

MOTIVATED ENCOUNTERS

SPICING UP RANDOM ENCOUNTERS



THERE IS SO MUCH MORE TO RANDOM ENCOUNTERS than what the player characters experience. Often, a group of hostile monsters unexpectedly appear while the characters are traveling, forcing the heroes to deal with a minor annoyance before continuing on their quest.

How often are random encounters with creatures just wandering around or “patrolling,” even if they are nowhere near a lair to actively patrol? This is sufficient and even appropriate for many encounters, and an easy option to fall back on

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when the GM has been given no advice on what the creatures are doing or what they want. It's easy to forget that the creatures they encounter must have a reason to exist—giving your random monsters motivation or showing them in the moment combat begins before helps create encounters your players will remember forever.

Detailing every random encounter is time-consuming and takes up space in a published adventure, so it is often left for the GM to determine how and why the encounter takes place. The following ideas can add spice to both written adventures and homebrew campaigns.

USING THE TABLE

This chart is to help a GM add context, interest and hopefully, a little fun to their random encounters. It's not an encounter chart in itself; it is to be used alongside your random encounter charts. After determining which creatures the characters encounter, the GM then rolls on this chart to see what the encountered creatures are up to at that time.

Using the chart below will also add verisimilitude to your setting. How often do the PCs encounter creatures without seeing signs of their occupation in the area? Some of the entries include coming across signs of encounters, or even finding them dead. Encounters like these can be used to warn players when dangerous creatures are around. Some can also be used to alter the difficulty of an encounter. If you want to throw an orc war chief into the mix but feel the party can't handle one yet, then perhaps the war chief is Wounded (see below).

Very few of the entries below require modifications to the encountered creatures however—they are merely for dressing and adding motives for the creatures. Not all entries will suit all creatures. If you don't like the result, roll again, choose an alternative or fall back to patrolling.

Roll percentile dice or choose from the following table.

Random Encounter Motivation

d100 Creature Aims and Actions

- 01–02 **Accompanied by Other Creatures.** Combining two random encounter rolls can lead to interesting relationships. If the encounter includes multiples of the same creature (e.g., three orcs), replace two of these creatures with two other monsters of the same challenge rating. These two encounters are not hostile to one another and likely working together. You may wish to roll a second time to see what this combined group is up to.
- 03–04 **Alternative Movement.** The encounter is currently moving using a method other than walking, such as running, swimming, climbing, burrowing, swinging, riding, flying, or sliding.
- 05–07 **Ambush.** The encounter is hiding and ready to strike. This might be a favored hunting spot for beasts or an elaborate set-up by intelligent creatures. If possible, it is likely that intelligent creatures have booby-trapped the area.
- 08–09 **Bickering or Fighting.** This is an internal scrap or argument, not one with other creatures. It is likely a fight for dominance, food, mates, shelter, or because someone cheated in a game or contest.
- 10–11 **Constructing.** The encounter is presently building a home, lair, shelter, stronghold, religious site, monument, or bridge. Simple beasts encountered in this way are settling a lair or den.
- 12–14 **Camping.** The creatures of this encounter are preparing to rest. A camp usually involves shelter, food and a fire.
- 15–16 **Captured.** The encounter rolled is the prisoner of another encounter. (Roll a second encounter to determine the captors or determine that the captors have left them to die.) Prisoners are likely tied up, usually to a pole or to each other, or even caged.
- 17–18 **Collecting Food and Drink.** The encounter is actively fetching food and drink. This could involve foraging, hunting, skinning, butchering, fishing, digging, or simply carrying their takings.

d100 Creature Aims and Actions

19–20 **Common Annoyance.** Encounter is suffering from or has recently suffered from a pest of some sort, such as fleas, mosquitoes, hornets, or poison ivy. In any case, the encountered creatures are agitated; depending on the creatures' nature, they may be spoiling for a fight or itching to retreat.

21–22 **Conducting Business or Diplomacy.** Generate another random encounter. These two groups of creatures are currently involved in conversation or interaction of some importance. For beasts, this could be a display to attract a mate or move rivals on.

23 **Counting Wealth or Divvying Loot.** The encounter is sorting through, divvying up, or counting their gains.

24–26 **Crafting.** The encounter is creating new things, such as magical items, arrows, weapons, armors, common equipment, alchemical or herbal concoctions, clothing, or even a large item (wagon, trap, canoe, etc.).

27–30 **Dead.** The party stumbles upon a dead encounter. Generate another encounter to determine what killed them; the victorious party may have left tracks that the party can follow.

d100 Creature Aims and Actions

31–33 **Devious.** This encounter has no interest in confrontation, but it does try to relieve the group of some items, possibly even pets or mounts. Encounters of this nature could involve pickpockets while in the city or kobolds setting up traps while underground. Beasts encountered in this fashion could be stalking the party, keen on devouring their horses, but hoping to avoid a confrontation with the whole group.

34–35 **Carousing.** The encounter is currently enjoying a meal and drinking. Each of the encountered creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or are intoxicated by what they are drinking and are Poisoned for the next hour.

36 **Escaped.** The encounter has recently escaped and is fleeing its tormentors. Generate another random encounter to determine their pursuers.

37–41 **Evidence of Encounter.** The characters don't actually encounter a creature, just evidence of its presence in the area. This could include dung, refuse, tracks, blood, a dropped item, commoners spreading rumors, remains from recent kills, diggings, scratches on nearby trees, or an abandoned lair.



d100 Creature Aims and Actions

- 42–43 **Fighting Another Encounter.** Generate another random encounter; the two groups of creatures are locked in combat. You may wish to determine what they are fighting over, or what one group was doing before the conflict, by rolling a second time on this chart.
- 44–45 **Competing.** The encounter is involved in a test of might or a game of chance such as cards or dice. Some contests include balancing, largest vegetable contest, archery, riddling, arm wrestling, or playing dice games. For beasts, this may be a contest for pack leadership or for a mate, such as two stags locking antlers.
- 46 **Grooming or Dressing.** The encountered creatures are getting ready to go out or simply preening themselves.
- 47–49 **Guarding.** PCs stumble upon guard or scout for larger group, or come across larger group that has guards posted. These guards may be watchmen for a larger horde, or they are protecting a secret location or object.
- 50 **Inconvenient Situation.** The encounter is caught with its pants down, perhaps quite literally. The situation can vary from the serious (caught in a trap, stuck in a web, drowning, shedding skin, giving birth) to the embarrassing (attending to bodily functions, mating).
- 51–54 **Lost.** The encounter does not know where it is and is wandering aimlessly.
- 55–56 **Secret Society or Betrayers.** Reroll this result if applied to beasts. The encountered creatures have ulterior motives that they must conceal from their kin. Perhaps they belong to a cult or society not allowed in their home, or simply wish to betray their leader. This encounter may lead to a roleplaying situation where normally there would be combat.
- 57–58 **Merrymaking.** The encounter is currently involved in a party, festival, or shindig. This likely involves music, dancing, singing, and drinking.

d100 Creature Aims and Actions

- 59–63 **On Patrol.** This encounter is simply scouting out their territory. If there are guards on patrol, there is usually a lair or camp nearby. A beast might be marking their territory.
- 64–65 **Preparing for War.** The creatures are sharpening weapons, donning armor, erecting defenses, and loading or constructing siege engines. Beasts are gathering as a pack to hunt a huge creature together.
- 66–67 **Ritual or Rite.** Reroll this result if applied to beasts. The encounter is conducting a religious rite or arcane ritual. The ritual might include: uttering blessings, writing insignias on gear, war chants, dancing, or a more formal service such as wedding, funeral, sacrifice or summoning.
- 68–69 **Repairing or Cleaning.** Creatures are bathing or simply washing their clothes or gear.
- 70–72 **Relaxing.** The encounter is kicking back, but is not sleeping. Perhaps they are basking in a recent glory or rolling around full after a decent meal. They may be enjoying a recreational activity, such as playing or composing music, reading, or writing.
- 73–74 **Seeking Someone or Something Important.** This encounter is on a quest, looking for a missing person or item, or even the player characters. Perhaps they're hunting the same person or item that the player characters are!
- 75–78 **Sleeping.** The encounter is asleep. Almost every creature needs to sleep at some stage, and today the PCs are in luck. This encounter works best if the PCs can hear the creature snoring or it is clearly visible.
- 79–81 **Struggling Against the Elements.** The encounter is contending with nature or the terrain. This depends a lot on where the encounter takes place, but they may be trying to keep warm, cooling off, drying off, trudging through mud, or taking shelter from a storm or a rough wind.



d100 Creature Aims and Actions

- 82–84 **Suffering.** The encounter is suffering in some way. This could be reflected by the poisoned condition, applying the effects of a disease, by adding levels of exhaustion or something as simple as reduced Speed. This can be an effective way of reducing the difficulty of an encounter. A second roll on this chart or your random encounter table could indicate what caused their suffering.
- 85–86 **Training.** The encounter is conducting or receiving training for combat, hunting, a class ability, skill, feat, or membership into an organization. They could even be teaching a group of younger creatures, such as a lioness teaching her cubs to hunt.
- 87–88 **Transporting Goods.** This encounter is seeking a trade. It is for intelligent creatures only. Think about what these creatures might have to offer. It could be orcs transporting slaves, hobgoblins with weapons, or gnomes with magical lanterns.

d100 Creature Aims and Actions

- 89–90 **Trapped.** The encountered creatures are caught in a trap. Generate another encounter to determine who built the trap. If nothing else makes sense, perhaps the terrain itself has trapped the creatures.
- 91–93 **Traveling or Adventuring.** This encounter has a destination in mind. They may or may not know exactly where it is, but they are not just wandering aimlessly. Perhaps it is the same place the characters are headed. Other possibilities include a pilgrimage, to honor a leader, to join another tribe, or to find treasure.
- 94–95 **Working the Environment.** The encounter is making use of the local environment for its resources. They may be involved in logging, quarrying, mining, or foraging. Beasts are simply devouring food from the area.
- 96–00 **Wounded.** Similar to Suffering, but the encountered creatures are obviously wounded. Reducing hit points by half is an easy way to show a creature is wounded, though a GM could choose to reduce them by any amount. A second roll on either the random encounter chart or this chart is the reason for the injury.