

TP20 A New Emperor

By Dan Hass



With the coup d'etat underway, but meeting surprisingly strong resistance, the time for subtlety is at an end. Can heroes emerge to directly effect a change of power in the Tofarian Empire? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 20th level characters. The twentieth episode in Tyranny in Purple.

Contents

Adventure Summary.....	2
Preparing the Adventure.....	2
Running the Adventure.....	3
Adventure Background.....	3
Adventure Outline.....	5
Starting the Adventure.....	6
Encounter 1: Over the Walls.....	7
Encounter 2: Into the Palace.....	8
Encounter 3: The Emperor.....	9
Concluding the Adventure.....	10
Appendix 1: DM Maps.....	11
Tofarmus.....	11
Palace Walls.....	12
Palace Throne Room.....	13
Appendix 2: NPCs.....	14
Girded Tiamus.....	14

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Adventure Summary

TP20 A New Emperor is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 20th level characters. It requires a *Player's Handbook*® (PHB), a *Monster Manual*® (MM), a *Volo's Guide to Monsters*® (VGM), a *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*® (XGE), and a *Dungeon Master's Guide*® (DMG). It also uses selections from *Unearthed Arcana Feats* (UAF) ([here](#)).

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.

The Digital copies of the encounter maps are available [here](#).

Campaign Choice

While *TP20 A New Emperor* is designed to fit within almost any setting according to Dimgaard principles (**low prep time, strong themes, smooth presentation, highly scalable**), it was written using the Dimgaard campaign as its primary influence, and is indicative of the themes in Dimgaard. The Dimgaard campaign guide can be found at www.dimgaard.com.

Preparing the Adventure

It is always a good idea for the DM to read through an adventure before running it. *TP20 A New Emperor* 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. *TP20 A New Emperor* 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. In the encounters, 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, while Appendix 2 has more detailed information about prominent NPCs. 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. To aid in this process Appendix 2 contains entries for the NPCs in this adventure (taken from the DGN series available on www.dmsguild.com).

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

Items for Review

- Creatures. owl, shield guardian
- Feats. Spear Master
- Magic Items. headband of intellect, iron bands of binding/Bilarro, stone of good luck, vicious weapon
- Spells. *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *glyph of warding*, *harm*, *heat metal*, *hold person*, *invisibility*, *longstrider*, *moonbeam*, see *invisibility*, *sending*, *true seeing*; the Emperor has an extensive spell list.
- Other. fighter (champion), rogue (thief), wizard (evoker), oil of Taggit

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.

TP20 A New Emperor
By Dan Hass

Running the Adventure

TP20 A New Emperor is made up of 6 events arranged into 3 encounters. Some are hazards that can be applied in only a few minutes but encounters with NPCs and other creatures that involve combat or roleplaying will take longer. But since the action occurs in a single adventuring day, it should use a single game session.

Often the PCs' actions determine the type of interaction. 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 adventures gives the DM opportunities to reward good roleplaying. Good roleplaying can garner an easier path to achieving the desired outcomes. However, it takes stellar roleplaying to completely avoid combat. The world 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 *TP20 A New Emperor* 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 that 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).

The Tofarian Empire

The Tofarian Empire is an evil presence in the world. Slavery is a fundamental economic force. 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 – 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 insured 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.

Adventure Background

When the Tofarian Empire levied an extra tribute on the barony of Chogneaux that included additional laborers/slaves, the barony revolted. It replaced its complicit baron, and openly defied the Empire. When the rebels withstood the initial assault by the Tofarian governor's garrison, the Rebellion gathered support, but it was clear that without dramatically increasing its resources, the Rebellion would be easy work for the Empire's regular armies.

Emissaries were sent to garner additional support with one group venturing into the

TP20 A New Emperor

By Dan Hass

Cavern Realm (Dimgaard's implementation of the Underdark). In the Cavern Realm, the Rebellion's agents enlisted the Onyxbane dwarves as well as some lesser forces before rejoining the main rebel forces.

In a bold move, the Rebellion seized strategic Tofarian outposts that controlled the passes through the Dragon Teeth Mountains. With superior positions, the Rebellion's ragtag army repulsed the initial Tofarian response, and in the wake of the Rebel victory, an ambitious Tofarian ally has conspired with the Rebellion to assassinate the Emperor and replace him with an Empress favorable to the Rebellion.

Key to the plan is for the Emperor to invite the armies under Khan Yesi (the conspirator) into the capital of Tofarmus. Without the Emperor's invitation, Khan Yesi's force would be repelled by the Emperor's personal armor. To elicit the invitation, the Emperor would need to face an insurrection within Tofarmus sufficient to require aid from Khan Yesi's armies.

Yesi has co-conspirators in Tofarmus, and with capable agents, these elements could achieve the necessary civil unrest. Primary among these are the unlikely collaboration of followers of Torm and Asmodeus. Each has their own agenda and ultimate goals, but the first objective for both is to eliminate the influence of the Order of Hextor (who the Emperor reveres), and a secular Empress such as Yesi meets the goals of both.

The Order of Hextor

While the Tofarian Empire adheres to the One True Faith, it favors patrons specializing in war and tyranny. Among these, Hextor is currently the favorite and holds great sway in the capital, Tofarmus.

The order of Hextor in Tofarmus is extremely hierarchal. And as long as the current leader, Tagran, is in place, there is no room for advancement. The second in command, Sagra, succumbed to ambition and accepted an offer from Resistance agents to compromise Tagran – implicate him as the perpetrator of a capital offense. In return, Sagra has agreed to perform some traitorous acts with the assurance that regardless of how things settle, Sagra will be the head of the Order of Hextor in Tofarmus.

The *clone* repository is secured by the Hextorites, and Sagra will give Resistance agents access.

The sanctuary of Torm has provided a safe location for the heroes to recover after infiltrating Tofarmus.

For several days, the Resistance has engineered unrest in Tofarmus – violent protest, assassinations, riots. Tofarmus is protected in many ways, and the Resistance has suffered greatly. While the resistance presents a strong front, the truth is that within Tofarmus, they are under more pressure than they can withstand for more than a short time. If Khan Yesi doesn't arrive soon, the effort to displace the Emperor will fail. Their reserves of supplies are nearly exhausted, and many key leaders have been killed or captured.

However, Khan Yesi is stalled. The widespread unrest did not cause the reckless panic expected. The Emperor – or his advisors – were too wary to invite Khan Yesi into Tofarmus. When it became clear the invitation was not coming, Yesi decided to commit to the coup and moved her three armies toward Tofarmus without permission.

The Imperial home army – equal to three typical Tofarian armies – interceded, and the two forces have been engaged in a stalemate battle several miles from Tofarmus now. This has reduced the total defenders of Tofarmus and stretched the resources of the city watch, but no one expects Khan Yesi's forces to achieve a victory over the Imperial home army so significant that it will result in the elimination of the Emperor.

The window for deposing the Emperor is closing.

The Tofarian Emperor

The Tofarian Emperor has no name. He is simply the Emperor. He is viewed as a supernatural entity.

In truth, the Emperor is the puppet of the very ancient green dragon Yuanlong. Yuanlong's very existence is a secret known by only a few creatures. Yuanlong carefully manages the transition of Emperors. He has a troop of potential new Emperors that he is constantly testing for loyalty and ability so that when the current Emperor dies or must be removed, Yuanlong has the successor ready to assume the purple throne.

The Emperor is a powerful caster in his own right, but certainly knows that he rules at the pleasure of Yuanlong.

Yuanlong isn't revealed until the end of *TP20 A New Emperor*.

Parties of a Different Level

While the adventure is optimized for a party of 20th level characters, the DM can present the module to PCs of a different level. The DM must calculate **Party Strength** by summing the PCs' levels and then dividing by 20. The encounter and hazard scaling should be based on the Party Strength rather than the actual number of party members.

Adventure Outline

The PCs are informed that today is the final chance to assassinate the Emperor.

The Resistance musters its forces for an assault at midday. The first task is to breach the palace walls and cross the courtyard to the palace.

In the palace, the PCs must deal with the agents charged with personal security of the Emperor, before confronting the Emperor himself.

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 PCs begin the adventure having just completed a long rest and they can benefit from only one long rest in a 24-hour period (*PHB* 168).

Once the action starts, the PCs can't take a long rest. If they insist, the Resistance crumbles with the Emperor reestablishing security in Tofarmus.

Starting the Adventure

Downtime & Story Building

The DM is encouraged not to minimize the use of Downtime. Even if it isn't used to provide substantive resources, it has two other very important functions.

First, it allows the DM and players to build a free form story with the DM managing the detail, but with the players control over the direction and action.

Second, as a byproduct of the collaborative story building, Downtime builds an esprit de corps and aligns objectives for the PCs.

It has been a few days since *TP19 Tofarmus Politics*. The Resistance has successfully disrupted every aspect of Tofarmus activity. Ministers and magistrates have been wantonly assassinated and are now in hiding. Looters and rioters instigated by the Resistance have generated so much violence in the streets the city watch is stretched to the brink. Frequent arson is undermining infrastructure and draining resources. If the PCs were successful in the objectives of *TP19 Tofarmus Politics* then these events have gone according to plan, and the PCs have a few days of Downtime. However, if the PCs did not successfully eliminate the chief arcanist and guard captain, the Downtime is consumed by extra efforts necessary to achieve the unrest. The *PHB 187*, *DMG 127*, *XGE 123*, and the *Dimgaard Campaign Guide* all have suggestions for downtime activities and the DM may develop some of her own. Considering the disruption, the range of Downtime activities is limited. However, things that can be completed within the sanctuary are reasonable – Sacred Rites, for example. Also the DM may decide that some PCs have sufficient Deception, Perception, Intimidation, or Stealth to venture out – Searching for a Blessing/Magic Item, for example. There are also several (playtest) options available through the *Unearthed Arcana* ([here](#)).

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.

When the downtime is resolved, read or paraphrase:

Tofarmus is a din of chaos – violence in the streets, arson, looting. However, the Tofarmus watch is methodically addressing the unrest, and it looks like they will soon have the rioting quelled.

In this maelstrom of danger, the sanctuary of Torm provides a haven for you and your party. You begin the day in the dining hall of the stronghold taking breakfast with the companions you have found.

When the discussions are complete, the DM can launch the action of the adventure by reading or paraphrasing the following:

Girded Tiamus, one of the leaders in the sanctuary, enters. He looks tired. He approaches and sits. "While it looks like a success, the secret is that unless something dramatic happens today, the effort to replace the Emperor will fail.

"Khan Yesi won't be able to enter Tofarmus for several days, but we don't have the resources to last that long. Further, the leaders involved are aware of this, and soon – probably not later than today – groups will begin evacuating Tofarmus or shift alliances to avoid the Emperor's repercussions when the coup fails.

"We have summoned all our resources for a resolution today while there is still a chance for success. We will need our strongest assets – your group – for the direct assault on the palace."

Tiamus can add the following details:

- The Emperor must be killed, and his body secured.
- The Emperor is secured in his palace and not accepting visitors – even other heads of state or allies.
- The Resistance has a sufficient force to make an assault on the palace with a reasonable chance of breaching the walls, but no chance of wholly taking possession of the palace.
- A select group needs to penetrate the palace to complete the assassination.
- The Emperor has a *clone*. It is stored in a repository controlled by the Order of Hextor, but the resistance has infiltrated that organization and will be able to destroy the *clone* as soon as the palace assault begins. The PCs may spend the morning preparing. When they are in place for the attack on the palace, the DM presents Encounter 1.