

TP10 The Keenbone Assault

By Dan Hass



With the help of the Tofarian Empire, the Keenbone kobolds are poised to move against their generational enemies – the Onyxbane dwarves. Can heroes emerge to prevent the annihilation of the dwarven town and galvanize the alliance between the dwarves and the Rebellion? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 10th level characters. Episode ten of the *Tyranny in Purple*.

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Adventure Summary

TP10 The Keenbone Assault is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 10th level characters. It is designed to run using only the *Basic Rules (BR)* and *DM Basic Rules (DBR)* (these are a free download [here](#)) along with the *Systems Reference Document (SRD)*; free [here](#). It also utilizes the free *Unearthed Arcana (UAF) 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. It also utilized a free online resource: [Monster-a-Day](#).

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 available [here](#)), but could be set elsewhere. Digital copies of the 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 the heroes be challenged and success is a question to be decided by deeds and choices. *The Lord of the Rings* is 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. *TP10 The Keenbone Assault* 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. *TP10 The Keenbone Assault* 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

- Magic Items: *brooch of shielding*, *ioun stone* (absorption), *staff of charming*, *stone of good luck*, *sword of wounding*, *vicious weapon*
- Creatures: bandit captain, berserker, commoner, crystal elemental, flameskull, spy, steam mephit, will-o-wisp, winged kobold
- Other: Arcane Archer, group ability check, oil of Taggit, Short-Term Madness

Running the Adventure

TP10 The Keenbone Assault is made up of six 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.

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Dimgaard gives the DM opportunities to reward good roleplaying. Good roleplaying can generally garner players an easier path 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 *TP10 The Keenbone Assault* 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 Onyxbanes of Virbur have been convinced to join the Chogneaux rebels against the Tofarians, and Thane Grurfad is using his efforts to coalesce the disparate Onyxbane populations into a force that could influence the revolution against the Tofarian Empire that began in Chogneaux (the first five episodes of *Tyranny in Purple*).

Part of the effort involved sending an emissary – escorted by the heroes – to the neighboring town of Morndirth. During that escort mission, the PCs learned that the Tofarians were organizing and equipping the Keenbone kobolds to neutralize the Onyxbane dwarves.

The heroes have spent the past few days recovering from the demanding escort task. Morndirth is celebrating a significant holiday. Seasons have no signs of passage,

and so one of the important services of the Moradin clerics is to calculate the first crescent moon of the new year, and have a special celebration: Luna Prime.

Morndirth – unlike most communities in this time frame – is not inherently hostile to outsiders. It has thousands of pilgrims at any time, and this swells for Luna Prime because of Morndirth's religious importance. It is also common for non-dwarves to venture to Morndirth for the festivities.

Unknown to anyone, the Keenbones have been infiltrating Morndirth using the holiday as an excuse. They have disguised themselves as innocuous traders, entertainers, scholars, etc. The activity surrounding the holiday has covered their subterfuge.

The Tofarians expect that a surprise overwhelming attack against Morndirth – a town of immense cultural importance to the Onyxbanes – will persuade the Onyxbanes to avoid a conflict with the surface.

Onyxbane Dwarves

The Dimgaard Campaign implements a version of the traditional "Underdark" called the Cavern Realm. In this expanse, the most prolific (by far) dwarven culture is the Onyxbane. They are not a unified nation, but there is a strong affiliation based on a shared culture, history, and common adversaries. The Onyxbanes build communities that are almost always led by a thane. The thane usually emerges from consensus, but sometimes more formal processes decide it – inheritance, election, auction, etc.

Usually, these communities will be focused on exploiting a resource – a mineral/ore vein, an elemental vent, a lava flow, a valuable trade route – but a few (like Morndirth) exist because of historic/cultural importance. (Morndirth is supposed to be the site where Moradin appeared in person to provide guidance and blessings on a group of early Onyxbanes and is a pilgrimage site.)

There is a presumed mutual defense treaty among the Onyxbane communities, and throughout its very long history, there have been occasions where severe threats have emerged that has coalesced an Onyxbane alliance that has fielded armies of tens of thousands of warriors.

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Luna Prime & Tet

Dimgaard adventures and modules often draw inspiration from actual historical events. While the path of the episode varies from the historical, the setup for *TP10 The Keenbone Assault* draws from the 1968 Tet Offensive in the Vietnam conflict. In particular, Morndirth's experience is influenced by the massive assault on the culturally significant city of Hue where the defenders were surprised, overwhelmed and driven to a fortified area of Hue's Citadel.

TP10 The Keenbone Assault deviates in that the Morndirth defenders must breakout, whereas in Hue, both sides poured reinforcements into the city and it became a bloody, month-long (25 days) battle.

A Kobold Battle Episode

There are certain module archetypes – the investigation module, the gathering module, the escort/travel module, the diplomatic mission, etc. One of these is the battle module. *TP10 The Keenbone Assault* is a battle module.

The “difficulty” of a battle module is that it is heavy on combat. And some players prefer little combat in D&D. However, the combat module is one of the oldest of these adventure themes and a well-structured campaign really needs to include combat.

Another detail about *TP10 The Keenbone Assault* is that the primary antagonists are kobolds (although advanced). This runs counter to some traditions, as kobolds are usually not considered suitable opponents for 10th level PCs. However, Dimgaard has a long tradition of using modified kobolds. During the earlier versions of Dimgaard, experienced players learned to avoid Dimgaard's kobolds if at all possible. Dimgaard is not unique. Kobolds can be a platform for scaling effectively.

This is especially true in 5th edition as a variety of kobolds are presented in *VGM* and kobolds are presented as a race (for PCs and NPCs).

Finally, a trademark of kobolds is trickiness. This is reflected in this adventure's heavy use of traps and constructed hazards.

Adventure Outline

After arriving in Morndirth, the PCs are scheduled to meet the thane (Kraldrun) and underthanes. However, just after breakfast, the town comes under a withering attack by the Keenbone kobolds.

It begins with the PCs being targeted by summoners as the PCs have been specifically identified as important.

It is immediately apparent that Morndirth is being attacked by a far superior force, and that the only location that can provide safety is the Thane's great hall. The PCs must make their way to the great hall, and have the opportunity to establish themselves as heroes by aiding other residents in the process.

The next day begins when the kobolds have completed their long rest and resumed their assault. It becomes clear that the best course of action is to evacuate – at least the nobility. This leads to the dramatic breakout from the great hall.

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.

The episode starts with the PCs having just completed a long rest, and by the rules, a PC can benefit from only one long rest in a 24-hour period.

Once the action starts, the PCs can take a long rest only in the safety of the Thane Kraldrun's great hall. There is no other safe place for the PCs to take a long rest in, and if they flee (presumably via magic), then others manage to escort Thane Kraldrun to safety. The withering Keenbone assault causes Onyxbanes to reconsider intervening against the Tofarians, and the PCs will have to spend their entire downtime rehabbing the situation.

TP10 The Keenbone Assault is unusual for Dimgaard modules, in that it spans two adventuring days. This is necessary to include the XP to progress to 11th level.

Starting the Adventure

Downtime in Morndirth

Morndirth has about 10,000 permanent residents (almost all Onyxbane dwarves). The economy centers around the religious and cultural importance of the town to the Onyxbane culture. The influx of outsiders for Luna Prime makes Morndirth quite cosmopolitan, and the DM can comfortably inject whatever resources the DM desires the PCs to have access to. This may lead to some interesting roleplaying as the PCs search and/or negotiate – if the DM is inclined.

It has been several days since the PCs arrived in Morndirth (presuming they completed *TP9 The Keenbone Initiative*. 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. There is also a very useful (and free) *Unearthed Arcana* article on downtime. In particular, the Tofarians are undercover in Morndirth, and can act as foils (as described in the *UA* article.

Tofarian Downtime Foil

Motivation: The Tofarians have identified the PCs as threats to their plans and want to reduce their effectiveness.

Goals: The Tofarians are infiltrators tasked with keeping the Onyxbanes (or any other significant element of the Cavern Realm) from aiding the (above-ground) Rebellion.

Assets: The Tofarians have a significant treasury sent by the Tofarian Emperor. Additionally, they have some spellcasting that is useful to spies (e.g., *charm person*).

Actions: During downtime, the Tofarians won't risk exposure. But they can undermine the PCs' activities. Some examples might be: the PCs will face prejudices that are inflamed at every opportunity; or the Tofarians will anticipate items the PCs may want to procure and bid up the price.

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.

At the very least, each PC should have a couple of *potions of healing* (so that any PC can bring an unconscious PC back into the fight), and a mechanism for casting *revivify* (which may need to be a specially infused stone).

Where Does Downtime Fit In?

Downtime can be a very fulfilling part of a game. It allows players to develop their characters in ways that are outside the plot – they can establish friendships (with NPCs or other PCs), or ties to organizations. Most experienced DMs observe that the game is much more fun when a module is not rushed. There are some situations where the DM may feel the need to finish the entire module in a single session (for example, at a convention), but if this is not the case, the players (including the DM) should not rush through downtime.

Of particular importance is to use the downtime for a new character to build a strong reason to integrate into the party, and cooperate towards common goals.

When the downtime is resolved, read or paraphrase:

Morndirth is different from Virbur. Morndirth is dedicated to the internment of notable dwarves in an area sacred to the Onyxbanes. Tradition holds that it is where the first group of dwarves led by GlazmUIL Onyxbane first found the Cavern Realm because of the guidance of Moradin.

You have recovered from the challenges of the journey at a comfortable inn. Morndirth is – again – different from Virbur in that it has numerous accommodations for travelers as the destination for pilgrimages by those who revere Moradin.

With you are a group you have come to rely on. You have been offered an audience with Thane Kraldrun, and given the knowledge that the Tofarians are backing the Keenbone kobolds, you expect that following the meeting, you will be able to address Morndirth's underthanes.

Crossing the community, several residents seem to recognize you with a favorable smile, wink, or nod. It appears that news of your accomplishment has spread ahead of you – a good omen.

You are still nearly a half-mile from the Thane's great hall when wisps of smoke begin to rise above various locations around Morndirth. Soon there is the echo of screams – or possibly war cries – as the smoke plumes become more pronounced.

As this is a "battle module" there is little time at the PCs' disposal. The action begins with Encounter 1 immediately.