

'UNSTUCK' ENCOUNTERS

SHORT SCENARIOS FOR WHEN YOUR PCs JUST CAN'T FIGURE IT OUT



By Jean Lorber

5th Edition D&D

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Introduction

“The best-laid plans of dice and DMs oft go awry”

Every Dungeon Master has been in this situation: your PCs can't figure out what to *do* next, where to *go* next or who to *look for* next. It's your job as the DM to get them unstuck, and this collection of encounters can help.

Rather than simply telling your PCs what they need to know, make them earn it. Once they are about to give up, use these short encounters as a way to reveal the needed information in a different or weird or (sometimes) low-cost way.

For instance, did your PCs miss your multiple clues about the secret section of the dungeon? Then have them meet Dirk the transmuted rat thief who would gladly show them the way in exchange for some well-made, rat-size furniture...

Mostly consisting of role-playing opportunities, these encounters don't have Challenge Ratings. They can be used by parties of any level, simply by adjusting the Skill check DCs.

Materials and formatting

To run these encounters, you'll need *VGTM*, your trusty *Monster Manual*, and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (for the occasional magic item description).

There are several visual signals used in this document to call your attention to important features or bits of information:

- Major NPCs or monsters will be named in bold type the first time they are mentioned in the encounter—e.g. **kobold sorcerer**.
- Some game mechanics are capitalized when they are mentioned—e.g. Advantage, Inspiration, names of Actions).
- Skill checks or saving throws opportunities are in all caps—e.g. DC13 DEXTERITY saving throw.
- Text in grey boxes is meant for DM eyes only, usually providing context for some element of the encounter.
- Text in clear boxes is meant to be read aloud to your PCs.



“Maybe I should have taken the left passageway.....”

STICKY CHICKEN

Summary

Inside a dungeon, your PCs come across a fortified intersection occupied by a tribe of kobolds. Directions to or information about a needed location can be negotiated for a seemingly low price: the PCs prepare the kobold leader's favorite meal. The true price becomes apparent when the PCs locate the key ingredient: cockatrices.

Utility

This encounter is best suited for an underground setting. Use it if your PCs are having trouble finding a secret or otherwise undiscovered part of a dungeon.

Backstory

This band of kobolds is led by Beeka, who used to live beneath a city. She grew fond of stealing food from restaurants and her favorite dish was sticky chicken, a honey-glazed delicacy. When the PCs show up, Beeka thinks these "civilized" people are her ticket to a meal of her precious chicken.

Encounter Areas

In a section of dungeon or castle that your PCs must get through, they find their way blocked by a tribe of kobolds.

1. Barricade

The passage you are traveling in ends abruptly at a roughly-constructed barricade. Reptilian, dog-nosed faces peer out. "Go away! Tunnel closed!"

Twenty **kobolds** are dug in on the other side of the barricade (AC 17, 60 HP). They aren't hostile, but they refuse to let PCs through. If the PCs attack, don't escalate at first. The kobolds respond: "Hey! Quit, quit! This our place! You talk to Beeka!" They fetch their chief, who is ready to make a deal:

A female kobold head pops through the barricade. She sees you and her eyes widen. "You from surface? From city?!...OK, wait." A hatch opens, and a jaunty purplish kobold steps out. OK, we can make fight. Lots kobolds. Or we make deal. In city, I eat sticky chicken. Best food! You cook

two sticky chickens for me, and I help you find what you look for. Deal? Come, I show you chickens."

Beeka is indeed willing to trade free passage and information for a meal of sticky chicken. A DC12 INSIGHT check reveals her genuine excitement over the prospect of this meal. She takes a PC by the hand and happily escorts them to area 2. Besides the meat, the kobolds have the rest of the ingredients for the dish (pilfered from a spice caravan), but have no idea how to cook the dish.

2. Roost

A large cave is dimly lit by luminescent mushrooms. Tiny pebbles are scattered on the packed stone floor. Several small alcoves are carved into a wall, and piles of old furniture and broken masonry dot the floor. Perched on one such pile is a grey chicken, looking quite content.

A flock of four **cockatrice** calls this 60x60-foot cave home, all but one are currently resting in the alcoves. In a neighboring cave, the entrance to which is noticed with a DC12 PERCEPTION check, is an **ogre**. He tends to the flock for his amusement, throwing in dungeon detritus like broken tables for the cockatrice to perch on. The 'pebbles' on the floor are grain he scattered. He doesn't fear getting petrified as his hide is too thick for the cockatrice beaks to bite through.

Sneaking up on the visible cockatrice requires a DC14 STEALTH check. Killing it puts the scent of blood into the air, which sends the remaining birds into a frenzy. They start squawking loudly, and won't stop unless they are fed meat or calmed (their dead flock-mate will do, as will a DC12 ANIMAL HANDLING check). Unless they are quieted in 2 rounds, the ogre checks on them.

Resolution

If the PCs cook Beeka's sticky chickens, she is thrilled and ravenously eats one on the spot, bones and all. She burps, satisfied, and shows the PCs how to get to their desired location.

A FINE MEAL, INDEED

Summary

The PCs must dine with an influential nobleman to obtain needed information. At dinner, the PCs learn that the noble has no money, and that they will be expected to pay for the entire evening. The more the PCs spend, the better their chances for getting the information. Both patience and pocketbooks will be put to the test.

Utility

This encounter is best suited for city setting, in a palace or manor. Use it as a costly way for your PCs to obtain information or influence they haven't figured out how to get.

Backstory

Lord Khot is an important nobleman in the city where your PCs are based. He's lived off his family's fortune for decades, squandering it on dog-racing. He is now broke, but only vaguely aware of his situation, and continues to live a lavish lifestyle. This is possible only due to the efforts of his cunning butlers, who have connived to have a series of visitors pay handsomely for their time with the Lord.

Encounter

Your PCs have determined that talking to Lord Khot could yield the information that they've been seeking. He has agreed to see them, and they have just arrived at his grand but somewhat shabby estate. They are greeted at the door by a pair of aged butlers, who show them inside.

The butlers are **Dirgis** (human male) and **Plum** (gnome male), who have been in the employ of Lord Khot for most of their lives. They behave like proper butlers: haughty and aloof. They are the driving force extorting money from the Lord's guests. The butlers aren't actually seeking to personally profit from these transactions. They are solely concerned with maintaining the status of their failing Lord.

The butlers escort the PCs to the dining room, where the night's entertainment has already begun:

The sound of truly terrible singing pours out from the dining room you're headed to. As you enter, a young woman is finishing her performance. Her audience consists of an older man, who sits alone at a large table, sipping wine in his gloomy, spacious room.

Lord Khot has been listening to his daughter Cordelia singing and is in a bad mood. Cordelia joins everyone at the dinner table as he welcomes the PCs begrudgingly and engages in some idle conversation. Some of his mannerisms include:

- Speaks animatedly about dog-racing and gambling.
- Gets the PCs names wrong.
- Asks the PCs a question, but then barks out orders to his butlers during their response.
- Tells long anecdotes about random nobles

Ultimately, sitting through Lord Khot's stories is worth it, because he knows most of the city's rumors and some of its secrets, including the information the PCs seek. However, extracting this information will not be easy or cheap. Lord Khot's mood, and therefore his willingness to tell the PCs what they want to know, is directly linked to the quality of his upcoming meal.

The first clue about the night's true cost occurs during the first course (soup). Read the following:

Lord Khot's daughter speaks up while eating her soup: "Father, might I have another round of singing lessons? It would only cost 50 pieces of gold..."

"Plum! Arrange for Cordellia's lessons."

"Sir, I'm not sure where I might find 50 gold p..."

"What do you mean?! Just rummage around in the cushions!...Bah! This soup is terrible! NEXT course!!" Lord Khot lets the conversation die in an awkward silence.

The butlers' patience looks strained. While clearing the soup course, Dirgis mutters quickly to the PCs in one breath:

"Lord-Khot-is-penniless-you-must-pay-for-this-meal-to-keep-him-happy-and-talkative."

He then walks off as if nothing happened and plays dumb if asked about his comment.

Thus begins a charade between the two butlers and the PCs: Before each course of the meal, Dirgis slowly announces the choices of food while looking to the PCs about whether they will pay for it. Each course has a cheap option and an expensive option (see inset). Whatever the PCs answer, Plum runs into the kitchen to order the appropriate food from the nearby butcher and grocer. Before the 2nd course is announced, read the following:

Lord Khot snaps his fingers at his butler. "Dirgis, second course! What are our choices?"

Dirgis makes meaningful eye contact with you, then slowly addresses the Lord: "Well, my Lord, I believe we...have sausage...or...perhaps something better...?"

Dirgis covertly looks at you, waiting...

Next to him, Plum holds up fingers to indicate the price of the "better" option. He waits for your response, ready to run into the kitchen to place the order.

If needed, the butlers can continue to insinuate that the meeting will go better if the PCs help fund the evening's activities. A typical passive-aggressive warning is below:

"Perhaps the gentlemen (lady) would *like* the Lord to throw his paltry salad in a fit of rage and forget the questions you've asked him?"

To acquire the information they want, your PCs will need to succeed on DC20 Skill check during conversation with Lord Khot (your choice). However, he is initially impervious to inquiries; no Skill check will succeed (or be counted) until he has had two courses of this five-course meal.

PCs can attempt Skills checks starting at the third course, but their chances might improve if they wait. For every expensive food option chosen, the Lord's mood improves and the DC for acquiring the information decreases by 2. Additionally, the PCs can gain Advantage on this check in the following ways:

- incorporate gambling into the conversation
- Singing a duet with the Lord's daughter (DC10 PERFORMANCE check also).

After a first failed check, describe the Lord's darkening mood or stony silence as a warning that another failure will conclude the evening. With two failed Skill checks, the Lord's mood sours, and he concludes the night with a hasty "well met".

To sum up, if the PCs spend 200 gold pieces on 4 courses of lavish food, they then have 2 chances to succeed on a DC12 Skill check, possibly with Advantage. Succeeding on this check means that the PCs obtain the needed information.

Suggestions for each course are as follows:

Soup: Mixed vegetable gruel (no choice)
Salad: Cheap--mixed lettuce with oil
Expensive--Wilted arugula with imported goat cheese and veggygmy pollen
Meat: Cheap--ground sausage
Expensive--dry-aged owlbear tenderloin
Fish: Cheap--boiled lake trout
Expensive--filet of kraken with chuul roe in a lemon-butter sauce
Dessert: Cheap--sugared carrots
Expensive--Mead from the court of the Fey Queen and moon elf cakes

Each cheap option costs 1 gold piece.

Each expensive option costs 50 gold pieces.

Resolution

Thoroughly full and mostly drunk, Lord Khot eventually excuses himself from the table. He thanks the PCs for a wonderful evening and pledges his undying friendship. He forgets everything the next morning...

MARKET RUMBLE

Summary

Your PCs don't know where to find a crucial NPC. They go to an information dealer for help, who is currently having tea at the city market. The PCs questioning of the dealer is cut short when a bounty hunter snatches him up. If your PCs can rescue the dealer, he'll gladly tell them the location of their NPC contact.

Backstory

Inibri Five-eyes is a self-styled "information merchant". The halfling runs a network of low-level spies, who keep tabs on the city's famous and infamous people. Your PCs learn about Inibri by asking any barkeep or watchman.

Inibri has become a target of Gruzz Longrope, a nasty half-orc bounty hunter. Gruzz has tracked him to a market café, but he has to be careful: the local Lord lets Gruzz operate only as long as he doesn't cause too much trouble (murder, for instance). So this chase won't become too violent; Gruzz is seeking to throw off his pursuers, not kill them. Who hired Gruzz? That's another story....

Encounter

To begin, your PCs head to a meeting at a café on the city market. Inibri sits at a table near a window, sipping tea. A DC11 INSIGHT check reveals that he is nervous and keeps looking at his bodyguard at the café's door, a battle-scarred dwarf. He gets right to the point:

No, don't sit. This won't take long. My information isn't cheap. 40 gold pieces. Deal? OK. Who are you...looking... for..?

Inibri's attention wavers when he sees movement out of the corner of his eye. After the PCs begin to interact, read the following:



Quick as a flash, a heavily-muscled, green-skinned arm reaches in the open café window, and yanks Inibri outside. The sounds of crashing wood, squawking chickens and rapidly-retreating footsteps follow. Inibri's bodyguard leaps through the doorway in pursuit, but an unseen tripwire causes him to immediately crash to the ground.

Inibri has just been snatched by Gruzz, who is making a quick escape. Gruzz has helpers to deal with Inibri's bodyguard, but he wasn't planning on additional pursuers. He's a professional, though, and he has some tricks up his sleeve.

The Chase

As an alternative to the mechanics described in the DMG (pages 252-255), use the following rules for this chase.

Unless the PCs catch Gruzz, he reaches a waiting carriage in 5 rounds, speeds off and the encounter is over. Gruzz is caught if he ends his turn in a condition that logically ends a chase, such as Restrained, Stunned or Paralyzed. Nevermind the distance between the PCs and Gruzz; until he is caught, he's always just a few feet beyond the PCs reach.

Each round plays out in 3 steps:

1. This busy market is full of features that could either help or hinder the PCs efforts. Roll a d6, consult the 'Market Features' table below, and read the description out loud. Any mechanic listed takes place immediately, (usually a Skill check, choose PCs randomly). Gruzz automatically succeeds.
2. Gruzz unleashes another obstacle. Roll a d6 and consult the 'Gruzz's tricks' table below. Any mechanic listed takes place immediately.
3. It's now the PCs turn. But any PC that failed a check or saving throw in the previous two steps must now use their Action to make a new DC12 saving throw, using the ability they failed with before. Failure means that they are out of the encounter, while success allows them to stay. The other PCs get to attack Gruzz, using their own tricks or the market feature rolled in step 1. Note that Gruzz's 'Nimble Little Minx' feature gives him the ability to negate one attack per round.

Market Features

Roll	Description	Mechanic
1	A large awning stretches across the street	None required. 5 slashing damage causes it to fall across street (AC5).
2	A cart of nightsoil is crossing from a side street.	All PCs must pass a DC8 ATHLETICS or ACROBATICS to avoid it.
3	A nobleman is taking his pack of excitable hounds on a walk.	2 PCs must pass DC8 ANIMAL HANDLING to keep them from jumping all over them.
4	A crowd watches a mother duck and her ducklings cross the street.	2 PCs must pass DC8 DEX to avoid stepping on a duck and getting harassed by the crowd.
5	A crowd has assembled to listen to a cleric of Kord preach.	2 PCs must pass a DC8 PERSUASION to get the crowd to part.
6	Several puddles are spread across the street	2 PCs must pass DC8 PERCEPTION to avoid the deeper, ankle-twisting potholes.

Gruzz's tricks

Roll	Description	Mechanic
1	Bola thrown at 1 PC.	DC12 DEX saving throw or PC is Restrained
2	Caltrops thrown on ground in front of 2 PCs.	DC12 DEX saving throw or PC is Slowed
3	Sand thrown in the eyes of 1 PC.	DC12 CON saving throw or PC is Blinded.
4	Knocks a table of melons over in front of 2 PCs.	DC12 DEX saving throw or PC falls Prone.
5	Yells in falsetto voice: "Help me, thieves!" (2 PCs)	DC12 CHA saving throw or PC is Restrained by crowd.
6	Pulls large crate over onto 1 PC.	DC12 STR saving throw or PC is Slowed.

The city guards know Gruzz, and won't stop him from doing his mostly-lawful work. They also won't stop the PCs from giving chase, as long as they aren't endangering the crowd by waving swords or shooting arrows into crowds. Make it clear that outright violence won't be tolerated (but a little mayhem will be met with a chuckle). Alternatively, remind the PCs that Inibri is slung across Gruzz's back, and targeting Gruzz with lethal force would be a bad idea.

Resolution

If Gruzz is caught, he doesn't resist any further. This was a job, nothing more. He gives up Inibri and expects to be released by the PCs. A grateful Inibri tells the PCs the location of their target and gives them 40 gold pieces.

GRUZZ LONGROPE

Medium humanoid (half-orc), neutral

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)
Hit Points 30 **Speed** 30

STR 16(+3) **DEX** 14(+2) **CON** 14(+2) **INT** 10(+0) **WIS** 14(+2) **CHA** 8(-1)

Skills ACRO +5, ATHL +6,
Senses passive Perception 12

Nimble Little Minx. If Gruzz is hit by an attack, he can use his Reaction to avoid the attack and any condition it might have imposed.

ACTIONS

Gruzz can make any one of the attacks from the table per round.

DIRK'S HOME FOR WAYWARD RODENTS

Summary

The PCs must negotiate with an unnaturally clever rat with a past to get access to a needed clue or location.

Utility

This encounter is best suited for a dungeon or castle setting. Use it if your PCs aren't finding a needed clue or location.

Backstory

Dirk was a petty thief in a big city. He robbed one too many wizards and was the target of a permanent *true polymorph* spell, which turned him into a rat. He fled to the sewers, then hitched a ride on a series of caravans to end up in the location where your PCs currently are.

Dirk has grown to enjoy his new life as a rat; he figured out how to train other rats to scavenge for him and has a pretty easy, if basic, life. He does miss civilization sometimes, so he built a rat-scale facsimile of a comfortable study.

Encounter

The PCs are in a tunnel or hallway, and come across a common dungeon sight: a pack of rats. However, one rat stands out. Read the following:

A group of about 20 rats is scuttling along the tunnel floor, headed towards a couple of low holes in the wall. You see one rat stand up and stretch, then roughly nudge a few of the other rats in a new direction.

A DC10 PERCEPTION check reveals that the rat is wearing a small leather belt with a couple of pouches. This is Dirk, herding his rat buddies on a scavenging mission. He'll engage with the PCs if they approach him, or even try to get their attention. If the PCs really threaten him, he unleashes 3 **swarms of rats**.

Dirk will answer some basic questions about the surroundings, mainly to show that he's pretty well-informed. Some of Dirk's mannerisms include:

- Speaks only in halting Common, squeaking often in the middle of sentences
- Smokes a small pipe while listening to PCs
- If the PCs are patronizing to him, he feigns rummaging in a belt pouch, then produces an upraised middle finger.

Once Dirk knows the PCs need something, he will start negotiating. He has no use for currency, and will scoff at any offer. What he really wants is additions to his rat-scale cottage. The chairs, bed and bookshelves he built with his little rat hands aren't very well crafted.

This is a great opportunity for your PCs to use their tool proficiencies. Educated PCs could create and copy little books while craftsman PCs could build furniture. The more civilized the item, the better. Three items constructed with a DC12 or better Skill check will satisfy Dirk. This should take at least 2-3 hours, which could trigger a random encounter roll, if your campaign uses those.

Resolution

With 3 items delivered, Dirk leads the PCs to the clue or location that they need. Any item built with a DC18 or better Skill check will completely delight Dirk, and he'll send two of his trained rats to accompany the PCs. On command, each rat will scout out an unexplored room for danger. It will return to the PCs and give a "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down". It will then return to Dirk.

