the night before, a wizard begins with *find familiar* already cast.

As new characters, the DM can read or paraphrase the following as a prompt:

Ahead is the village of Chogneaux – centered among a productive set of fields and orchards. A sturdy keep overlooks a small central plaza surrounded by the dwellings of several hundred residents. Just outside the village, you enjoy the company of newfound companions.

Once introductions are complete, the DM can introduce the action by reading or paraphrasing the following:

It is a dark and dangerous world. Without the benefit of a secure base the adventuring life could reach a quick and deadly end. The security of a protected village is a great boon – whether you were born in Chogneaux or have happened upon it, it is a location. Your morning finds you exploring about a mile from the village proper.

The level of information a PC will have about the situation in Chogneaux and the Tofarian Empire will vary according to their character's class, background, and race. Based on these the DM can reveal the following points.

- The village of Chogneaux is the seat of a small but stable barony within the Tofarian Empire.
- The current baron is Baron Reolus, and his heir is Sir Ragno.
- Despite paying fealty to the Tofarian Empire, Chogneaux's population is of Cheyna ancestry.
- Like all subject villages, Chogneaux must provide support to the Tofarian Empire in the form of tributes of various kinds.
- Also, like all subject villages, the residents of Chogneaux resent the tributes to the Tofarians, and that resentment gives rise to various forms of resistance.
- The Tofarians rule by making examples of communities that rebel to dissuade the activity, and it has been several years since the last community exhibited a level of treason to provoke full retaliation, so the Empire may be looking for such an opportunity.
- Part of the defiance within Chogneaux is a fledgling thieves' guild that currently is little more than a disgruntled group of youths with little organization or resources.