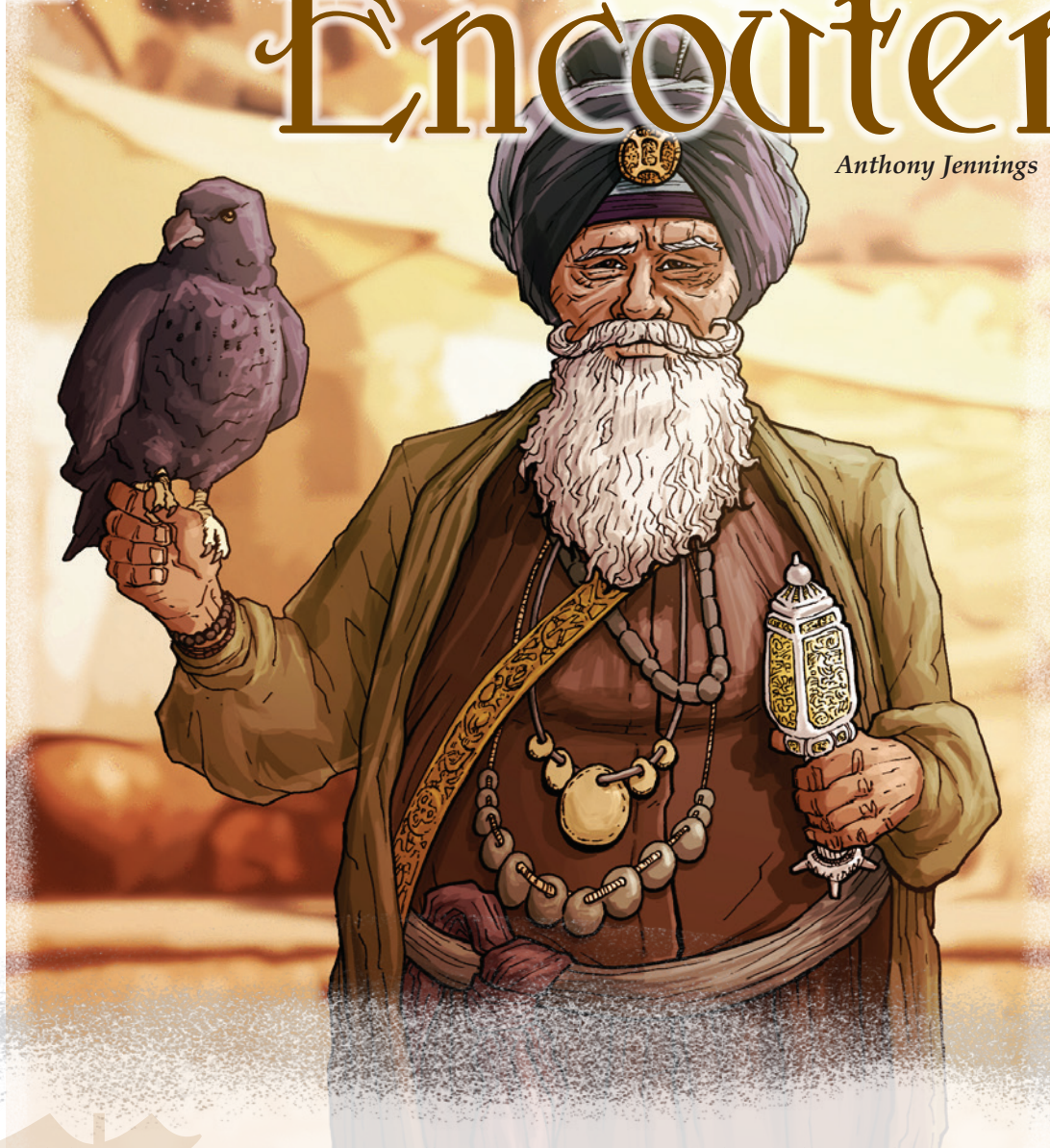


# 4 Random Roleplaying Encounters

Anthony Jennings



While many Game Masters still create random encounters from a table of monsters that the player characters can fight, random encounters can also provide opportunities to promote roleplaying and immersion, as well as introducing new and exciting NPCs to the campaign. As a result, the following encounters stress roleplaying and problem solving rather than combat

prowess or dice rolling. These encounters should incite a debate amongst the players as to what exactly is the best course of action. Allow the discussion to continue as long as the players stay in character and the debate is productive. If the players become bogged down and cannot make a decision, offer some advice that may help them break the deadlock without giving them a “correct answer.”

## Awarding Experience

You should award experience as if the players had overcome an encounter of their average party level. You can award more experience if you feel the players role-played well or came up with an innovative solution to the encounter.

### 1. Baby Monsters

The PCs are traveling through a dense and eerie forest known as a haven to terrible and ferocious beasts. In these lands not even the roads are safe, as the adventures soon discover when they encounter the corpse of an **owlbear** lying across their path. When the PCs inspect it, they learn that it has been dead several days and that hunters most likely killed it. The creature has several broken arrows sticking out of its side and a deep gash across its neck.

The next day, the adventurers hear loud cries and chirps coming from a thicket of brambles and brush not far off the road. When they track the cries to their source, they discover an owlbear nest with several dead owlbear chicks and only one survivor. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check confirms that the dead chicks died of starvation and that the surviving chick is starving and malnourished.

The PCs face a dilemma. Owlbears are known to be dangerous predators, but will they kill a defenseless chick? They could take the owlbear with them and hope to find a druid who can properly raise it. Even the PCs could attempt to raise the chick on their own—with the risks and potential rewards associated with raising an owlbear.

## Using This Encounter

This encounter forces players to choose between killing a defenseless and usually evil creature or allowing it to live and possibly cause harm others. The players must make a moral decision about the life of a helpless creature and then live with the consequences. If the players decide to keep the chick and raise it, you should create a baby version of the owlbear and make raising it and caring for it as difficult as possible. A full grown owlbear is a powerful companion and, as such, the players should earn this ally. In this sense, raising an owlbear should require more effort than succeeding on a few Animal Handling checks.

You can substitute the owlbear with any creature with a normally evil alignment. A **troll** baby or a **behir** youngling would be great choices. You should select the creature that best fits your campaign and the environment in which the PCs are currently traveling.

### 2. The Tag Along

After successfully completing their most recent adventure, the PCs set out pleased that they have once again saved the world from certain doom. However one children, a young girl named Mera, has followed the PCs. The PCs may hear strange sounds in the forest or may notice that when they stop for the night someone or something is stealing food from them. After several days of travel, they discover Mera and must decide what to do with her. Mera wants to become an adventurer like her heroes, the PCs. Already fourteen—and extremely stubborn—

Mera refuses to return to her village. The adventurers must choose between backtracking to return Mera to her home and allowing her to join the party.

### Using This Encounter

This encounter explores the effect that the PCs have on their world. Rather than just being a group who wanders from place to place solving problems, they must now deal with the spoils of their successes. Mera is symbolic of all the people who want to take up the adventuring life and may mirror the backstory of one of the PCs.

If the adventurers allow Mera to join their party, they will find themselves responsible for her well-being. However, if one of the PCs mentors Mera, she quickly proves to be a talented student and gains a level in the same class as her mentor the next time the PCs level up. Treat Mera as an NPC otherwise. She gains no experience from encounters unless she takes part and the PCs agree to split their experience with her. You should avoid using Mera as a hostage for the adventurers to rescue; instead, you should portray Mera as a capable and resourceful character.

Instead of a young child following the adventurers, the NPC could be a villager who has fallen in love with one of the PCs. The risks of this variation are many, as a spurned lover could become a powerful nemesis. Also, keep in mind that not all groups are comfortable with adding a romantic subplot to their games.

## 3. The One That Got Away

During a long trek, the PC's pass near a swamp, but thankfully the road skirts the edge of the swamp and does not go through it. Up ahead

the adventurers hear an inhuman screech and a few moments later a **lizardfolk** rushes down the road towards them fleeing in terror. He has no weapons and is running for his life. Hot on his trail, another adventuring party sprints after him firing arrows wildly.

The lizardfolk falls to his knees at the characters' feet begging for help. Speaking in broken Common, he says his name is Kizzik and that the people following him attacked and destroyed his village and that he is the only survivor. The other adventuring party, led by a female elven ranger named Talindra, claims that the lizardfolk is a part of a tribe that has been attacking nearby villages.

### Using This Encounter

The crux of this encounter is not to determine who is telling the truth, but instead putting the life of a single lizardfolk in the PCs hands. Kizzik has surrendered, but Talindra is dead set on killing him and exacting revenge on the lizardfolk who slaughtered the villagers. In this case both sides are telling the truth: Talindra honestly believes that Kizzik and his tribe are guilty. Kizzik's tribe, however, was not responsible for the attack. As a result, no roll can determine who is lying since both are telling the truth. Do the PCs believe in vengeance or justice and mercy? Talindra and her party will not attack the PCs, and if the PCs attack them, they will retreat rather than fight.

Although Kizzik and his tribe are not responsible for the villagers' deaths, someone is. Perhaps it is another lizardfolk tribe or a far greater and more dangerous enemy that the PCs can only defeat by working together with Talindra and her party.

## 4. Snake Oil Salesman

On a major trade route, the PCs encounter a halfling merchant named Lordena Swiftfoot driving a large and colorful wagon. She claims to specialize in selling powerful and exotic potions. If asked where the potions come from, she tells the PCs that she has contacts with a powerful wizard's guild from whom she purchases the potions.

Lordena is lying. She mixes the potions herself and knows just enough about brewing potions to make the potions appear magical if the PCs use *detect magic*. At best, her makeshift potions simply do not work. At worst, they have terrible side effects. Assuming that the adventurers are not too bright, Lordena attempts to sell the PCs as many potions as she can. She is happy to haggle and even sell them well below market value; after all, they cost her almost nothing to make.

Lordena is not necessarily evil, but she is greedy. She knows that her fake potions could leave an adventuring party in dire straits, but that is not her problem. If the adventurers figure out that she is selling fake potions, she has a sob story prepared about how a group of gnolls attacked her wagon and stole the real potions. As a result, she is only selling the fake potions because she desperately needs the money.

### Using This Encounter

Lordena is a simple merchant and prefers to run rather than fight. If the adventurers discover that she is selling them fake potions, she flees. If escape is not possible, she offers to repay the PCs and even give them a portion of her sales in the future. The adventurers may choose to take out their anger by attacking Lordena or destroying her wagon and supply of fake potions. In that case, treat Lordena as a **commoner**.

Lordena may be able to successfully sell the potions to the adventurers without the PCs discovering that the potions are fakes. In that case, you will need to keep track of which potions are fakes and determine what their effects will be, if any.

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