

EG18 The Draconic Caliph

By Dan Hass



Dragonkin dedicated to the god/wyrm Rugarth have seized control of a large swath of southern Dimgaard and converted it into a religious state. The entire region is on the verge of a devastating sectarian war as the other races, including humans, start to resist the subjugation by the dragonkin. Can heroes help the area avoid a horrific conflagration? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 18th level characters. Episode eighteen in *Encounters with Gold*.

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Adventure Summary

EG18 The Draconic Caliph is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 18th 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 *EG18 The Draconic Caliph* 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. *EG18 The Draconic Caliph* 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. *EG18 The Draconic Caliph* 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. archer (VGM), auroch (VGM), giant ape, gold dragon, knight, swashbuckler (VGM), veteran, warlock of the great old one (VGM)
- DMG. Disease: Cackle Fever; Poison: Carrion Crawler Mucus
- Magic Items. *headband of intellect*, *ioun stone* (greater absorption), *moon-touched sword* (XGE), *ring of free action*, *stone of good luck*, *sword of sharpness*, *weapon of warning*
- Spells. *dispel magic*, *enhance ability* (cat's grace), *fireball*, *freedom of movement*, *glyph of warding*, *healing word*, *hold person*, *lesser restoration*, *longstrider*, *sacred flame*, *sanctuary*.

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.

Running the Adventure

EG18 The Draconic Caliph is made up of 8 events arranged into 4 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 *EG18 The Draconic Caliph* 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 Great Reduction

Many thousands of years ago, Dimgaard was home to several powerful dragons. Dragonkind were the predominant races in the region. Despite their natural rivalries, the chromatic and metallic dragons had complicated agreements to avoid disastrous internecine wars.

At some point, fey settlers from the Feywild who lived in Dimgaard spawned the new race called elves. The Archfey had a fond and protective view of elves and realized that as long as the dragons ruled, the elves would be constrained. Through a campaign of intrigue that took several centuries, the Archfey engineered a war between the metallic and chromatic dragons.

The dragon war lasted several centuries but eventually the metallic dragons won a narrow victory. A handful of powerful chromatic dragons managed to flee the region, but most were killed in the war.

Only a few powerful metallic dragons were left alive, and their supporting resources were drained by the war. At that point the Archfey delivered an ultimatum. The remaining true dragons would either be allowed to flee or be killed.

The campaign of intrigue, the dragon war, and the ultimatum that resulted in eliminating true dragons from Dimgaard became collectively known as the **Great Reduction** among the dragonkind that were left behind.

Rugarth is an ancient gold dragon deprived of his territory by the Archfey in the aftermath of the dragon war.

Dragon Cabal

Among the dragons dispossessed by the Great Reduction was a gold dragon named Rugarth. For thousands of years Rugarth has seethed at the injustice dealt him.

A few decades ago, one of Rugarth's half-dragon progeny convinced Rugarth to begin a campaign to regain his rightful territory. Rugarth began to send agents into Dimgaard and build an organization (the Dragon Cabal) to support his return. The Dragon Cabal is working to convince dragonkin of all types to set aside their differences and unite to restore dragons as the rulers of Dimgaard. In the process, they will subjugate all the non-dragon races (or eliminate those who refuse to submit).

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Adventure Background

The Dragon Cabal has worked for decades towards returning Dimgaard to dragon rule. In the past few weeks they have launched the final phases of their plans. With a wave of assassinations of key nobles and other leaders, southern Dimgaard was thrown into a state of chaos (the topic of episodes 11 through 13 of *Encounters with Gold*).

Having destabilized the region, the Cabal launched its violent takeover of many connected fiefs and towns across southern Dimgaard (the topic of episodes 14 through 17 of *Encounters with Gold*).

Meanwhile, in the distant city of Tarfodom – seat of the head of the One True Faith, Metropolitan Gregor – the leader of the human-centric religion are organizing their response. A hostile, dragonkin-based state where humans are subordinate is unacceptable to them. Having declared a crusade, forces loyal to the One True Faith are assembling and preparing to reconquer southern Dimgaard.

As noted in the conclusion of *EG17 The Draconic See*, Tusge Verdadis escaped the fall of the Verdadis barony – anticipating just such a racial/sectarian war. He hopes to ease the devastation, but he will need the help of heroes. Tusge doesn't entertain hope of overthrowing the Cabal's Holy See, nor can he stop the overwhelming crusader response by the One True Faith. However, he hopes to visibly demonstrate a resistance sufficient to convince the leaders of the One True Faith that not all dragonkin are Cabalists.

The Cabal knows that it has little time to consolidate its position and prepare sufficiently to resist the onslaught of the One True Faith's crusade. Odill is the hub of the Draconic See's defense. It is the largest city and walled. Until the new draconic state is safe, the Cabal won't expose Rugarth or the highest level of their leadership; they are safe in Rugarth's home territory many thousands of miles away.

A gold dragonborn, Rasrinn, has been assigned to administer the See until the senior Cabalists decide to relocate to Dimgaard. He has been given the title Caliph Rasrinn and rules the Draconic See as authority of the great gold wyrm Rugarth.

Odill is under Rasrinn's authoritarian rule. Almost all humans have been evicted to the outer slums, which have been divided into military wards, each under the supervision of a governor. The governors are powerful

and influential dragonkin who earned their governorship by their service in the recent war. Many of them are ruthless to the point they must be considered evil. Inside the walls, the Cabal is hurriedly but systematically preparing for an inevitable confrontation with the crusaders.

Still, the rigid organization the Cabal has imposed has solved many of the problems that had persisted in Odill for years – albeit often to grisly effects. The governors have the absolute authority within their wards to determine which citizens are of no use to the defense effort (or – worse – a threat to the effort) and execute them summarily. Several governors make these public executions with the bodies displayed prominently afterward to serve as motivation for the other citizens.

But there is no longer an unemployment problem in Odill and every citizen is guaranteed a full day's nutrition via *goodberries*. While the blandness of the sustenance is a common complaint, no one is starving in the slums now.

The Verdadis Family

It is lost to history where, when, or how the Verdadis family's bloodline became intermingled with that of a green dragon, but it did, and it is strong. Almost every family member manifests the draconic ancestry to some degree. For most of the family's history, they lived in fear of the One True Faith, or the reactions of the populace if their secret became known.

About fifty years ago, Osun Verdadis retired from a successful adventuring career to build a fief in some open territory to the east of Mooresgate. It became known as the Barony of Verdadis and quietly prospered.

As it grew, it drew the attention of the Duchy of Trussia (which has Mooresgate as its capital). The barony became a vassal state of the duchy and thrived.

The (true) rumors are that the Barony of Verdadis is a haven for dragonkin who are content to live quiet private lives with respect for the One True Faith (though not necessarily adherence) and a willingness to recognize the importance of peace.

The Barony of Verdadis has been the target of several campaigns over the years. Some by adventurers, some by Pholtans, and some by the Inquisition. However, the political influence of the Duchy of Trussia has prevented a full crusade.