

TP6 Into the Cavern Realm

By Dan Hass



As the fledgling rebellion considers how it will face the response by the Empire's main armies, an unexpected opportunity presents itself. A vast hidden realm has been discovered, and a representative has offered to smooth introductions for the revolutionaries. Can heroes deliver the diplomat and noble to his home and foster relationships that could help free the bonded states from the Empire? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 6th level characters. Episode six of *Tyranny in Purple*.

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Adventure Summary

TP6 Into the Cavern Realm is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 5th level characters. It is designed to run using only the *Basic Rules (BR)*, *DM Basic Rules (DBR)* ([here](#)); and the *Systems Reference Document* ([here](#)). It also utilizes the free *Unearthed Arcana (UAF) Feats* ([here](#)), *Hoard of the Dragon Queen Supplement* ([here](#)), *Princes of the Apocalypse Supplement* ([here](#)) and *Wardrow's Feat Compendium* ([here](#)). The DM and players should get an 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 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 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. *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm* 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. *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm* 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. *boots of springing and striding, cloak of elvenkind, headband of intellect, ring of evasion, stone of good luck*
- Creatures. *adult red dragon, drow mage, duergar, giant constrictor snake, noble, rug of smothering, thug, swarm of poisonous snakes, troglodyte, will-o-wisp*

Running the Adventure

TP6 Into the Cavern Realm 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 *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm* 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 Cheyna village of Chogneaux has survived as a vassal of the Tofarian Empire for several generations. Recently, the village rebelled when faced with an unexpected increase in its annual slave tribute. The resistance forced the baron (Reolus) to abdicate in favor of his son (Ragno) who favors independence. The rebels fought off the Tofarian governor's attempt to suppress the uprising with his garrison force, and now face a full onslaught by the Empire's primary armies. That event is likely at least several weeks away as these large armies of about 5,000 troops must navigate the passes of the Dragon Teeth mountains, so the rebels have some time to assemble a force sufficient to defend against the Tofarian regulars (but not a lot of time).

Beneath the Dragon Teeth mountains is a vast (perhaps endless) series of tunnels and chambers inhabited by fantastic creatures. Entire nations of races unseen on the surface compete for scarce resources. The upper reaches of this network are unstable, and openings to the surface are never permanent – rarely lasting for more than a few weeks before the shifting geology closes them again. However, there is almost always an opening to be found somewhere.

Onyxbane Dwarves

The Cavern Realm is vast, and within it there are many dwarves. Almost all claim membership in the Onyxbane tribe. The geography does not allow for a unified territory; instead the Onyxbane groups live in disjointed enclaves with close ties to each other – trade, a common religion based on the dwarven pantheon, mutual cultural events, and a common defense against the other threats of the cavern realm: drow, duergar, kobolds, etc.

There is variation, but each Onyxbane enclave will be led by a thane. The thane is generally a first among equals and is only an inherited position if the thane's son has earned the necessary respect of the enclave in his own right. There is no single path to becoming thane – some come from the religious sector, some from the military orders, and some from economic influence.

Enclaves often arise around a mineral resource (e.g., a gold vein), exploit it for a time (a few years to several generations) until it is depleted, and then the enclave will collapse without the resource.

Some enclaves evolve into stable communities – maybe because the resource is ongoing or because of some natural feature. Eventually, the enclave transitions to a permanent town and a more complex economy and political system arises. Usually, a set of under-thanes will evolve. Each under-thane represents a particular interest in the community – the town guards, or the followers of Moradin, or the miners, or the weaponsmiths. To discuss issues and advise the thane, usually a council of Underthanes will be established.

This evolution is organic and informal (a matter of tradition), and there are a few Onyxbane communities where the Thane is an inherited ruler with more autocratic powers, but these are rare outliers.

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Among this underground expanse are a tribe of dwarves: the Onyxbanes. The Onyxbanes have been one of the populations closest to the surface. While the passages' unreliability prevents permanent trade routes, the Onyxbanes have become adept at exploiting passages when they open to trade with dwarven populations in the Dragon Teeth.

In this pursuit of commerce with fellow dwarves, the Onyxbanes perpetually have scouting parties with diplomats adept at forming relationships exploring. One of these recently suffered a catastrophe. The noble Jordem Broadgrog was the thanepick (a lesser rank of Onyxbane nobility) in charge of an expedition that was beset by road agents from a village struggling to meet its annual slave tribute (much as the triggering event for Chogneau's rebellion).

Jordem tried to return to the Onyxbanes via the opening they had used (within the ancient mine from *TP3 A Secure Location*), but found the passage too dangerous to traverse alone.

He hopes the Chogneau resistance will escort him in exchange for aid in convincing the Onyxbanes to ally with the rebellion.

Adventuring Days

Typically, Dimgaard adventures span a single adventuring day. However, within the *Tyranny of Purple*, each episode is designed to include enough XP to take the PCs to the next level.

Getting the PCs from 6th to 7th level requires a dozen events. This is clearly too much for a single adventuring day (typically a maximum of eight events). So, *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm* spans two adventuring days.

Additionally, the story driving *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm* is a traveling story. This archetype of module typically encompasses multiple days in game.

Finally, the module is designed so that it can be run in a single 4(ish) hour session, but this may be rushed. The DM may decide to split the module into two sessions using the long rest as a break point.

Adventure Outline

The PCs are asked to escort the noble Jordem into the Cavern Realm and cultivate alliances there to help the resistance.

On the way to the breach into the Cavern Realm the PCs encounter an area infested with snakes.

Descending into the upper reaches of the Cavern Realm, the PCs encounter a tribe of troglodytes.

The second day, the PCs must deal with duergar slavers.

Before reaching the dwarven town of Virbur, the PCs encounter dispossessed female drow.

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 threats of the Cavern Realm impose on their rest.

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Starting the Adventure

Downtime in Chogneaux

Chogneaux is a typical small fief. It has smiths, craftspeople, and clergy. Further, Chogneaux is now a war zone, and opportunists know that a war economy offers the chance for profits.

The DM can comfortably inject whatever items she desires. Certainly, the items from the *PHB* should be available for purchase.

It has been a few days since the action of *TP5 Tofarian Response*. Chogneaux is a typical village of a couple thousand residents (swollen slightly by an influx of people disaffected with the Tofarian Empire who have relocated to Chogneaux). Most of the activity centers on preparing to face the inevitable confrontation with the Tofarian regular army (as opposed to the governor's local resources faced in *TP5 Tofarian Response*). Within this context, the DM can award a few days of downtime and align with the evolving story. 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.

PCs should have several *potions of healing* (so that any party member can raise them from 0 hit points to conscious in combat). Additionally, *lesser restoration* is often overlooked, but can be a very important spell for the party. It is suggested that the party have access to it. Similarly, *revivify* can save an adventure, and should be in the party mix.

If no PC can prepare these, there are options the DM can exercise. The DM can allow a PC to use downtime to attain a *charm* that allows the PC to cast these spells once. Alternately, the DM can assign these charms to Jordem, which will further increase his importance to the party.

The players should have just advanced to 6th level, and when the downtime is resolved, the players may wish to discuss aspects of their character prior to the action. The DM can facilitate this discussion with the following:

With the governor's garrison repelled there is a moment of respite. But after a couple of days of celebration, the reality of the situation settles in. The previous encounter was only the governor's immediately available garrison, and the coming conflict will be with seasoned, focused Tofarian regulars. With attention focused on how to avoid annihilation by a regular Tofarian army, you take breakfast among a capable group with their own perspective on the situation.

With the introductions complete the DM can launch the action with the following:

As the meal's dishes are cleared, Baron Ragno enters the common room accompanied by an entourage and a single dwarf. Ragno and the dwarf approach while the entourage makes small talk with the townsfolk in the common room. Ragno begins, "I am actively engaged in forming an alliance to throw back the eventual Tofarian army, but in the meantime, an opportunity has presented itself.

"Apparently there is a vast system of tunnels and caverns that extend deep beneath the Dragon Teeth mountains. In that expanse, there is a sizable dwarven state that could have an interest in seeing the Tofarian Empire reduced. This is Jordem, a noble of those dwarves. He has offered his influence with these dwarves – the Onyxbanes – if we can reunite him with his people in their town of Virbur.

"The journey will be perilous, as Jordem has tried to make the journey himself and been thwarted by evil denizens of this 'Cavern Realm.' It is a mission for individuals with special skills such as yours."

Jordem is a minor noble who carries out diplomatic missions for the thane. He is amiable, and pleasant. He will do what he can to help the party get to Virbur. In combat, Jordem simply moves to a safe location and dodges.

Jordem (Noble). *HDQ* 13; *MM* 348

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12