

# TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr

By Dan Hass



The rebellion's search for allies in the fight against the Tofarian Empire has led them into the Cavern Realm beneath the Dragon Teeth Mountains. There, a vast nation of dwarves (the Onyxbanes) is facing a cultural struggle between traditional dwarven independence and isolation, and a rising opinion that dwarves should forge ties with other groups. Can heroes emerge to gel this cultural flux into an alliance for the rebels? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 7th level characters. Episode seven in *Tyranny in Purple*.

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## Adventure Summary

*TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr* 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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. *TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr* 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. *TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr* 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. *adamantine armor, brooch of shielding, headband of intellect, rope of entanglement, stone of good luck, sword of wounding*
- *MM*. *animated armor, bandit captain, flying sword, knight, ochre jelly, rug of smothering, thug, violet fungi*
- Spells. *fireball, glyph of warding, hellish rebuke, slow, thaumaturgy*

## Running the Adventure

*TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr* 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 *TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr* 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 <sup>1</sup>. 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**

For eons, the Onyxbane dwarves have strictly followed the traditions of dwarven culture as interpreted by priests dedicated to Moradin. While other deities within the dwarven pantheon are revered, among the Onyxbane, Moradin's supremacy is undisputed. However, over the past decades an alliance of commerce related deities has become very persuasive among the Onyxbanes. The challenge is that these deities are generally considered evil (primarily Abbathor, Laduguer, Roknar). So, their efforts to forge commercial, cultural and political ties beyond the dwarves have been categorized as self-serving and greedy.

Over time, the majority of Onyxbanes have grown to accept the idea that it is better for them to establish positive relationships with

groups like the Geheth (drow) and K'Guz (duergar) rather than pursue campaigns of mutual destruction.

However, many Onyxbanes are opposed to these changes. They see it as a corruption of Onyxbane society. Among these the most strident are members of the Hammers of Moradin.

But even the Hammers of Moradin are not monolithic. The Onyxbane city of Virbur is a hub of Onyxbane culture and politics. It has nearly 10,000 residents. And the Hammers of Moradin there are some of the most influential. Thane Grurfad Earthenstone (leader of Virbur) would like to see the Onyxbanes develop better ties to neighboring non-dwarven populations, but he is held in check by the Hammers of Moradin (and several members of the Council of Underthanes who would like to assume Grurfad's position).

However, Grurfad found an ally among the Hammers of Moradin – Nardaet Brittle spine. Nardaet is a life cleric. This is an oddity among the Hammers of Moradin, who favor deities associated with war or weapons. Grurfad and Nardaet agreed that Nardaet would travel to the duergar outpost of Morn Buldor (about two days' travel) and negotiate an agreement that Nardaet would be able to present favorably to the Hammers of Moradin.

Nardaet's mission was a success. He gained concessions on slave trading and territory. But there was a traitor within his entourage. Grobret Runechin was one of the protectors escorting Nardaet but was loyal to a prominent underthane who wants to see Grurfad undermined. He reported the success via *sending stones*, and the underthane contacted a long-time villain known to Virbur.

Stioris Morte is a tiefling artificer who makes her way through life by crafting magic items. She covets life clerics who have the *guidance* cantrip as they are sacrificed to create *stone of good luck*. Because of her proclivity for creating magic items, she exists on the fringes of society. The rogue underthane notified Stioris of Nardaet's return path and agenda. They provided her with a writ signed by the second in command of the Hammers of Moradin (Nelgroun Hillshoulder) in Virbur declaring Nardaet a criminal – convicted of treason and collaborating with known enemies of dwarvenkind. The writ charges Stioris to punish Nardaet by any method

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she chooses as long as Nardaet never returns to Virbur.

Stioris laid an ambush that successfully captured Nardaet (and killed Grobret). She has been crafting a *stone of good luck* that will consume Nardaet's soul to power the enchantment and will complete it today.

Grurfad has been working to discover Nardaet's fate, and in the process realized that he cannot trust the underthanes nor the Hammers. He has discovered that Stioris has captured Nardaet, but doesn't know her precise location. With no one to turn to, he is looking for someone not associated with the Hammers of Moradin or the underthanes that he can send to rescue.

### Adventure Outline

The PCs are presented with a plan to establish their reputation – rescue a missing diplomat (Nardaet) who is extremely influential.

Finding the place where the diplomat's party was ambushed, the PCs find oozes. Searching for Nardaet, the PCs encounter violet fungus.

The PCs must rescue Nardaet from the tiefling artificer Stioris, who is a prominent member of his community.

Returning to Virbur, the PCs are confronted by other tieflings regarding their interference in Stioris' affairs.

Nearing Virbur, the PCs are confronted by fundamentalist Hammers of Moradin who want to prevent Nardaet's influence on the community.

### *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, Stioris completes her crafting, which consumes Nardaet's soul.

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## Starting the Adventure

### *Downtime Virbur*

Virbur is a city (about 10,000 residents). It is well supplied with a variety of crafters, but as a city of dwarves, it specializes in armor and weapons. To that end, as the PCs accumulate renown with the Onyxbanes and Virbur, they can draw upon the crafts-dwarves to create items aligned to the DM's campaign desires. This is often an avenue to use roleplaying in place of treasure to gain expensive items like silvered weapons or high-priced armor.

As a byproduct of downtime activities in Virbur, the PCs should acquire the following information by interacting with the Onyxbane dwarves.

- Many of the Onyxbane dwarves are isolationists – especially among the orthodox Hammers of Moradin.
- An exception is Nardaet – a Hammer of Moradin who favors broadening dwarven relationships.
- Nardaet was sent by the Thane to negotiate an agreement with the K'Guz duergar, but should have already returned. There is concern of foul play.
- There are various known villains who threaten Virbur because of its prosperity, but one of the worst is a tiefling artificer named Stioris – a notorious magic item crafter.
- While Thane Grurfad has a strong grip on his position, there are underthanes who are known to have designs on it.

It has been a few days since the PCs arrived in Virbur at the end of *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm*. Much of this is spent settling in and arranging introductions to agents of the Thane Grurfad. The DM can award downtime within that framework. 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.

### *Expected Resources*

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* can be a very important spell for the party. Similarly, *revivify* can save an adventure, and should be available.

If no PC can prepare these, the DM can allow a PC to use downtime to attain a *charm* that allows the PC to cast these spells once.

When the downtime is resolved, read or paraphrase:

You have arrived at the dwarven town of Virbur. It has about ten thousand dwarves in residence. Virbur is a huge cavern with a lava flow through it. Living chambers and craft shops are carved from the walls of the chamber. In one of these chambers – a tavern/inn – you take the morning meal with fellow adventurers and discuss your situation.

With the introductions complete, the DM can launch the day's action with the following:

As the meal is complete, a dwarf approaches. While his clothes bespeak a common miner or craftsman, a jeweled ring is out of place. He says, "Yes. In Virbur, things are not always as they seem. Subtle plots often circulate unseen. I am Voleac Stormhead. I fix complex and subtle problems for Thane Grurfad.

"And the Thane has a problem that is tailored for you. The Thane favors your cause and would see an alliance with your rebellion, but there are obstacles – orthodox dwarves favor isolation and strict confinement to purely dwarven affairs.

"Several days ago, the Thane sent a prominent resident – Nardaet – to demonstrate the possibilities by negotiating a treaty with the K'Guz duergar. But Nardaet is several days overdue. We fear he has fallen into the hands of Stioris, the tiefling magic item crafter; worse, we fear some Onyxbanes are complicit.

"You would demonstrate your value as an ally to Virbur by returning Nardaet safely."

Voleac describes the path Nardaet was following so the PCs won't get lost. The PCs can spend a few hours preparing, but time is short. Once the PCs venture forth, present encounter 1.