

PW6 The Criminal Patron

By Dan Hass



Ulskov has long had a sketchy reputation – a haven for those wanted by justice and rumored to be the source of many criminal plots. Word arrives that a new order is in place. Can heroes ensure that the newly forming syndicate will not be an instrument of chaos, havoc, and murder? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 6th level characters. Episode 6 of *Patron Wars*.

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Adventure Summary

PW6 The Criminal Patron is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 6th 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* ([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 *PW6 The Criminal Patron* 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.

PW6 The Criminal Patron 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. *PW6 The Criminal Patron* can be run with a lot of interaction between the PCs and NPCs depending on the inclinations of the players and DM. 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. bandit captain, bargura, berserker, cult fanatic, giant elk, maw demon (VGM), quasit, spy, thug, violet fungus, will-o'-wisp
- DMG. Collapsing roof trap, Short Term Madness
- Feats. Alert, Mage Slayer, War Caster
- Magic Items. cloak of elvenkind, ioun stone (absorption), ring of free action, stone of good luck, sword of wounding, weapon of warning
- Spells. *command*, *darkness*, *dispel magic*, *freedom of movement*, *glyph of warding*, *healing word*, *hellish rebuke*, *hold person*, *inflict wounds*, *lesser restoration*, *light*, *longstrider*, *magic mouth*, *minor illusion*, *misty step*, *prestidigitation*, *sacred flame*, shield of faith, spiritual weapon, thaumaturgy
- PHB. Devil's Sight, Relentless Endurance

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.

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The Peka River Sandbox

The Peka River's convergence with the River Styx establishes a volatile region rife with adventure. At the center is the town of Farjvad. While the three episodes: *PW5 The Corrupting Patron*, *PW6 The Criminal Patron*, and *PW7 The Quiet Patron* are published sequentially, the DM can alter the order of presentation. (The additional chapter *DGD25 The Insurgent Patron* also fits into this structure.) Taken together, the three episodes progress the PCs from 5th through 7th level if most of the challenges are successfully resolved – regardless of order presented.

This may present some mismatched encounters if the DM deviates from the order published; for example, *PW5 The Corrupting Patron* is optimized for 5th level PCs, and if it is presented last – when the PCs are 7th level – the PCs will likely find the encounters less than challenging. Similarly, *PW7 The Quiet Patron* is optimized for 7th level PCs, and if presented first (when the PCs are 5th level), the encounters may be overwhelming.

The DM can compensate for these mismatches by using Party Strength (as detailed in the sidebar below: Parties of a Different Level), by adjusting the number of optional creature modifications (as detail in the sidebar below: Modification “Exploits”), and by adjusting the number of Random Events (using Appendix 3) during the travel phase of the module.

Running the Adventure

PW6 The Criminal Patron is made up of 11 events arranged into 5 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 give 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 *PW6 The Criminal Patron* 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).

Eldanoth, The Bloodless Scion

Eldanoth is a demon lord, but unlike others, his operations are cloaked in secrecy. He is known to be a primary influence in many of the most successful criminal enterprises across the cosmos.

Eldanoth is concerned about his personal comfort. His focus is on expanding the criminal organizations that serve him – providing him with luxuries and security.

Eldanoth is one of the demon lords with a following among civilizations. His ethos and methods are not nihilistic the way many demon lords are: Orcus would see all life ended and recreated as undead; Jublex would see the multiverse degenerated into a continuum of oozes; Lolth (like many demon lords) is simply bestial and all-consuming; Zuggtmoy would see fungi as the ruling form of life. Eldanoth functions as a patron deity for many assassins' guilds and thieves' guilds.

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Adventure Background

The River Styx has altered course and insinuated itself into the Material Plane. Several miles upstream from the village of Farjvad, it has merged with the Peka River, forming a breach to the Abyss. Several miles downstream it diverges from the Peka River and enters into the Nine Hells, forming a breach to that realm.

The Abyssal breach was the first to form. When it began to manifest a few weeks ago, it immediately disrupted river traffic. The demon lord Yeenoghu attempted to establish an outpost (the topic of *PW2 A Patron's Outpost*) but was thwarted. Following that attempt was an expedition of the demon lord Zuggtmoy, Lady of Fungus. Her minions corrupted the environment around the Abyssal breach (the subject of *PW3 A Patron's Expedition*).

The Peka River has now fully merged with the Styx across the several miles of waterway between the northern and southern planar breaches.

Because of the River Styx's sudden, random change in course, the area surrounding the town of Farjvad has become overrun with demons from the breach to the north. In response, devils have entered the theater through a breach to Baator to the south.

Because Asmodeus is now an accepted intercessor within the One True Faith, Farjvad's temple has been turned over to the Order of Asmodeus to coordinate the defense of the area. The Asmodean acolyte Dante Shadowsoul has become the high priest of the temple in Farjvad.

There are several lesser communities within a day's travel of Farjvad, and these have become the focus of different Abyssal or Diabolic powers.

Palga (the topic of *PW5 The Corrupting Patron*) is a small farming community of a few hundred peasants ruled by the knight Cristole the Earnest. Within the town is a monastery. The Palga monastery has an amalgam of orders within the One True Faith, and their focus is reproducing sacred texts and fabricating copies of holy relics. Often, orders within the One True Faith will entrust a text or relic to the monastery to achieve the replications – taking between a few months to as long as a couple years. While these holy items are not powerful magic items, they are significant foci of religious faith. This has drawn the attention of minions of the demon lord Ansitif, the

Befouler, who has a particular greed for desecrating the religious items of deities.

Ulskov (the topic of *PW6 The Criminal Patron*) rests on marginal land and has virtually no agriculture. It has never had a formal noble in command. It is a haven for those who operate on the fringes of society – hustlers, entertainers, exiles. At any time, the “ruler” is the most powerful – which often involves influence rather than actual physical intimidation. While this community is scorned by most as impossible to govern and having no resources worth the effort, Eldanoth, the Bloodless Scion, is a demon lord with a special interest in crime. His minions see Ulskov as an entry point with criminal elements who could be molded into a powerful asset.

Ulskov “Syndicate”

War and strife inevitably lead to great riches and power to a select few who are willing to look past the misery and exploit the persistent shortages. Ulskov has long been a haven for marginal types with “flexible” moral codes. Exploring through the Abyssal breach, followers of Eldanoth identified this location as a potential locus for a criminal organization.

In only a few days, the agents insinuated themselves into the Ulskov society, which lacks a strong ruler – or even a formal governing structure.

Quickly, the agents began extending their tentacles – corrupting officials for information like the route of supply caravans and information about which citizens could be trafficked without outrage or investigation.

Farjvad is the hub of activity for the Dimgaard resisters and their devilish allies. The Ulskov Syndicate immediately recognized this and after establishing themselves in Ulskov, decided their next move was to develop a “thieves’ guild” in Farjvad to fully exploit the opportunities there – smuggling, black markets, protection rackets.

Farberg (the topic of *PW7 The Quiet Patron*) is the closest community to the Abyssal breach; however, no alarms have been heard. This is because it has come under the influence of Graz'zt – a subtle and sinister demon lord. Graz'zt has slowly molded Farberg into a colony without its residents even realizing they are a victim of his plots.