

TP8 The Onyxbane Factions

By Dan Hass



As the resistance works above ground to build an alliance capable of defending against the Tofarian Empire, beneath the mountains in the Cavern Realm an effort is underway to recruit newly discovered resources. However, the effort's secrecy has been compromised. Can heroes overcome the intrigues within the dwarven community to garner their support? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 8th level characters. Episode eight of *Tyranny in Purple*.

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PREVIEW

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Credits	
Editing	Jeremy Esch
Contributor	Brandon Twyford
Cover Art	Fernando Olmedo (his work)
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PREVIEW

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Adventure Summary

TP8 The Onyxbane Factions is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 8th 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 (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.

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 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. *TP8 The Onyxbane Factions* 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. *TP8 The Onyxbane Factions* 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. *cloak of elvenkind, headband of intellect, ring of free action, stone of good luck, sword of wounding, vicious weapon*
- Monsters. *allosaurus, gargoyle, kobold, owl*
- Spells. *contagion, counterspell, dispel magic*
- Other. *Cunning Action, Fast Hands, hunting trap, Second-story Work, Sneak Attack*

Running the Adventure

TP8 The Onyxbane Factions 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 *TP8 The Onyxbane Factions* 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

Several weeks ago, the Tofarian Empire demanded an unexpected increase in the annual tribute by the subjugated barony of Chogneaux. The Baron tried to meet the quota, but his citizens rebelled, and he was forced to abdicate in favor of his firebrand son, Ragno.

An effort by the Tofarian governor to quash the upstarts in a quick action failed, and the Resistance grew. However, the facts are unavoidable. Unless the Resistance can form a strong alliance, it will be only a few months before the Empire moves full armies (rather than just the governor's garrison) against the frontier.

The Resistance hopes to make a stand at the gaps in the mountain passes, but even that will be a stall of the inevitable. So, the Resistance is working to find resources

capable of swinging the conflict in their favor.

Rumors of vast empires beneath the surface of the Dragon Teeth mountains have circulated for centuries. These have been confirmed in recent weeks as adventurers discovered a passage to this Cavern Realm while looking for a safe location for the fledgling movement.

Onyxbane Dwarves

The Onyxbanes are a populous and wide-ranging tribe of dwarves that thrive throughout the Cavern Realm. While they are unified in their culture and tribal identity, the nature of the Cavern Realm prevents them from being unified geographically. Within the Onyxbanes there is a class of dwarves known as prospectors. This group is continuously exploring for new veins to be mined. When prospectors find a new resource, an Onyxbane colony will grow up around it to mine it.

These colonies will exist as long as the resource (an ore vein or valuable mineral deposit) is mineable. If this lasts long enough or if the area has a non-mine resource (an elemental vent, passage to the surface, ecology to support mushroom farming, etc.) the community may become permanent. Otherwise, once the mining ends, the Onyxbane community will disassemble and move to the next new prospector discovery. The Cavern Realm is littered with Onyxbane ghost towns at played-out mining sites; often these will be repurposed by other communities.

Because the Onyxbanes are a disjointed nation, they have a confederation structure. Each of the Onyxbanes has its own local Thane and will evolve its own council of Underthanes. In each community, different groups will want a voice in governance. There are groups that are present in almost every Onyxbane community – military, miners, smiths. There are groups that arise as an enclave's population grows – specialized craftsmen, traders. And there are those who may be tied to a specialized resource – mushroom farmers, for example. So, the mix of Underthanes will vary from one community to the next.

In wake of the conflict with the primary Tofarian Empire, the Resistance has sent emissaries into the Cavern Realm in search of allies. The first such group to be identified is the Onyxbane dwarves – a vast tribe of

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dwarves that span the Cavern Realm in secure and stable enclaves.

However, the Onyxbanes are not as unified as they appear to outsiders. There are various cultural, political, and religious institutions that have agendas that often are in conflict. Organizing this disjointed tribe into a viable ally able to take the field against the best of the Tofarian Empire is no easy feat.

Further, Tofarian agents have learned of the Resistance's efforts and sent counter-agents to thwart the efforts.

Adventure Outline

The PCs begin with a friendly meeting with Thane Grurfad, who has arranged for the PCs to make their case to the Council of Underthanes the next day. The PCs are allowed to spend the day influencing Virbur to their cause.

As the PCs begin their campaign, there is an industrial accident where the craftsmen's activities open a rift to the elemental plane of earth and rampaging elementals come through.

With the enhanced reputation from addressing the planar rift the PCs rally support for their cause.

While the day's activity was successful, it has allowed Keenbone kobolds to lay a trap for the PCs as evening approaches.

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 take a long rest only at the point indicated. The action begins with the PCs having just completed a long rest, and PCs can benefit from only one long rest during a 24-hour period.

Starting the Adventure

Downtime in Virbur

Virbur is a town centered around using the lava flow – an elemental vent – to craft special items. To that end, downtime is an opportunity for the DM to decide what range of exceptional items she wants to expose the PCs to. The elemental vent is a chance for the DM to inject a general +1 weapon or two. At 8th level, this is about the place where a PC is expected to have a magic weapon optimized to the PCs' strengths.

(Previously presented magic items in this campaign were likely not useful to stronger builds such as Great Weapon Masters, or Polearm Masters).

It has been at least several days since the PCs arrived in Virbur (at the end of *TP6 Into the Cavern Realm*) and a couple days since the end of action in *TP7 The Onyxbane Martyr* (where the PCs may have acquired access to adamantine, and it is an excellent use of downtime to have that fashioned into armor).

Information about downtime and other activities prior to launching the adventure. 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.

At the very least, PCs should have a couple of *potions of healing* (so they can be raised from 0 hit points by anyone), and the party should have the ability to cast *revivify* at least once.

Introducing New Players

As campaigns progress, new players may join, or players may decide to play a different character. The DM decides what level these new arrivals will be, but an important role of downtime is to build a compelling story explaining how the new character has come to join the party in a way that promotes party cohesion.

As part of downtime, players may want to discuss elements of their character. The DM can facilitate this with the following:

The rescue of Nardaet, the dwarven life cleric of Moradin, has influenced attitudes within Virbur. You have managed an audience with Thane Grurfad Earthenstone. As you consider your strategies, you begin the day with a group of talented individuals that you have come to trust.

With the updates complete, the DM can launch the action of the adventure with the following prompt.

Thane Grurfad maintains a great hall in the tradition of dwarven rulers. There is a perpetual roasting animal slowly rotating over a fire pit. Libations flow freely. There are emissaries from various interests awaiting Grurfad's attention – even kobolds and myconids. Dour guards ensure that the envoys with histories of hostilities peacefully abide each other's company.

Eventually, the Thane turns to you. With small talk complete, Grurfad says, "I am one thane. And while Virbur is a strong community it is only one of many – not even the largest. We enjoy influence because of our prosperity, and proximity to the surface.

"Our cousins on the surface are held dear. There are legends that the Onyxbanes share a common heritage with the various surface dwarves. And we are aware of how they have suffered over the past decades to this Tofarian Empire, which has occupied the area on the surface your people call the Dragon Teeth mountains.

"With that said, among Onyxbanes many feel that our challenges in the Cavern Realm are too serious to afford the luxury of surface entanglements. The quest to win over the Onyxbanes begins with the Council of Underthanes. While I hold decision making authority, I need their consent for policies of this magnitude. I've arranged for you to address them tomorrow.

"In the meantime, the Underthanes each must answer to a constituency – miners, craftsmen, armorers, traders, etc. You could bolster your cause with goodwill from these.

"Enjoy the benefits of the great hall, and may Moradin favor your cause."

The PCs should interact with the various elements noted by the thane prior to their audience. When the PCs venture out, present Encounter 1.