

EG20 The Dragon Archon

By Dan Hass



In Auricholm, the capital of the organization led by and supporting the great gold wyrm Rugarth, his desires are conveyed via his Archon. But access to the Archon is strictly controlled, and there are vested interests in Auricholm that would suffer if the militarism of the organization subsided. Can heroes gain access to the Archon and convince him against war and conquest? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 20th level characters. Episode 20 of *Encounters with Gold*.

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Adventure Summary

EG20 The Dragon Archon 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* ([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 *EG20 The Dragon Archon* 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. *EG20 The Dragon Archon* 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. *EG20 The Dragon Archon* 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.

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

Items for Review

- Creatures. commoner
- DMG. Social Interaction
- Feats. Lucky, Mage Slayer
- Magic Items. *ioun stone* (greater absorption), *ring of free action*, *stone of good luck*, *vicious weapon*
- PHB. Fighter: Battle Master's Commander's Strike, Exhaustion, Warlock: Pact Weapon
- Spells. *detect thoughts*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *freedom of movement*, *glyph of warding*: *spell glyph*, *hold person*, *long strider*, *minor illusion*

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

EG20 The Dragon Archon 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 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 *EG20 The Dragon Archon* 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).

Auricholm & Cipa's Influence

At one time – not more than a century ago – Auricholm was a bastion of benevolence and justice. The dragons and dragonkin in the service of Rugarth worked diligently for the betterment of the cosmos – opposing tyranny and evil.

Beginning about a century ago, one of Rugarth's great granddaughters – the gold dragon Cipa – became very influential. She grew very close to Rugarth – almost always by his side. And in many instances she inserted herself to speak for Rugarth – apparently with his authorization.

Those fortunate enough to interact directly with Rugarth noted that he seemed weary. At over 100,000 years old he seemed to have lost the vigor that had driven him to found one of the great empires – spanning multiple domains and even extending into other planes – after being ejected from his home territory. He was often disinterested in what were apparently important issues the Rugarth organization wrestled with, almost always deferring to Cipa.

Just over five decades ago, a nephew of Cipa and direct descendant of Rugarth – a half-dragon named Dallarth – became more prominent. The Dragon Cabal was Dallarth's creation. He proposed unifying all the dragonkin of Dimgaard in opposition to the forces that would deprive dragons of their just positions as rulers of Dimgaard.

This movement enjoyed the support of Cipa and if Rugarth opposed the proposition he kept quiet and his support was inferred.

The Dragon Cabal allied with groups that were clearly evil – working toward the oppression of other groups; advocating the right of conquest to supersede decent treatment of conquered populations; insisting that conquerors enjoy absolute rights to loot; etc. Dallarth and Cipa ensured that the mission of the Dragon Cabal in Dimgaard received resource priorities.

The consequence for Auricholm is that it became a haven for very unsavory elements of dragons and dragonkin. It became a common tactic for an evil dragon – possibly even a creature as vile as an adult red dragon – to espouse support for the Dragon Cabal to gain access to the comforts and resources of Auricholm. Any foul results were supported by Dallarth and Cipa – who often stepped in to protect offending dragons/dragonkin from justice for egregious violations within Auricholm. This has splintered justice-concerned elements.

Adventure Background

Dimgaard is on the brink of a wide-ranging war between the Dragon Cabal and the One True Faith. Even if contained, it will still devastate large swaths of Dimgaard. Both sides have intractable positions. The choices of Rugarth's chief administrator in Dimgaard (Caliph Ranriss) are to either pursue a path he knows to be disastrous (continue the crusade against the One True Faith) or openly defy his patron deity (Rugarth). In hopes that a new perspective will convince the senior members of Rugarth's organization – perhaps even Rugarth himself – Caliph Ranriss has arranged for a delegation to travel to the capital of Rugarth's domain (Auricholm) and meet with Rugarth's Archon, the chief noble in Rugarth's empire.

In *EG19 The Draconic Capital* the heroes had the chance to establish themselves in Auricholm and investigate the political complications of the city. It took several days before the heroes found a place on the Archon's daily agenda. During that time, elements within the capital with vested interests in war have been organizing to prevent the heroes from swaying the Archon. Some were surprising in origin.

Auricholm's temple to Bahamut is one of the most influential in the cosmos. As Rugarth's directions became more warlike, radical Bahamut followers came to Auricholm. These adherents find honor and redemption in the crucible of combat and believe that there is no shortage of evil to campaign against.

Rugarth's bellicose activities also drew many followers of Tiamat. They also found reasons to align with their fellow dragonkin and join Rugarth's many campaigns, often to great rewards – both in loot and personal satisfaction.

As the initial focused campaigns widened in scope and grew into decades of military activity, an infrastructure evolved. A large sector of economic activity in Auricholm is now dependent on the constant state of war.

These two groups have been active over the past days trying to keep the heroes from persuading the Archon to change the nature of Rugarth's empire.

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 day has arrived when the PCs have an audience with Rugarth's Archon. As they proceed through the city, they are accosted by followers of Tiamat who don't want the war to end.

Similarly, war profiteers have bribed gate guards to provoke a violent incident that will cost the PCs their appointment with the Archon.

Finally, the PCs must deal with militant followers of Bahamut who see Rugarth's campaigns as an instrument of justice throughout the cosmos.

If they overcome the obstacles, the PCs have a chance to make their case to the Archon.

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, they lose their appointment with the Archon – perhaps to never again gain peaceful access.