

OUT OF THE BOX ENCOUNTERS



A series
of encounters
for 5th Edition
Dungeons and Dragons*

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Chickening Out

Introduction: Travel is often taken for granted. Whether over land or by sea, this can be made into an opportunity to create dynamic encounters. Furthermore, what might be a typical such encounter like other ships, and indeed pirate ships, might be smugglers as well. What happens when that's being smuggled decides that it doesn't like being smuggled?

Environment: Aquatic/ Ship bourne.

Suggested level: 3-4

Description: While travelling at sea/large body of water, the watch aboard ship will spot an approaching vessel, which, by all estimates, will pass by the players ship very closely. Attempts to avoid a collision seems fruitless, as the approaching vessel seems to be weaving back and forth, almost as if anticipating the player's ship. The movements of the approaching ship will appear erratic and odd, as if the other vessel is not completely under control.

In the end, the approaching ship will veer at the last second and come alongside, grinding ship against ship in the process. Boarding grapnels will shoot forth from the deck of the "enemy ship", and it will appear that the players' ship is about to be boarded.

Once secured, the anticipated attack becomes a disorderly disembarking. The crew of the opposite ship will rush past any defenders, regardless of opportunity attacks. Their terror will be evident. The noise of panic mixed with squawking can be heard bellowing from below the decks of the other ship, with occasional loud thumps and a spray of feathers rising from the entrance to the hold below.

The ship is crewed by smugglers, hired to ship, among other things, a crate of live cockatrices. The cockatrices were in a magical stasis. What they did not know is that the crate had been weakened by mice who burrowed in search of food, who then mistakenly activated the monsters and were eaten by the cockatrices within. Awake, angry, and in full panic, these squawking monstrosities broke free of their confinement and took out their rage on the startled crew. Some of the crew have been petrified below decks.

Those that managed to escape have been desperate to escape their ship. When they saw the players vessel, they saw their chance to jump ship and escape a death by beak, claw, petrification or drowning. The crew have no interest in returning to their ship, and would rather hijack the players' vessel and make their break for freedom.

Monsters:

- Smuggler pirates (6):** Use "Guard" as per Monster Manual, but change armor to Studded Leather and change weapons to Scimitar and Dagger
- Smuggler captain(1):** Use "Bandit Captain" as per Monster Manual.
- Cockatrices (4):** Standard as per Monster Manual. Use as many as needed to create panic. Three or four is fair. More if needed.

Complications: The cockatrices have laid eggs that could hatch at any time. The attacking ship, if abandoned, might well become a floating "island sanctuary" for a whole flock of cockatrices. This might become it's own wandering encounter if left alone. The monstrosities will survive on the rats aboard ship at first, then seagulls and other waterfowl when those run out.

If the cockatrices pursue the escaping crew aboard the player's vessel, an egg or two might be laid there as well for future encounters.

If the players' vessel has food stores that would attract a cockatrice, there's a decent chance that one or more might stow away aboard the players' ship as well.

A Friend in Need

Introduction: Symbiotic relationships exist in nature, as do social groups. We have accepted this fact for many years. We see it in insects, mammals, reptiles, and even people. So why not monsters? Friend in Need explores such a relationship where two creatures, an Oytugh and a Mimic, share a living space, companionship, and tactics.

Environment: Variable**
Suggested Level: 5-7

**** The environment for this encounter was originally intended as a Wilderness encounter, but there's no reason why such a location might be found in an urban environment. It could even occur withing a dungeon setting, as outhouses/toilets occur wherever "civilization" may occur.**

Description: As the party traverses a lonely country road, they happen upon the ruins of what must have been an old cottage . A large tree has fallen from natural causes and has destroyed the building by falling through the roof. The only structure that remains intact is the former residents' outhouse, which escaped the fate of the main building by only a few feet. Though a crack in the wall of the outhouse, a glimmer of light can be seen.

Investigation of the main farmhouse will reveal harmless vermin, weathered and tattered wreckage of furniture, and collapsed walls. Shrubs now sprout through the floorboards and moss has begun to grow on the inner walls. There is barely enough roof left for any sort of shelter, as the massive tree that fell upon the roof of this structure crushed at least 75% of it inward.

Should the party investigate the outhouse, what they will discover is that the glimmer seen before is the remnants of a mirror hung on the back wall of the outhouse. The open seat of the outhouse remains intact, and it is the usual single-hole sort of layout. The smell of dung hangs heavy in the air.

What will intrigue the party is that something else is reflecting light from below. Spaces between the planks in the roof allow some sunlight through, which shines into the toilet hole, and is reflecting light. That light is being caught in the mirror.

The entire bench seat of the outhouse is a Mimic. It is working in tandem with it's best friend, the Oytugh in a large pit below, to snare prey and feast on unsuspecting travellers. The shine is produced from treasure below that has fallen from several travellers who have been taken in by this ruse and their own curiosity.

If the Mimic drops below 50% hit points the Oytugh will engage from below via it's tentacles.

Monsters: Mimic (1) - p. 220 of Monster Manual
Oytugh (1) - p. 248 of Monster Manual

Treasure: Level: 6 hoard - Default: 2000sp, 500gp.

Complications: There is a decent chance that one or more players will be infected with a Disease as per the Oytugh entry. If you so desire, add wild berries and other healing flora to the area or inside the ruined cottage to assist in Constitution saves to cure the infection.

If the players try to shift or move around the structure or tree inside the cottage, there might be a complete collapse. An Investigation (DC:10) roll will reveal this. If they ignore this fact and proceed anyway, this will result in a Dex (DC :15) Save to escape the structure or take 2d10 Bludgeoning damage.

All That Remains

Introduction: A lot of emphasis is placed on encounters being combat. Wandering encounters have likely accounted for more player character deaths than any other. That in of itself isn't the problem. It's that they usually strike when the players are down and wounded. At times like these, wouldn;t it be just as fun to throw something at the players that is equally fun and not as dangerous?

Environment: Various
Suggested level: Any

Description: On a foggy day, the adventuring party encounter either a cliff side that has been sheared away with precision, or perhaps a large monolith, or the remains of a wall to an ancient structure. In bas relief, they can see a massive set of ancient carvings showing the power and domination of an ancient ruler. In the very centre of the set of carvings, a massive 20' tall figure of a ruler in armor and finery dominates the surface. Gigantic compared to everything else, he is shown smiting several foes with a single blow. Around him show various scenes of conquering armies, falling foes, riches and exotic beasts being captured, and other signs of conquest - all carved from the same stone face.

Investigating the scenes, the players might be able to ascertain the identity of the ruler or the culture he comes from with a successful History (DC 14) check. His identity is left to the DM to determine, but he should be from a time long ago and without a current hold on local politics.

As the players investigate the surroundings, the fog will thicken. A simple (DC:10) Perception check will show that figures swirl through the mists in perpetual melee. These misty figures make no sound and do not react to any attacks, communication or other interaction by the players. A deeper look (either Investigation or Perception, DC 15) will identify these figures as those armies shown fighting on the carved stone surface - their battle unending even today. The area surrounding the carvings and covered by fog will glow faintly under a Detect Magic spell as long as the fog persists.

If the players dig in the ground within 500' of the stone carvings, they may find a relic of the long lost battle.

Monsters: None.
Treasure: If the players do an archaeological dig, roll d20.

- 1-10: Nothing
- 11-14: A rusted buckle, button, clasp or similar metal fixture to a garment
- 15-17: A ruined and broken weapon hilt, spear head, arrow head, or other weapon piece.
- 18-19: A trinket -(Player's Handbook, p. 160-161)
- 20: A gold coin.

Complications: Complications would only arise if there is an association of this site with any religious significance. Defiling it by vandalizing the carvings or digging the lost battlefield without permission may invoke some form of wrath from interested parties.

If others find out that even the slightest bit of treasure may come out of the ground here, it could lead to all sorts of prospectors digging the area up for lots mementos and such. The results of that, again, may have further repercussions.

Gone but not Forgotten

Introduction: The fascinating thing about our own world is that history is still being discovered every day. We are still finding lost relics, tombs, and clues to ancient civilizations - sometimes in the most surprising places. Mythology and rumor sometimes persist around these ancient sites, but just as often, all living memory is lost. Records may not have been taken, rumors are forgotten, or a people may have been totally wiped out. Then all that stays behind becomes a mystery, waiting to be discovered. However, in a fantasy realm, even when others forget, the dead remember...

Environment: Wilderness - Grasslands, Hills, Farmland.
Suggested Level: 2-3

Description: In a lonely area, away from the wanderings of most civilized folk, stands a large and odd hill in the middle of nowhere. It's near-perfectly domed shape stands out as unusual given the surrounding terrain. Were it not for the single tree growing atop it, and the several shrubs that mark it's base, you would think it to be man-made.

This hillock is a barrow mound, and ancient burial site for an individual of importance at least two centuries old. It contains a burial chamber for these remains.

If the characters approach within 50' of it, they will (Perception: DC 12) see a stone door ajar in a flagstone door frame hidden behind one of the many shrubs. It is only open a crack, with darkness being the only clue behind.

If the characters approach the door within 10', what will become very obvious that several bones litter the ground around the doorway. The weathered and tattered remains of clothing and scraps of leather armor lie in the grass with them. Rusted, useless and destroyed remains of two swords and a few daggers lay among the bones.

And Investigation (DC13) check will determine that at least two, possibly three individuals remain here. It's hard to be exact, as wildlife may have either devoured or removed at least some of the organic remains.

The earth around the door itself is overgrown with tall grass, and the door itself is difficult to move due to settling of the door frame. The result of which is a difficult (DC 15) Strength check to open the door.

If the door is opened, an ancient curse activates that was intended to protect the interior, and the tree and surrounding shrubs awaken to defend the sanctity of these remains. These plants will not retreat, and fight to the end - unless the characters retreat away from the barrow mound to a distance of 60'. At which point the plants return to their original locations. Any damage they suffered is healed upon this return and they become normal plants again - unless awakened again.

If the characters are victorious and proceed in, they will only travel a short and low hall perhaps 5' tall, 5' wide, and 10 feet long. Inside is a single chamber, 20' in diameter with a domed flagstone roof and a recessed floor, also lined with flagstones. The dominant feature is a stone sarcophagus with a cracked lid. Its surface still possesses the weathered remains of tribal designs, showing a heroic figure upon a war chariot. It's upper body and face have been obscured (Investigation DC 13) with some sort of scraping damage created when the lid was unsuccessfully opened at an earlier date.

Within the coffin, the mummified remains of a tall figure lay within, their face covered with a dusty wooden and metal-bound shield. It's former armor has corroded away in the humidity, but the remains of silver finery are still upon him. Two thick bracelets engraved in woven patterns, a silver torc around it's neck, and a silver buckle in the shape of a horse's head upon a rotted leather belt remain behind.

Upon the recessed floor are the rotted remains of two wooden wheels, and axle and a cart (formerly a chariot), wax-sealed clay pots containing spoiled grains, wine (now vinegar) and tools - all intended for use in the afterlife. Two massive halving-sized clay pots hold larger bones (Nature: 12 - Two horses).

Monsters:

Awakened Tree (1): as per Monster Manual p.317

Awakened Shrub (6): as per Monster Manual p.317

Treasure:

The silver torc (a heavy one-piece horse-shoe shaped necklace) worth 100gp

Two silver bracelets worth 25gp each

Silver horse head belt buckle 25gp

Optional - The shield can be a +1 Shield.

Complications: Aside from the reactions of the awakened plants, there's an option to continue this encounter as a plot hook or the creation of a villain.

Curse of the Dead - One could decide to either place a curse upon the characters who rob this tomb. Until all of the jewellery, and the shield are laid to rest where they were found, those who robbed the grave will suffer Disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws, especially those involving Fear or Madness.

Revenge of the Dead - One could have the dead figure rise from the grave to hunt his lost items down. Depending on the level of the characters, one could decide if it's a Ghost, Revenant or Mummy. It's all up to how far the DM wishes to take this. If your party is low-level, the Ghost is your best method, as it would have the option of possessing loved ones or associates of the party to hunt down or retrieve the lost item without having to damage them.

The Dance Macabre

Introduction: I love making players ask questions. “How did this get here? Why is that thing like that?” A random encounter might be able to inject this sort of curiosity if the set up is right. By doing so, a DM can add depth, colour, and even a little history to a game when the well has run dry of ideas...then unleash the players and let their questions build the world. However, a player should always remember what happened to that cat in the cliché...

Environment: Wilderness/Dungeon
Suggested level: 2-3

Description: In a clearing obviously made for a massive structure, the players encounter an old ruin. Its many walls, towers and other structures have crumbled to rubble - all save one. The remains of the columns and buttresses that supported a massive great hall still remain, with its vast decorative tiled floor mostly intact.

Figures in formal clothing dance endlessly to the eerie lack of music - like an eternal waltz in silence.

Even as the characters advance, the figures remain dancing, seemingly oblivious to their approach. When they close to within 50' they can finally ascertain (Perception: 12) that the finery worn by the figures are in poor repair, and in some cases, tatters.

What the characters do not know is that the former Lord and Lady of this castle dabbled in dark necromancy, and held great celebrations and grand balls to lure unsuspecting victims into their lair. During the height of the celebration, a victim would be lured away to a hidden chamber and sacrificed to Orcus. Over time, their machinations were discovered and the surrounding peoples allied to destroy the Lord and his holdings. Now, ages later, his victims have animated to continue the dance where they died - a tortured reminder of the vast power of the Demon Lord. A character might discover this if they succeed a difficult (DC:17) History test.

If any character steps upon the dance floor, it is subjected to “*Otto's Irresistable Dance*” (p.264 Player's Handbook. DC:14 Wisdom save. Duration 1 minute. Save ends.).

Within the finery are **Skeletons**, who will attack those who step upon the floor, whether they are affected by the Dance or not. They do not discern if a character is under the affect of the Dance or not, nor do they care. If you need to determine between a number of characters whom is attacked, determine randomly.

If the players retreat, the Skeletons will not pursue beyond the dance floor unless they are being attacked from outside the Great Hall (in which case they will obviously attack)

Monsters: **Skeletons (10):** p. 272 Monster Manual, or p. 310 of Player's Handbook and depending on “*Complications*” below, perhaps a **Zombie** or two (P. 316 of Monster Manual or p. 311 of Player's Handbook)

Treasure: None

Complications: While under the influence of the Dance, a character is at Disadvantage for all of its attack rolls and saving throws, and can be attacked with Advantage.

If a character is knocked unconscious upon the dance floor, the skeletons will ignore it and move on another target.

If a character is killed on the dance floor and left there, it will animate as a **Zombie** in 24 hours, and continue to dance like the others.

Auntie Knows Best

Introduction: Greed. It's the single biggest motivator among players. They may tell you otherwise until something shiny shows up. A clever DM can use this to his advantage, and set-up encounters, plot hooks, storylines, and perhaps entire character arcs through this simple vice.

And to that, I have an admission to make: I think Hags are cool. They are an under-rated villain in D&D, although not in fantasy and mythology. Therefore I'd like to implement a classic villain who plays chess when the players are just playing checkers. The intent for this encounter is less as a combat encounter and more of a way to set up change, or manipulate existing encounters on the fly. "Auntie Treeshadow" always has a way of manipulating others to her own ends, and will choose discretion over combat whenever possible. For an immortal fey, there's always tomorrow.

Environment: Wilderness/Swamp or "Dark" Forest
Suggested Level: Any

Description: While attempting to cross a twisting and treacherous path through a misty swamp the players will discover the skeletal remains of a traveller nearly obscured in the twisting swamp grass on the side of their path. It's belongings are corroded and rotted beyond repair or worth, but it still clings to a single item in it's hand...a necklace on a fine gold chain with what looks like a glass eye in a gold filagree.

This is a "Hag Eye" belonging to a Green Hag named "Auntie Treeshadow". The remains were once one of her many victims, forced to perform act after act to try and save a loved one from her manipulations. Should one of these poor souls die in the swamp during one of these tasks, she always takes the time to "bury" the body close the path so that the eye will be discovered again. Through it, she can see their actions based on the eye's capabilities, and so leads them into her service...and likely doom, unless they can be the first to outwit her.

While they carry it, she will send them notes, letters and other messages to encourage them to take on her objectives. She will always seek to better her "sisters" in her coven through these actions, and uses the unwitting so that she cannot be blamed for these actions.

She may even approach the party, always under an illusory form. She has been known to be both a "quest giver" for something and as the "recipient", both under different illusory forms - simply for her own entertainment.

Monsters: **Auntie Treeshadow (1):** Green Hag as per Monster Manual p.177...but actually any Hag might be used given the nature, level or location of your setting and campaign.

Treasure: Hag Eye - (Monster Manual, p. 175)

Complications: This entire encounter is all about any and all complications. It is intended as a set-up for other encounters or adventures, or as a way to advise a villain of the actions of the party. It is, in effect, a valid reason for a villain to know what the party is up to and where they might be. It removes any accusations of meta-gaming that might be directed at a DM.

The longer the party carries this Hag Eye, the more Auntie Treeshadow will learn about them. Because of the illusory powers most Hags have, this will allow her to interact with the party in person, tracking them through the use of the Hag Eye. Further, she could play the part of multiple persons through illusion, further confounding and manipulating the party into a massive fall from grace.

Consider as well that this Hag may not even be the arch villain. What if she is also under the thumb of an even more powerful villain, and the Hag Eye is the means for this even more powerful foe to track the party through his Hag servant? There's always a bigger foe...

Down on the Farm

Introduction: Often, the most basic of settings can be a great place to put an encounter. What will seem like another boring problem will turn out to be more. When missing goods, livestock and the like become a problem, players always assume that goblins, kobolds, or the usual rogues gallery of villains is to blame. Switching that up from time to time is a good idea, as it keeps the players guessing.

Additionally, players tend to forget that others operate as a team too. Players will use scouts, terrain, spells and the like to their best potential. They will seek to flank their foes or find some way to gain Advantage. Some monsters like to do this too, but the list is short. What if a monster has another monster as a pet? What if the players assume that typically solo monsters surprise them by acting like a team?

Environment: Wilderness/Forested/Farmland.
Suggested level: 3

Description: A local village or farmer of renown has a problem with an increasing loss of farm animals. Chickens geese, small goats, and even domestic dogs or cats has gone missing of late. What started as a suspicion of a coyote problem has been made more mysterious, as no howls have been heard and no large tracks have been found. What has been really disturbing is the lack of cricket song in the evenings, giving nightfall an eerie silence.

The farm borders on a large forest that has been avoided by local hunters because of rumours of a haunting. To reinforce this foreboding sense, an increase of large webs has been noticed deep in the forest, and a prized hunting dog has gone missing in pursuit of a deer very recently while exploring this area.

In reality, an “Fengus” the Ettercap has begun a spider farm.

“Fengus” has been breeding spiders bigger and bigger, creating a new species in the process. His favourite spider is “Beatrice”, a giant spider and very protective companion. On the way to Beatrice, he has bred a species of dog-sized Large Spiders, as well as fostering an entire swarm of tiny spiders who have recently hatched.

For them, he has created a “fenced in” spiral series of webbed walls leading to a large central pen. This is where he’s been breeding spiders to be bigger and bigger. These spiders then hunt for him and are for sale to many nefarious sorts as guards and pets. The “farm” can be as big as desired, but should have webbed walls clinging to strong trees tall enough to discourage climbing. Anyone still trying to do so should be treated as if under the effect of a “Web” spell, DC:14. Within this spiral maze of webs, the walls will be crawling with Large Spiders (see below), a swarm of tiny spiders from which they were bred. In the centre of the maze will be the open area where “Fengus” and Beatrice will be.

Once the players find their way inside the labyrinth of webs, they will see the “farm” in all it’s glory. The carcasses of dead animals, wrapped in gossamer, will cling to the inside walls or dangle from the trees. Fengus and Beatrice will be here and ready, having seen the trembling of the webs as the players either fought their way through, burned a hole through, or got caught in the webbing. They will fight as a pair. Beatrice will have been with Fengus since she was born, so they are very familiar with each other’s tactics.

Monsters:
“Fengus” the Ettercap (1): Use Ettin as per Monster Manual, p. 131
“Beatrice”(1): Use Giant Spider as per p. 328 of the Monster Manual.
Insect Swarm (Spider Swarm variant): As per p. 338 of the Monster Manual
Large Spider (8): see below

Large Spider

Small beast, unaligned.

Armor Class: 13

Hit Points: 4 (1d6+1)

Speed: 30', Climb 30'

STR:5(-3), DEX: 14(+2), CON: 12(+1), INT: 1(-5), WIS: 10, CHA: 3(-4)

Skills:Stealth +4

Senses: Blindsight 10', Darkvision 30', Passive Perception : 10

Languages: —

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Spider Climb. The spider can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the spider knows the exact location of any creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The spider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Actions

Bite: *Melee Weapon:* +4 to hit, reach 5', one creature.

Hit: 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) poison damage. If the target is reduced to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned this way.

Treasure:

Any and all livestock will be either dead or poisoned to the point where their recovery is unlikely. A bounty for their return isn't likely, and their flesh couldn't be harvested for survival purposes due to the venom. However, it's likely that one or more hunters, wanderers, or other travelling folk may have fallen victim to this farm and were dragged back as part of the feeding pen. If the hanging wrapped bodies are cut down, the players can gather:

250 sp

An engraved pocket watch - 50gp

A silver flask (25gp) filled with fine brandy.

A gold wedding ring - 100gp

Complications: There's a lot that could go wrong for either side. There are many creatures with poison, so there's a very good chance that one or more players will have to deal with that problem. On the other hand, many experienced players will seek to burn spider webs on sight.

This will have the benefit of likely removing all of the Large Spiders in one go, but may also start the trees to which these webs are anchored to burn as well.

Any turn in which fire spells are used to remove webs, a check should be made to see if the trees are set alight. This check should also be made if players miss ranged spell attacks with spells like Fire Bolt, Scorching Ray and the like that have Ignition properties. Living trees tend to not instantly catch fire, but dried leaves, pine needles, twigs and the like might. The DM should roll a D6 every time such an event could occur. A fire of some kind will start 1 chance in 6, which will require action by the players to stop. How they do it is up to the players and the DM to resolve, but a successful Survival or Nature check might well do the trick on a successful DC 12.

Fengus will not seek to die in this conflict. He's a successful farmer, after all, with clients who buy his pets. If Beatrice falls before he does, or his farm is totally on fire, he will seek to escape. If he can get away, expect the players to be spied on by spiders, followed by them, and other harassment.

Mirror, Mirror

Introduction: Everyone has a story. What's usually forgotten is that all Undead do as well, and perhaps theirs is the most tragic. This is often forgotten and this entire class of monster is played like cardboard villains. I find that to be a loss. There's a huge opportunity for story building, side quests, plot hooks and the like from any single Undead... if the DM is willing to make them more than the Scooby Doo villains that they are now. "Mirror, Mirror" goes into one such small story, about an Undead that's typically just a damage machine.

Environment: Wilderness -Forest/Swamp
Suggested Level: 4

Description: One night as the party settles to camp for the night, the normal activities with making camp are interrupted with a strange discovery. As the party makes their fire pit, they uncover a small hand mirror that was buried in a shallow hole of leaves, dead grass, or whatever surface in which they are digging. The mirror is covered in dirt and such, but once it's cleaned up, anyone who peers into its reflective surface will see their reflection looking back at them - but as if they were a child version of themselves. The mirror will detect as magic, but possesses no other unusual properties. Later that night, conversations and such that occur around a campfire are added to with the distant sound of sobbing.

It will be obvious that a woman is sobbing, but her direction will be hard to ascertain given the echoing nature of the wilderness setting in which they are camping. A Survival (DC 14) will certainly help determine the direction.

What they will discover after a period of searching is the ghostly figure of a lady in fine robes and long braided hair. Her ghostly face weeps into her equally ghostly hands.

"It's gone. It's all gone.." she sobs.

The players can engage the spectral figure socially if they like. The figure is a Banshee. Normally such elven undead attack the living, but in this case all she wants is her mirror back. Resolving that should not be as easy as flatly asking and getting a straight answer. She has been dead a long time, so her social skills are foggy and long forgotten.

What should be required is either an Insight (DC 17) or even Investigation (DC 17) to determine this. To add to the event, the DM can optionally add a Wisdom (DC 13) saving throw for those within 20' of the sobbing figure. Those that fail will also begin to cry. Crying characters will make the above mentioned Insight or Investigation rolls at Advantage, as they will feel her pain of loss. Characters are allowed to make a save at the end of each of their turns to end the crying effect.

If the characters realize that she is looking for the Mirror of Childhood and return it to her, she will cease crying and fade away, never to return, mirror and all. If the players try to trick her with another mirror, she will become enraged and attack.

Monsters: Banshee - as per page 23 of the Monster Manual, except as noted in the description of the encounter.

Treasure: *Mirror of Childhood* - Trinket. To the right buyer it might fetch anywhere from 25 to 250 gp (Roll 1d10 and multiply by 25)

Complications: Unless the Banshee is destroyed, if she knows the players have the mirror she will not rest until she has it. This could lead to a number of pursuit-type encounters, or the Banshee turning on the friends or loved ones of the players to see its return.

Island in The Storm

Introduction: For those with access to one, the Dungeon Master's Guide has a tone of great encounter tables. Chapter 5, pages 108 and 109 have two great ones. Each item on these tables can generate a good encounter. Mixing them can generate a great one.

The following idea combines Monuments #19 (circle of standing stones), and Weird Locales #16 (skeletal ferry captain) and #20 (floating earth mote). Next, it's important to note either the special abilities of monsters or NPCs, and pay special attention to any flavor text. When all the pieces fall into place, you can really have an encounter with depth. The intent is to give your players something unusual and thought provoking.

Now your encounter will create a moment where your players will ask more questions than receive answers. They'll struggle with how to proceed socially and may even have moral or ethical questions. This will add depth to the player character dynamic. That's the basis for this whole encounter. You might even use something like this to start an adventure, or expose character background features. How you fully utilize it is up to you.

Environment: Any
Suggested level: Any

Description: One evening as the players are settling in for a night, they will witness an unusual event. Fog will build all around. In the distance, they will witness a green flash. They will then see a small bobbing green light slowly approaching, no bigger than a lantern.

It will only approach so far, but never closer than 100' to their encampment. If the players ignore the light, it will slowly fade away after an hour, only to return the next night in the same eerie manner. If they investigate, once they breach the fog to a distance of 100', they will see a strange sight. A gondola made of a black wood will be seen floating slightly off the ground. The boat will be lit by a lantern suspended by a central post - emitting the strange green light. The ship's pilot will be a singular figure, the size of a human child, in dark clothing and hat with a decorative mask like that of an expressionless boy's face.

The childlike figure will beckon them to board silently, and a ramp will lower to allow them access. If they choose to attack the figure or the gondola, they will find their attacks passing harmlessly through. The gondola and the figures are extensions of The Shadowfell, and thus cannot be harmed by conventional means.

Should they board, the boat will silently turn around, and the fog will take on the appearance of a milky pool upon which the boat will glide. In the distance will be a small island, no greater than 200' in diameter, surrounded by the same milky white fog and "water". Upon it, several ancient standing stones mark its border, all at least 15' tall. In the centre of the island, a single figure can be seen.

This is Emelia. She will turn and face them in a non-threatening manner. Her expression is sad and filled with longing (Insight DC :12) She is young, beautiful, and dressed in a white hooded robe. Emelia is a ghost, cursed to remain on the island in the Shadowfell. She cannot leave voluntarily. She will plead with one of the members of the party to allow her to possess them. Only then can she board the gondola, and escape the island.

The players can engage her in conversation if they so choose. They will find out (Persuasion DC 13) that she was once the wife of a noble, whose name is lost to eternity. She fell in love with a rival noble, and had an affair with him. She became pregnant with his child. When this fact was discovered, she and her unborn child were murdered and buried in secret. This island prison now holds her spirit. If one party member allows her to possess them, she can cross the barrier and pass on.

A successful Insight (DC 15) check will unveil that the gondola pilot is the spirit of her unborn son. If she becomes free, so does the pilot.

Monsters:

“Emelia” - Ghost, as per Monster Manual page 147.

Treasure:

If the party allows for possession, and Emelia successfully escapes the Shadowfell, the lantern from the gondola will remain behind with them. This lantern will essentially be identical to the Gothic Trinket #29-30 “A lantern with a black candle that never runs out and burns with a green flame”. It may not be much, but will be a permanent “light spell” that they can cart around in item form.

Complications: Lots can happen here. The Ghost can be attacked, and will defend itself if attacked. She will not wish to engage in combat, but will do so if pressed. Her intent is to escape, not to fight to the death. She might wait for the right moment to possess an attacking foe if needs be.

Her preferred path is for one of the characters to willingly allow her to possess them. If this happens, that character will feel a disturbing chill, and will hear her voice in their head. They will be overcome by an uncontrollable urge to leave the island. The possessed character will know that they can use the gondola to leave the island. They will recognize the boy for whom they are. If they can cross the barrier (the milky water) and leave the fog, then the ghost will exit the character’s body unharmed, and will fade into nothing. The fog will disappear, and the characters will be back at their campsite.

If a portion of the party stays behind on the island, they may be trapped forever in the Shadowfell. That alone is a massive complication that may require the stranded characters finding a way home. That is up to the individual players and DM to work out. It may also be a great way to introduce the Curse of Strahd setting, or Ravenloft in general. Any character who jumps over the side of the gondola while it’s in transit will similarly be lost in the Shadowfell.

If the characters refuse and wish to leave in peace, that too is possible. A successful Persuasion (DC 20) check might negotiate a release from the island. However, should they successfully leave the island via the gondola in this manner, they will be haunted by visions of this girl and her child, who might return via a similar encounter in a month’s time.

As stated before, this can test a party. Many have very plain views on undead of all kinds. Some faiths, like that of Kelemvor, are very clear on their approach. The number of variations on personal views, faith, morals and ethics can have this encounter go a number of ways. It may start a discussion upon the island that may affect how the party interacts for a very long time. It’s important for any DM to watch this carefully and adjust accordingly. It may also be a great opportunity for character growth and may add to the depth of the party as a whole.

A Standing Warning

Introduction: Many experienced DMs will know that the key to tension is the right touch of paranoia. The right description and setting can establish the right mood and put the players on edge. This can allow the DM to set up other encounters or drop hints from their campaign setting. Such encounters may just be red herrings intended to throw characters off the trail or to make them think.

Coupling these descriptive moments with non-combat skills and a group puzzle might challenge the players in a way that they were not expecting.

Environment: Wilderness/Any
Suggested level: Any

Description: Along a lonesome path that the characters are travelling, they will discover two black obelisks on either side of the path. One is still standing. The other has been broken at the base and lay on it's side. Both are constructed of a smooth black stone that defies identification. The standing obelisk is engraved with markings in an exotic language (Infernal, Abyssal, Draconic, Deep Speech, etc) that perhaps only one character in the party might speak. It's important that this be difficult to translate. The markings on the standing obelisk are divided by deep horizontal grooves which break up the obelisk into even sections, each containing roughly the same number of markings. That fallen obelisk has the same horizontal sections, but no markings apart from these grooves can be seen.

A successful History, Arcana, Religion (or similar) check (DC 17), along with proficiency in some exotic language of the DM's discretion, might determine that the standing obelisk contains part of a warning. Such a warning might be worded like "Behold and be warned! For now, you enter the domain of..." The warning should be incomplete and not contain the actual names of the region or the identity of any ruler.

That's where the fallen obelisk comes into play.

Both obelisks are constructed of a strange stone that defy description, as noted, and are of a semi-magical nature. A Detect Magic spell will determine that they glow faintly with magic of a Divination sort. Examining the fallen disk (Investigation or Arcana, DC 15) will discover that the sections of the obelisk can rotate along it's axis, but require some force (Strength DC 15). Spinning these sections to align correctly will reveal the remainder of the message.

In secret, cut up a piece of paper into pieces. Write each letter of the ruler's name on a separate piece of paper. This sets up the puzzle.

This is the puzzle. To get everyone involved, since you will have those whom are strong, some whom are smart, and some whom are just great at puzzles, initiate a group check of a different sort. Have everyone roll a D20. Instead of the actual values counting, success or failure is determined by the number of even and odd numbers rolled. Do not tell the players this fact. Keep them guessing. If the party rolls a majority of even numbers, they gain 1 success. If the players roll a majority of odd numbers, they gain none. Every time they gain a success, hand the party a piece of paper with a letter on it. Then let them solve it.

If they guess right, have the obelisk right itself and the name of the ruler will appear in the appropriate exotic language.

Complications: As stated earlier, it's up to the DM if these message still has relevance. The ruler might be long gone. Then again...they might not. That's up to each DM to determine.

Solving the puzzle may awaken a long-thought-lost ruler like a sleeping dragon, slumbering vampire, ancient lich or mummy lord, or trapped devil or demon. It may awaken an ancient device, open a portal, or activate another set of obelisks for the party to find. This is limited only to the DM's imagination or campaign setting.

The intention is to spark imagination and paranoia in the players. They will get a chance to work as a group to solve a puzzle, and might well start investigating other such monuments in their region. This will open new avenues of exploration and could lead to other encounters.

Rube's Cube

Introduction: Sometimes an encounter occurs because of a single “what if”. It can lead in all sorts of unexpected directions. Imagine an illusionist’s castle, dungeon, or other lair. Imagine an environment filled with puzzles, tricks, and other dangers. Within such a confine, “Rube’s Cube” can exist.

For this encounter, I wanted to use an under-appreciated monster (ooze) in a way other than a hit point sponge or ambush predator. What followed was a series of “what if” questions.

What if a normally non-spellcasting creature had access to a spell or spell-like effect? In this case, I thought of Mirror Image.

No item to my knowledge creates such an effect outside of a ring of spell storing with the correct spell, so a little extra creativity was called for. What if you made such an item? In the end, you take what would normally be an ambush predator who may not survive more than three rounds, and you’ve created a mystical shell game with one ooze and one item. What if you take that creature, and that magic item, and place them in a room that is custom made for both in a fun way? Hmmm...

And so “Rube’s Cube” was born.

Environment: **Dungeon**
Suggested level: **2-3**

Description: Deep within a wizard’s lair, the party will eventually enter what looks like a simple room, 40’x40’, with a low 10’ ceiling. The door they will enter will be in the center of one wall, with an identical door on the far side on the opposite wall. What looks like a translucent square pillar suspends the ceiling in the very center of the room. It glows very faintly from within.

Once the party is fully in the room, the door will slam shut and lock. Consider it to be under the Arcane Lock spell with a DC 20 to unlock/break open.

Once the door is locked, the floor will appear to light up in primary colours, with each 10’ square in a shifting and changing primary colour. If no other light source has been in the room to this point, this shifting light source will easily light the room in a rainbow of changing colours. It might be distracting, but is not harmful in any way. A Magic Mouth will appear on the far door and begin singing whatever dance music the DM desires.

Once this light show begins, the pillar in the center of the room will leave its suspended animation and begin to move.

The Gelatinous Cube is now active. Remember that the Cube has Blindsight, so any character or creature within range cannot hide from it by means of Invisibility. The Cube’s internal “survival instinct” will activate the object glowing faintly within it - the Ring of Mirror Image. (see “Treasure” below). The Gelatinous Cube will expend 1 charge to cast Mirror Image on itself. Now, instead of one Gelatinous Cube lit from below by brightly shifting primary colour, there will appear to be 4. Only one is real, and the rest are obviously illusions.

Trapped in a 40’ square room, there will now be a shifting shell game of Cubes. Fortunately, the Gelatinous Cube has a low Armor Class, so it should not take long to reduce the number of Mirror Images. However, if the party outsmarts the number of images through some sort of area-of-effect spell (like Fireball, Lightning Bolt, and the like) or targets each of the separate images with a multiple-target effect like Magic Missile or Scorching Ray, simply have the Cube expend another charge from the ring. The Ring of Mirror Image has three charges.

In the meantime, the Cube will do what it normally does - advance slowly and try to consume the party.

Should the party defeat the Cube, both doors in the room will unlock, the floor will cease to light up, and a successful DC 12 Investigation roll will find the Ring among the remains of the Cube.

Monsters: **Gelatinous Cube (1)**- As per Monster Manual, p. 242.

Treasure: **Ring of Mirror Images** - Ring, rare (requires attunement) - While wearing this ring and attuned to it, the wearer may expend 1 charge to cast the Mirror Image on themself. (As per the spell, Player's Handbook, page 260.). The ring has three charges. It regains 1d3 charges at dawn.

Complications: The obvious complication from this encounter is the Engulfing of a character by the Ooze. Should this occur while the Gelatinous Cube is under the effect of a Mirror Image, then the image of the Engulfed character will also appear inside any of the duplicate images of the Cube.

This has obvious dangers, but may have the hilarious side effect of creating an illusory "dance party" inside the brightly coloured cubes. I would encourage any DM to try and pull off this effect, if only to break any tension and inject more humour into the encounter.

Aces High

Introduction: Aerial encounters are a rare and special circumstance that require a bit more imagination than a standard land-based encounter. Whether by travelling on an airship of some kind, or wandering the lands of a Cloud Giant, creating encounters in the sky generally come with the assumption of a higher level foe. Dragons, griffons, wyverns, and the like always seem to come to mind. This doesn't have to be the case. Further, attacks from above can also be applied to any environment where space is available. Consider urban rooftops, open plains, mountainous regions, and on open seas as other viable locations for an aerial attack. Massive caves and canyons could also be an unusual but perfectly allowable location for such encounters. Additionally, combining lower level foes in an interesting way can create memorable encounters.

For this encounter's description, I will be mentioning an airship, but feel free to change the location as you need it.

Environment: Aerial (Anywhere under an open sky/where space is available)
Suggested Level: 2+

Description: A cool wind blows across the deck of the airship as it glides through broken cloud cover. The sun sets a glow upon the ship though the passing mists. Moisture glistens on the surfaces, and mists dance through the rigging.

You look up past the envelope (balloon) of the ship to examine the clouds, and strange irregular shadows appear from above. Before you can shout a warning, riders on monstrous winged creatures pass by in a flash. Crossbow bolts pepper the deck like rain, and two ceramic balls crash upon the deck, exploding into flames.

You have been attacked by "Skeeve's Banshees"...and they are circling around for another pass...

Skeeve is a Goblin with ambitions beyond his kin. Using his natural affinity with Rats and Wolves to great advantage, he and his fellow Goblins have trained Giant Bats to be flying mounts. They have been raiding airships for months now to great success, and have improved their tactics over time.

The Banshees will attack in waves by what are classically called "slashes". They will pass by their target at speed and will focus more on creating mayhem for as long as possible before focusing on attacking the ships occupants.

The Banshees ride Giant Bats. These bats are equipped with goblin-sized saddles, and have both wings painted with the Banshee logo - a white skull with bat wings. The Bats have a ceramic pot loaded with Alchemist's Fire in each claw, and are trained to drop them when given the right signal by the goblin riders.

The Banshees are strapped into their saddles so they won't fall out (Skeeve is nobody's fool), and are equipped with Light Crossbows. They wear leather pilot helmets with white bat wings painted on each side, goggles, and red scarves. Should they need to dismount and melee, they have short swords and will always have their Light Crossbows.. Note that they will NOT dismount until they think it's safe to do so. They would rather escape a strong opponent than dismount and face anyone in melee. The swords are for a last-ditch weapon when they have boarded and are looking for treasure and other loot. The Banshees also carry a new weapon: grenados. (see below). the Banshees also have parachutes in case their Bats are killed, so it's possible that the party may meet "Skeeves" Banshees" again at a later date.

The Banshees will attack in slashing passes. Giant Bats have a normal flight speed of 60', but if they are in a dive, then the mounts will be using the Dash action to move 120' past the ship, with the Goblins attacking midway as they pass the ship. Because of their speed, it will make it difficult for the players to get an attack off, but it will also be hard for the Banshees to land a direct hit on the players. Players will have a difficult time determining the target between the bat and the goblin during a pass. Make the AC for both in a bat/goblin pair 15 during a slash, with the bat being hit 75% of the time if struck.

It's all about Advantage/Disadvantage and Held Actions. Making any sort of Ranged attack on a Banshee while the Giant Bats are on a Dash action will be at Disadvantage. the same applies to the Banshees on them

However, The Alchemist's Fire grenades will also be unable to accurately target the players at that speed. Therefore, when a grenade is thrown, determine the target randomly. That target will be allowed a Dexterity Save (DC 14) to avoid the blast. Alchemist's Fire only does 1d4, with an ongoing 1d4/turn after that unless they pass a further DC 10 Dexterity check to put the flames out. However, if a grenade misses, then the ship will begin to burn at whatever location it hits. That will create its own series of problems.

The Banshees, meanwhile will be targeting the deck and firing at anything that moves. They are experienced at attacking in this manner, so they are not at Disadvantage on a slash while shooting Light Crossbows. If they direct the Giant Bats to fly by the target airship at normal speed (60'), they can also throw a grenade.

Grenados are a new weapon. They are a black powder weapon with a new concept - weapon initiative. Grenados can be thrown and have a range of 30', so they'll have to fly close. When a grenade is thrown, it enters the initiative with its own roll. It will explode on its number in that initiative. That means that it may explode next, or last, or not even until the next turn. If its initiative roll is more than the Goblin who threw it, it blows up on the next turn on that number in the initiative order. When a grenade detonates, it has a blast radius of 10', inflicting 1d6 piercing and 1d6 Fire damage. A successful Dexterity DC 12 save will reduce that to half. It will also ignite flammable materials in the blast radius.

Monsters: **"The Banshees" : Goblins (4+)** as per Monster Manual p 166. - Add Light Crossbow (1d8 Pierce), 3 Grenados (see above), and some pretty cool steampunk goggles.
Giant Bats (4+...1/goblin). As per Monster Manual p. 323. Add Alchemist's Fire (2), as per Players Handbook p. 148.

Set the CR as per the level. I would use 4 at level 2, adding 2 or more Banshee/Bat pairs per level after that, depending on circumstances.

Treasure: Not much. But the Grenados might be an interesting thing for inexperienced party members to try and use. Skeeve's Banshees are looking for treasure. That's why they attack.

Complications: Loads. There are two different ways for the ship to start to burn. Consult the DMG, page 119,, with regard to how airships and other vehicles can be damaged. However, DMs can have separate areas of the ship burn with different effects. If the Envelope (balloon) of an airship starts to burn...well, there's a real issue. This same thing applies if the ship is held aloft by magical sails, as occurs in the game Earth Dawn. What happens or how fast the fire spreads is up to the DM, but it's a great way to build tension in the fight between slashes by the Banshees.

Players or NPCs who are next to the rails can be knocked or thrown overboard with a successful contested Strength check (at +4) versus the targets opposed Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) roll. If the Banshee/Bat combo wins, the target will be pushed 5' back and likely over the rails. Falling damage is 1d6/10'....

The direction or intent that a DM may want to take this is up to them. Skeeve is more than an average Goblin, with more than average goals and skills. Feel free to give him player levels if you want to ramp up the encounter or to make him a re-occurring villain.

This encounter could also begin a whole tradition of humanoid/mount combos, depending on the CR required. Orcs on Griffons, Hobgoblins on Wyverns, or Sprites on Giant Wasps. The sky is the limit - pun intended.

It's my hope that Skeeve's Banshees will create an exciting and colourful encounter for your airship campaign. Enjoy!

Coin Flip

Introduction: Sometimes a DM is at a loss for how to run an encounter, or that DM may have a party that either cannot nor desire to use tactics or think through solutions. This has often been raised as an issue, and DMs can find it frustrating to build an encounter involving complex layers only to have their players charge through and then blame the DM for any failures. I've seen this myself several times. The key is to embrace your party's chaotic nature from time to time. Engaging the players whom have this "random" outlook at least periodically can only improve rapport at the table. A DM might even find this can lighten the mood at the table, and satisfy the needs of the "chaotic" player so that they might be open to more involved or thought-provoking encounters later on.

This is where an encounter like "Coin Flip" comes into play. Also, since this is the 13th in the series of "Out of The Box Encounters", I thought some "luck" should be involved in the success of this encounter.

Environment: Dungeon

Suggested level: Any

Description: Somewhere within a dungeon, the party will enter what looks like an empty room. Once everybody is inside, the floor will appear to fall away, with the exception of a ledge on their side and a similar one on the far side. Into clouds below. A "new floor" will appear occupying this empty space between the two ledges. What will appear will be an interlocking pattern of giant coins laid flat floating like an interlocking floor, square in shape, with a solid ledge on the far side. Each giant coin is large enough for one player to stand upon, and since they touch each other like circular floor tile, it appears that the floating floor can be crossed. Each "coin" piece is a 10' diameter tile.

The size of the floor is up to the DM, as the number of coins used will determine the length and intensity of the encounter. The minimum number of coins is 9 as they can form a perfect square. You can use any number of tokens for this, so long as they form a square. A layout of four rows of four coins each in a square also works, as does adding one coin to each row or column, so long as it forms a square.

The function of this usage of coins is as follows:

The coins will form the floor upon which they cross. The area above the coin is considered as part of the coin to a height of 30'. Players cannot travel higher than the coin beyond that height as a magical force field restricts travel upwards beyond that point. The small "diamond" shaped space between the coins can be passed through by Tiny or smaller creatures, but doing so teleports that creature to a random coin...with all that entails.

Each time a player enters a floor piece, two randomizing functions occur. First, a coin is tossed. The player standing on the coin calls heads or tails. If they win the toss, nothing happens. If they lose the coin toss, then consult a table like Wild Magic or Wand of Wonder. The effect generated on the roll will affect the coin or the person upon that coin unless the occupying player successfully passes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw.

If they either pass the saving throw or the coin toss, they can choose to proceed unaffected to the next adjacent coin on the next turn on their initiative. Entering the space of another coin activates the coin toss again, meaning a new coin flip, a new effect roll, and a new save. A player can cross one coin as an action. That means that they can choose to Dash and cover two squares. If they do so, they will need to pass both coin tosses and Dexterity saving throws in order to successfully cross two coins. A failure in either a coin toss or Dex save halts the movement.

If the effect generated on the Wild Magic or Wand of Wonder table (whichever you are using) creates an area of effect condition, it only affects that coin. If the generated effect allows for a teleportation, then the player can certainly do so to either another coin or to a ledge, so long as it's within range. Flying creatures are subjected to the same movement restriction as walking/Dashing creatures, as the area

above the coins is subjected to the same condition to a height of 30' (where it is contained by a magical force field).

Summoned creatures created by either table will appear on a random adjacent coin next to the summoner. The creature is then itself subject to the coin's effect.

Standing in a coin once the effect has gone off does not generate an additional effect. Only one player can occupy a coin at a given time. A player can choose to remain on a coin for any length of time, but when they move to a new coin, the above effects can occur. If a player leaves a coin to occupy a new coin, and a different player occupies the coin that the first player just left, then the coin the is being newly occupied generates a new effect randomly.

Players could potentially use Teleport, Dimension Door, or Misty Step to cross the floor quickly, so long as the floor size allows for the spell to cross from ledge to ledge in one go.

Players might still be able to cast spells on other characters on the field of coins, so long as the target character is in range. However, "Touch" range spells will be difficult, as only one character can occupy a coin at a time, so characters on two adjacent coins whom which to convey spells through "touch" will have to be exactly the right spot to do so.

This will continue until all the players have crossed the coin floor and reached the opposing ledge. Neither ledge generates an effect and are immune to the effects generated by any of the coins.

Once all players are on the opposite ledge from where they started, the room reverts to it's plain appearance and a secret stone door will open on the side opposite to which they entered.

Monsters: None except what may be summoned by random generation.

Treasure: None except what may be randomly summoned

Complications: The number of complications in this encounter are limitless. There are all sorts of random dangers involved in either the Wand of Wonder or Wild Magic tables. Smart players will try to cross the field as quickly as possible, but players who revel in chaos may wander around the field until they no longer can. This could have two effects: They could satisfy their needs for random events, or they could end up rolling a new character.

DM s might also note that this is a great test to find out whom among your players are truly invested in seeing their characters play out or whom just want as much carnage as possible. For those players whom want carnage, they will soon discover that "Coin Flip" only affects their choices, and they cannot enforce their style on others whom are on the field.

The Argument

Introduction: This is yet another concept based around a “what if”. When we look at the many magic items available in the Dungeon Master’s Guide, one that seems to be missing is the Helm of Alignment Change. This was a cursed magical item that, once worn, converted the wearer’s alignment to whatever was diametrically opposed. The only alignment that was unaffected was Neutral, as it had no opposite. Some old school players and DM s will remember this awful item, either as a victim or as the DM who seeded a treasure trove with this bad boy to see if a greedy player would take it.

With that established, there are monsters out there for whom putting on a magic helmet would have a very unusual outcome for one main reason - they have more than one head.

So here’s the “what if”...What if an Ettin put on a Helmet of Alignment Change....?

Environment: Wilderness
Suggested level: 4

Description: While the players are travelling a winding road through a forest, the echoes of shouting and crashing can be heard in the distance. Before they can react, two draft horses, still in full tack, drag torn harnesses as they charge past the party in the opposite direction. As they close toward the noises of conflict, more might (Perception DC 10) become apparent. The sounds loud shouting are broken up with occasional cries of fear, mixed with the sounds of crashing....and then a guttural plea.

Exiting the forest and entering grasslands, what greets the party is an odd sight. A large two headed giant, perhaps 10’ tall, is both overturning...and then righting...wagons, carts and other caravan vehicles. All the while, the heads argue with each other. One head on the right, long-haired and shaggy, roars and creates the carnage. The other head on the left, wearing a decorative iron pot helm, cries out and tries to stop the other, and immediately rights any overturned vehicle. Two draft horses lie dead on the side of the road, butchered by a large bladed weapon. A mule stands nearby the caravan, seemingly either unaware or uncaring of the carnage. The occupants of the caravan are hiding in a nearby ditch; their heads popping up like groundhogs to witness and then hide from the bizarre sight. Every time the giant roars and overturns a wagon, they scream and duck down..only to pop up one at a time out of morbid curiosity to witness the ongoing drama.

This weird spectacle all began the day before when this Ettin, named Urglegurgle, raided a merchant carrying a satchel which included a Helm of Alignment Change. After a short argument, Gurgle put the Helm on before Urtle could react. Now, every attempt to return to a life of raiding and carnage that Urtle knows, Gurgle works just as hard to either stop or fix. This has lead to this bizarre circus of wrath and repair.

The players can attack Urglegurgle, of course. Urtle will roar and face the challenge. Gurgle will only attack if pressed. Mechanically, this means that Gurgle’s battle axe attack will not occur for the first round, meaning the multi-attack feature is not in play for the first round of any combat. Gurgle may even try to negotiate for peace, although Urtle will try his best to sabotage those plans. Negotiations will be at Disadvantage, but are not impossible. Ettins respond to bribery, so if the party wish to call off Urtle’s rage without harming Gurgle, a sufficient bribe might be enough to get the Ettin to leave. Otherwise, Gurgle may be forced to defend himself along with Urtle.

If they can somehow get the helmet off (with a Remove Curse spell), Gurgle will revert to his original alignment and join in the carnage along with Urtle. This may not be a desired outcome unless they want to kill Urglegurgle with a clear conscience.

Monsters: “Urglegurgle” Ettin (1) - As per Monster Manual, p. 132

Treasure: *Helm of Alignment Change (cursed)* - Wondrous Item, Rare. This iron helmet is decorated with bronze highlights and twisting, swirling engravings. When this helm is placed upon the head of a Large or smaller aligned humanoid or giant, the original alignment of that creature is changed to the exact opposite alignment so long as the helmet is worn. Lawful becomes Chaotic. Good becomes Evil. The Neutral component remains unchanged. The helmet is cursed, so the wearer will not willingly remove it.

For example:

Lawful Good becomes Chaotic Evil
Neutral Good becomes Neutral Evil
Chaotic Good becomes Lawful Evil
Lawful Neutral becomes Chaotic Neutral

...and vice versa.

This effect can be avoided if the wearer passes a DC: 15 Wisdom saving throw. If they pass, they will immediately recognize that the Helm has somehow tried to affect their internal morality and ethics, and can choose to discard it. If they fail, then the helmet will alter their alignment to whatever is the opposite. That character can make a new saving throw in seven days, and against the same DC. If they again fail, then the next month. If they fail that save, then it will be another year. If they fail that save, then the change is permanent. A Remove Curse spell can free a character from the helmet and thus revert the character's alignment. However, should that character have a permanent alignment change, nothing short of a Greater Restoration will repair their moral compass.

Furthermore, if the caravan can be spared, and the horses that ran off can be returned, the merchants will reward the players with a 500gp reward should they make it to their destination (which will be whatever the next town or village is in your campaign).

Complications: There are several complications to consider. There is the moral conflict created when Gurgle asks not to be harmed or apologizes for the damage. He only speaks Orc and Giant, so the players would realistically have to know one of these languages to fully comprehend that attempt.

The Helmet itself will fall away from the Ettin if the giant is killed, making it available to be worn by a player character. A character that is so cursed by the helmet should not immediately reveal it's new alignment if it is contradictory to the party, as the character will believe that this is it's rightful moral compass. That may mean that this new alignment can lead to sabotages and infighting.

That complication alone may make a player feel like it has lost agency, so it's important to give them an opportunity to have a Remove Curse spell made available if they are disheartened in such a way, either by finding a scroll or perhaps a beneficial NPC if no other means are available. This could also be seen as a great roleplaying opportunity, and may create it's series of storylines where a hero falls and then must be redeemed. It all depends on where the player wants to go with this.

The Eyes Have It

Introduction: Something that gets overlooked often are the relationships between monsters that exist naturally, and without “homebrew” input from a DM. Using these relationships can be used to justify other interactions that can create a chain of encounters that are not only logical, but generate a build in excitement. Intellect Devourers and Illithids, Orcs and Ettins, Goblins, and Worgs...all are existing relationships where you can hint at what comes next and then scale up the danger. Even seeing one may not necessarily lead to another, but even the hint that it might could lead to some great tension or scene building.

“The Eyes Have It” is one such case. It takes something relatively easy to deal with by remaining calm, a Gas Spore, and uses the existing flavour text in the Monster Manual to tie it in with Beholders. However, as Beholders are a top tier monster than many not be ready for, and Gas Spores generate from dead Beholders, a Zombie Beholder is not only fitting, but could be reasonable. What if the Gas Spores are not only the reason for the Beholder dying in the first place, but then spawn from it? Add in an undying will, and you have a great dual encounter.

Environment: Cavern/Underdark/Dungeon
Suggested level: 5-6

Description: Whether as part of a wilderness, Underdark, or existing dungeon exploration, the players will discover a cavern entrance that seems to have been dug away, and not natural. Tool marks and signs of excavation will mark a long, twisting tunnel that travels at least 100', generally 5' side, and about 7' tall. A Dwarf with Stone Cunning, or someone proficient in Mining (Investigation DC 10) will note that the tunnel descends slightly. As the tunnel progresses, tiny fungi will start to appear at the mid point, growing off most surfaces. The further along the players travel, the larger the mushrooms get, becoming varied in colour and many of which are faintly bioluminescent. The whole tunnel will take on a dim light in a variety of colours. Upon reaching the end of this twisting tunnel, the rough digging will appear to have broken into a large constructed chamber, circular in shape with a domed roof. The entire area is filled with massive mushrooms and other fungi, as if the area were a secret mushroom forest or garden. The room initially appears to have no exit other than what the players of entered by, and is around 100' in diameter, with a domed roof reaching to 40' at it's apex.

The area is densely “forested”, counting as “difficult terrain” for movement. Players can hack through the fungi easier than wood, but because the mushrooms are damp, they do not easily burn. Additionally, creatures in the fungal garden are considered “obscured” for visual purposes. To make the mechanics easy for clearing the area, give the mushrooms Vulnerability to Slashing weapons for clearing them, and Resistance to Fire. Taking an action to just clear an area might remove 5'x5' of “obscurement”, but the area will still be “difficult terrain” for movement because of the debris unless the players then take the time to remove the debris back up the entrance tunnel.

The mushroom garden is populated with a variety of fungi in many shapes and sizes; some of which are quite massive. The whole area is dimly lit by bioluminescence and casts odd shadows while clouds of glowing spores move about harmlessly.

But the players are not alone.

If you wish to make the players roll a Perception roll, do so, but it's easier to build tension by claiming to use their Passive Perception. By whatever means, the players (Or better yet only one or two) will see some odd shapes moving through the forest of mushrooms. At first shadows only, but silently, eerily, they will see what at first looks like a large 6' diameter orb hovering though the garden just out of sight...

Only by getting really close (say,

If they choose to investigate further, they might notice that it has what appear to be tentacles or eyestalks sprouting from the top. Lit in flashes by spores or glowing fungi, they will see flashes of pink or purple colouring of this mysterious beast.

Only by getting really close (say, within 20') can the players get a better look at "the beast". A successful Intelligence/Nature check (DC:15) will determine that this beast is a Gas Spore, and not a Beholder. Otherwise, feel free to play up the "monster in the bushes" drama.

Furthermore, as they explore this domed garden, they may notice that this inhabitant is not the lone occupant. There are two. A successful Nature (or even Arcana) check (DC:18) will remind the truly sage among the players that Beholders are solo creatures and do not share their lairs with others of their kind.

If the players ignore these wandering fungal imposters, they could potentially explore the remainder of this chamber unmolested. Doing so *might* reveal the exit on the far side of the chamber which has been overgrown by a thick tangle of tough mushrooms (Investigation/Perception DC:17, and only when right on top of where this exit is).

Attacking any Gas Spore might expose any and all nearby players to it's poisonous spores, and their fatal effects. However, this has an added side effect for those who can successfully survive the spores. Gas Spores are born upon dead beholders, and absorb some of their memories. Survivors of the spores have a random chance to learn a memory.

01-50 - Know the exact location of the hidden entrance behind the tangled mushroom patch.

51-80 - Know that another chamber exists beyond this one...somewhere.

81-95 - The miners who found this chamber did not survive.

96-100 - Somewhere, there's a dias with a hidden compartment. Treasure?

If the party finds the second exit, it will reveal a 10' wide, 10' high hallway with an arched ceiling. The inside of which is also covered in fungi, although these are strangely not bioluminescent. As they reach the end of the hallway, they will enter into another 100' diameter circular room with another 40' tall domed ceiling. A 20' diameter dias sits in the center of the room, rising by two steps to a height of 5'. Spaced equidistantly from each other, as well as being 10' from the dias are four stone columns that rise to the ceiling. The room seems strangely clear of fungus, but there is one pile of fine gray dust next to a shovel right inside the entrance to this room.

Hovering over the dias is a grayish-pink spherical creature. It possesses one milky white central eye, and what looks like several eye stalks on top of it's head. A few eye stalks have seemingly either broken or rotted off their bases. Open sores sprouting tiny pink and purple mushrooms litter it's flesh, and a massive mouth filled with blackening but still sharp teeth fill it's gaping mouth. It slowly rotates to bring it's gaze upon you....

This combat could be straight forward, as you are dealing with an undead. However, if the players wish to maximize their defences, hiding behind a column when in ranged combat with the Zombie Beholder should count as 25% cover.

Should they defeat the beast, an Investigation (DC 18) will reveal a hidden compartment in the top which hides a leather haversack. Anyone whom was attacked and survived the spores, as well as rolled the appropriate random memory from them, will roll only a DC:15 on this challenge, and will also gain Advantage on that roll.

Monsters:

Gas Spore (2) - As per Monster Manual, p. 138

Beholder Zombie - As per Monster Manual, p. 316

Treasure:

The leather container is actually a "*Heward's Handy Haversack*." It isn't empty. It contains:

1000gp

2500sp

500cp

Elixir of Health

Complications: There are a lot of complications, and they all span from the deadly abilities of all monsters considered. Those that are afflicted with the poisonous Gas Spores could potentially die, and thus the Elixir of Health. It's important to consider whether or not the party has some ability to deal with poison, be it through the use of spells, other magical items, or a paladin's Lay On Hands.

The Beholder Zombie will be using its eye rays randomly, but this might also lead to a deadly use of the Disintegrate Ray. This could either be harsh or hilarious, depending on the player at hand and the means by which it happens.

The intent of this encounter is to showcase the relationship between two monsters, perhaps in a fun way - not to kill the party. Keep in mind that the Beholder is a Zombie. It will not be a tactical genius and will be subject to random choice with regard to the eye rays.

Mirrors of the Soul

Introduction: DMs everywhere will agree on one thing: players will meta-game, even if subconsciously. Because of this, it can sometimes be hard to get players to try certain paths, enter portals, or take risks that are new. More experienced players tend to be guilty of this whereas brand new players are not.

Sometimes, the trick to getting the players to get their characters to act in a more adventuresome manner is to use their own meta-gaming outlook to trick them into taking a new chance or trying a new thing. In essence, you have to out-meta the meta. This encounter is one of those pieces of trickery, and all through the use of a D&D classic - "the secret note".

This encounter requires a little bit of preparation ahead of time. You will need to prepare two stacks of notes, one blank and one pre-written, all on identical paper. They need to be kept hidden behind your screen or in perhaps a box or other container so that the players have no foreknowledge. One stack will have the same message on all of them. The other stack will be blank. Both sets of notes should be individually folded up so that any contents cannot be seen. When you produce these notes for the players it cannot be noticed that they come from two different piles from behind your screen. A good "poker face" would help here. ;)

Environment: Dungeon (*special)
Suggested level: Any

(This encounter could be a room in a dungeon, but it could just as well be a pocket dimension, dream sequence, appear in a magical fog, or other strange method.)*

Description: The characters will enter a room, roughly 60' in size, with a number of walls equal to the number of members in the group (minimum 3). As they enter, the door behind them will seal and appear like a wall with no apparent exit. All of the walls appear to have a translucent, mirrored surface, and mists appear to dance and shift beyond them. If the characters succeed in an Intelligence/Investigation (DC: 13) check, they can tell that the mists do not blend from one mirrored wall to another. They may be of slightly different hues, colours, or move in different directions (DM's choice).

Any character that states that they will approach a mirrored wall will see their reflection in it. However, only the FIRST character to move to a given wall will see it clearly, and in only the first wall they approach. This applies to all characters in the room. The intent is to make sure that every character has a clear reflection in only one wall. With regard to any other wall other than the first one a given character approaches, his or her reflection will appear faded and ghost-like compared to the clear reflection. Any reflection, clear or faded, will not behave in any other manner either than as a reflection. If no character approaches a wall, or if some characters refuse to approach a wall, randomly assign their reflection to a wall.

If a character touches a mirror, or looks their reflection in the eye (as determined by a statement similar to "examine my reflection"), hand that character a pre-written note. Any character that refuses to approach a mirror under any circumstances gets a blank note. Do not let the players open their notes until every character has either been given a pre-written or blank note. Once this has been accomplished, have each player open the note and read it to themselves. (Not to be read aloud)

The pre-written notes say:

"You have entered a mirror realm. Mists surround you. You are standing on the other side of the glass from where you were facing a translucent version of yourself."

Any character transported to the opposite side of "the glass" (actually a glass-like force field) will be

able to see though to the inner chamber where they entered, as well as see any characters who did not approach the glass. They will not see any other rooms or to other chambers where other characters may have gone. They cannot hear what goes on in the main chamber and cannot communicate by any means short of telepathy with anyone else. They will not be able to break the “glass”, and if they try to wander the mists they will always end up right back where they started. Feel free to use some sort of teleportation to do so if a particular character obsesses with wandering the mists.

That established, they will have to deal with their reflection, who will stand there patiently with two hands outstretched. One hand holds a tiny box. One hand holds a knife. Until the character selects one or the other by statement, pointing, touching, grabbing or whatnot, the reflection will stand there looking at them quietly. Once the character chooses, whatever they choose, as well as whatever they did not disappear in a puff of smoke.

- *If they choose the box*: The once silent reflection will state a riddle in a eerie, echoing voice. No one else outside the chamber will hear the riddle. This riddle is:

“You saw me where I never was, and where I could not be. And yet within that place, my face you often see.”

The character will then have three guesses to answer the riddle. If they guess correctly, they will be transported back to the main chamber, and will be awarded a one-time free Advantage on their next saving throw, whatever it may be.

If the character guesses incorrectly all three times or refuses to answer within 1 minute (feel free to time it), they will be spat back out upon the floor in the main chamber. The Reflection will then move to it’s side of the glass and shout for all to hear in the main chamber whatever the failing character has written in the “Flaw” section of their character sheet in a language that everybody understands. (perhaps have everyone hear it in their native racial tongue).

- *If they choose the knife*: The once silent reflection the once idle reflection will initiate a Charisma Challenge. No initiative need be rolled, as both sides will act at exactly the same time. Each side will roll a d20 and add their Charisma modifier. Highest roll wins. Whomever wins the best two-out-of-three wins the challenge. Use the character’s Charisma attribute for both the character and the reflection. However, only the character can benefit from any magic items or spells that affect Charisma. The reflection does not.

If they win the Challenge, they will be transported back to the main chamber, and will be awarded a one-time free Advantage on their next saving throw, whatever it may be.

If the character loses the Challenge, they will be spat back out upon the floor in the main chamber. The Reflection will then move to it’s side of the glass and shout for all to hear in the main chamber whatever the losing character has written in the “Flaw” section of their character sheet in a language that everybody understands exactly like “The box” entry above.

Complications: Complications arise in a roleplaying sense, and based on exactly who is in the room if or when a reflection shouts a Flaw. This can create an interesting dynamic where players gain a chance to have their characters either build trust or distrust of other characters simply by knowing something flawed about another party member.

Characters may end up with shared secrets, building bonds with each other. Characters might likewise hoard these secrets and blackmail, distrust, or become wary of those whom they thought to be closer allies.

It all comes down to the player/character type.

Dungeonmasters should remain aware of how they think players may interpret this intrusion in their characters' privacy. The intent is to use meta-gaming to make otherwise over-thinking players more open to roleplaying and character development. If any DM thinks that a player may take such a violation personally, perhaps this encounter isn't for you. However, if you think that this might put more RP in the G, then by all means go for it.

Fountain of Fortunes

Introduction: Players and characters have a wide array of value sets and see value in many things. The vast majority see value in monetary things, but this may simply be a pragmatic outlook and not greed. The reality is that things generally cost money. However, many others place value on the intangible. Some place value in concepts or ideals. Love, honour, faith, hope, justice, and freedom..., or even death, carnage, corruption and tyranny. Add to that a bit of flavor text I read in the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide, and we have an encounter.

This encounter touches on that overarching theme of value in a small way. What do the players value or deem sacred?

Environment: Dungeon/Urban/Wilderness...anywhere you want a fountain.
Suggested level: variable.

Description: The players will come upon an elaborate fountain with a floating statue above it. The fountain is 10' in diameter, only two feet deep, and filled to a depth of 1' with clear water. Above it floats an unusual and very striking statue. The 10' tall statue is of two women in robes facing away from each other, but with their arms interlocked at the elbows. This statue floats five feet above the top of the pool. It is itself surrounded by stone statues of warriors in armor, which stand 6' tall and float in an orbit around the main statue. This series of smaller statues, as well as the main statue, slowly spin in a circle, like a very slowly spinning top held aloft in the air.

The centre statue is itself very striking. Both women are beautiful, but very different.

One is either painted black or carved from black stone. She has what look like massive deer antlers. Her expression is judging and displeased, and she looks down below. The other is either painted white or carved from white stone. She wears a blindfold, and smiles gently. She looks upward to the sky. If you're playing in the Forgotten Realms setting, these could be Beshaba (Mistress of Misfortune) and Tymora (Goddess of Luck), who are not only gods, but sisters (Religion, DC: 12). Otherwise, make them whatever religious or arcane figures you choose.

The Warriors are in a plain grey, yet polished, stone. They are carved as if in elaborate plate armor and stand at attention with no weapons in hand.

Players that approach the pool to within 5' of it will see things in the water. Scattered upon the floor of the pool will be coins. Some gold, some silver, and some copper. They scatter all about, and the distortion of the water makes it hard to count them accurately. (Optionally, you can choose to add a few low value gems of between 10 to 25gp each, but not many.)

The encounter becomes a choice. Do the characters drop coins in the pool, or do they take them?

- If they take any wealth from the pool:

Should the players seek to remove any of the coins from the pool, a voice will be heard from the black goddess statue. "They whom rob a fortune win only poor fortunes!" A number of Warrior statues will then come to life and attack. Statues will take a full action to descend to the ground, after that acting normally on the next round.

Measure the strength of the following encounter by CR level and judgement. The Warrior statues are simply re-skinned Animated Objects (armor). Use only as many as is fair. Therefore, if you need a higher CR, add more floating Warriors. If you need fewer, have fewer Warriors, or have some just float and not animate.

Optionally, you can have the statues attack in waves. One statue animates on the first round. Two animate on the second. Three will then animate on the third. If the players survive three rounds, the attacks end.

Once the waves end, all destroyed statues will reform, and hover back into place. Optionally, and with permission from any player killed in combat, you might even have a fallen player turn to stone and become one of the Warrior statues in place of a destroyed one. If the player has second thoughts about this choice afterward, feel free to let a *Restoration* or *Remove Curse* spell return the corpse to organic form, having been perfectly preserved by the petrification, and therefore able to be resurrected.

Once the statues have been defeated, the Beshaba statue will again speak.

"Your fortune has been cast," it says, in an ominous tone.

The players can take this however they want. DMs can choose to have this mean future misfortune, or use it as an excuse to set up an ambush or add a trap. A DM could even use this as an explanation for a failed saving throw or ability check in the future. "You know, Beshaba said..."

For those players adamant about raiding the wealth in the pool, see "Treasure" below.

- If the players donate treasure into the pool:

The white goddess statue will speak.

"Fortune left is fortune gained," she will say in a gentle and maternal tone. A player who donates to the well will receive a boon based on what they leave:

- up to 1 gp value: Gain a one-time bonus of +1 on the next Ability Check they make.
- up to 10gp value: Gain a one-time bonus of +1 on the next Saving Throw they make.
- 50 gp or more: Gain a one-time Advantage on the next Ability Check or Saving Throw they make.

If the players ignore the pool, examine the pool and take nothing, or otherwise leave it physically unmolested, nothing happens.

Monsters: **Animated Objects (Armor).** As per Monster Manual p.19. Use between 1 to 6, depending on what CR you are trying to achieve.

Treasure: Aside from the possible boons that are given by donating to the pool, the following can be found in the pool if the players take a full 30 minutes to raid the contents. The distortion of the water as well as how slippery the coins will be will make them tricky to collect quickly:

- 50 gp
- 750 sp
- 1000 cp

Complications: Aside from the obvious complications arising from the death or injury of a character as stated in the section above on characters transforming into statues, sloshing around in a pool to steal it's wealth creates issues. If this is a public park, citizens, especially superstitious ones, will protest this act and might even call for a constabulary/city guard.

One might even wish to have a series of mysterious events, all unlucky, befall any pool robbers until the coins are replaced or reimbursed. The extent of this poor luck is completely up to the DM.

The Albatross

Introduction: I can't speak for other players or DMs, but I get a lot of my inspiration from music. The simple act of listening to the radio in my car, or a playlist on my phone while showering, can lead to outbursts of "I have to write that down!" Songs inspire character concepts, back stories, encounters, scenes I want to lay out for my players, or images that lead to character sketches and other artwork. This encounter was inspired when I heard "Albatross" by Big Wreck.

In this encounter, "The Albatross" is a metaphor. Since "Rhyme of The Ancient Mariner", the concept of "wearing the albatross" (aside from one Monty Python sketch) as come to mean being saddled with a burden or a debt to be repaid. It could mean being wrongfully vilified, perhaps even willingly so, just to serve a greater good. It could mean bearing an immense responsibility, or taking on a curse to save another from it.

In this case, "The Albatross" will create a burden, and in an environment or setting not normally expressed in a tabletop game, but which occurs frequently in an online RPG setting - the escort mission. The intent is to test the resolve of the party, as well as the willingness to share a burden.

Environment: Wilderness, but it could be anywhere travel is required.
Suggested level: variable.

Description: Perhaps as the party travels through the wilderness in a twisting forest road, a hazardous mountain trail, or fog-covered tangled swamp passage, the party will hear the faint cries for help. A successful Perception (DC: 12) will determine it to be female, but in a voice that doesn't sound human. If the party would like to find the source of this voice, they will need to make either a successful Survival (DC: 13) or Investigation (same DC) roll.

Should they pass the appropriate checks, they will come upon an unusual scene. Hidden in the space of a hollow trunk, a small cave, or thatch of weeds will be an elven woman, obviously badly wounded, and carrying a swaddled infant.

When the players discover her, she look up at them in a very unsure manner and speak in very shaky Common. "New chief. Please help."

She will then hold the infant up to be taken. She will look weaker and weaker, finally expiring whether they take the baby or not. When she dies, it will be unrecoverable, so a simple Cure Wounds or Medicine Kit will not help.

It now falls to the characters on what they do. The baby will start crying almost immediately. After a minute of that, the players will hear noises in the distance. A successful Perception or Survival (DC 12) check will determine that this is the sound of a hunting party. Echoing from out of sight in the wilderness will be the sound of beating sticks, drums and the like normally used to flush large game. A Successful Insight (DC 15) check might determine that who or whatever they are happen to be communicating with each other and are closing in.

If they don't react swiftly, feel free to add this:

"As you stand there discussing what to do, two triangular bladed weapons strike the soft ground next to you. Their alien nature surprises you for a moment."

A successful Nature (DC: 17) check will determine that these are Thri-Kreen weapons called "chatkcha". Thri-Kreen love to eat elf flesh. They will be on you in a moment, and will surely eat the infant and the dead mother. If there are Elves in the party, give them Advantage on this Nature check.

You are being HUNTED!

What begins now is a variable chase. The intent is to create enormous tension and to use the Thri-Kreen in waves. The size of each wave and the number of them is determined by the size and level of the group, and should also account for any previous wounds the group might already have.

The Thri-Kreen should attack from out of the fog, and always from a different direction - but never from the front. The players should almost feel compelled to run forward toward whatever they think is the right destination. It doesn't matter what the destination is, so long as they head for it. Hiding out will simply make the Thri-Kreen eventually find them and will have essentially all the waves find them at the same time - not so good. Unless your players are keen defensive fighters with an understanding of cover, concealment, firing arcs, and are well-supplied...it's better to keep moving.

To start off, attack with one Thri-Kreen. Always have it start with ranged combat, with the fog counting as "light obscurement". The 'Kreen will launch two volleys of chatkcha for two rounds before closing to melee. When this Thr-Kreen falls, add two more. When these fall, add three. If necessary, keep adding and make it seem more and more desperate. Keep the battle moving if at all possible, and keep the descriptions intense. Impress upon your players how important it is that they keep moving. If/When you have your players absolutely against the ropes and badly outgunned, have the following happen:

"You can see and sense the mantis men closing in. They know you have the infant, whose cries seem like a siren call to them. They approach, and you begin to hear a new sound. Like the wind whistling too loud from too high above. The fog begins to darken slightly.

Arrows rain down and into the group of Thri-Kreen. Dozens of arrows. The 'Kreen dance like marionettes with half-cut strings and those who have survived your defence fall under the weight of these missiles. As the last of them fall, silhouettes emerge from the mists. Slim figures in hooded cloaks coloured to match the terrain emerge. Many still have bows knocked with arrows, but not raised yet.

A single figure approaches and draws it's hood back to reveal a beautiful Elven woman with hair the colour of Autumn leaves. She puts away her weapon and approaches with arms outstretched."

At first, she speaks in Elven. For those who know the tongue, they will hear "We have come for the lost chief. Please hand over the child."

If the party does not respond, she will repeat herself in Common, likely after rolling her eyes.

If the party hands over the child, she will smile and cradle the infant. All aggression from her will fade. She will remove and intricately forged and woven silver bracelet that resembles tangled vines, and hand it to the party. She will add, without even looking up from the baby, "You have made safe the lineage of my people. The bracelet will grant you safe passage through our lands so long as you respect them."

If the party refuses to hand over the child, she will ask again, but all the bows will be drawn and aimed. If she asks yet again and no positive response comes, combat with them will ensue as well.

Hopefully, though, they will turn over the child. She will then turn and walk back through the lines of surrounding elves and fade into the fog like a ghost. One by one, the armed elves will do the same until none remain. They will vanish into the fog like they were part of it.

Monsters: **Thri-Kreen (6+)** as per page 288 of the Monster Manual

Elves: Use "Scout" as per Monster Manual, but also add the Racial features from **Wood Elf** as per page 23-24 of the Players Handbook.

Elven Woman: Use "**Bandit Captain**" as per Monster Manual, page 344, but also add the Racial features from **Wood Elf** as per page 23-24 of the Players Handbook.

Treasure: "The Bracelet of Elders" - To common folk, this will be just valuable jewellery of fine elven design. Among the Wood Elves, however, this bracelet signifies an ally of the Wood, and grants safe passage to non-Wood-Elves through their territory, so long as they respect the land and the people.

Complications: Complications are many and varied. One thing that will not occur unless the party makes it happen is that the child will never be the direct target of an attack by the Thri-Kreen. They will make it look like that, but any attacks will be directed at the person carrying the baby so that they can take the baby alive.

If the party member carrying the baby drops, then the party have two rounds before a Thri-Kreen will get close enough to grab the baby. That may produce it's own chase, but in reverse order, with the party chasing the Thri-Kreen.

If the party have a member that falls unconscious, they will have to decide if they leave that person behind, carry another body, or stand and fight. Feel free to adjust the waves of 'Kreen for this. The intent is not to kill the party. The intent is to make them run and feel tension. This should feel like they are in a replay of a Aliens or Predator movie.

If the party choose to fight the Wood Elves, you may want to add a "poison" feature to their weapons that knocks the players unconscious. Again, the Wood Elves would rather not kill. They just want their heir back.

If you wish, add plot hooks around the bracelet. Perhaps tribes of Orcs or Goblins will recognize it and it will have exactly the opposite effect. Perhaps this Wood Elf community will reach out to the party in the future, as their contacts "in the outside world" might be limited, and they are the most trustworthy of all the other options.

You could even use this chase as a way to get the party from point A to point B, or have it end among ancient ruins. It's all up to you.

Shell Game

Introduction: Not every encounter requires a lot of set up or preparation. Some encounters just need the players to show up and be willing to have a good time. “Shell Game” is one such encounter. It uses the resources on the table as the encounter starts, and uses those limited resources to maximum effect to create an oddball moment that might come up in later conversations. And really, isn't that what it's all about?

Environment: Dungeon, but anywhere you wish to set up the conditions.
Suggested level: Any.

Description: The characters will enter upon a room or cavern that present the players with a series of challenging puzzles. There should be a Strength challenge, a Dexterity challenge, and an Intelligence/Wisdom challenge. This series of puzzles are essential to proceeding to the next room.

Example:

The players enter a chamber that is perhaps 30' in diameter, but soars upward like a cylinder with a ceiling at least 100' above them. Looking way up, faintly lit by bioluminescent fungi, is the outline of the exit way above. No rope, ladder, steps, or handholds exist to reach this upper exit.

Presented before the players will be a series of odd geometric shapes carved from a variety of substances like wood, stone, and crystal. Each item has a unique shape, and are scattered randomly around the room.

A successful Intelligence (Investigation) (DC 15) check will determine that some pieces might fit into each other. You might even allow the party to know that they can be stacked in such a manner with the result of that roll, or ask for another. It will take a successful Strength (Athletics) (DC 15) test to lift these heavy objects so that they stack one on top of another. A successful Wisdom (Perception) roll will reveal where the first piece will lock into the floor to allow the pieces to be stacked like a climbable surface up to the upper exit. When one particular piece (identified by Investigation like above) is lifted to shoulder height (achieved by the Strength/Athletics above), it will glow slightly then hover upwards slowly to just beside where it could fit on the piece below. A successful Strength (Athletics) (DC 12) check will allow the odd shapes to be climbed upon like a ladder, and a successful Dexterity (DC 15) check will bring the piece in line and lock it into place.

Here's where it gets tricky.

Every time anyone grasps a shape, Wild Magic will flash. Pick two characters at random. Each makes a Wisdom DC 15 saving throw. If both fail, have them swap character sheets. The effect is as if the spirit of one character swapped bodies with another character. The personality and such that the player of that character portrays does not transfer - just the physical body. So you might have a sage wizard's traits, ideals, bonds and flaws and such inside the body of the barbarian, and the primal barbarian in the body of the tiny wizard. To make it simple, have the skill sets, racial abilities and the like stay with the host body. Otherwise this could get too complicated. This will continue to occur every time a piece is touched. A particular character may end up being swapped multiple times.

This will make every player try to figure out a puzzle perhaps outside of how they normally would, but with the personality they are accustomed to playing.

Once they have assembled a dozen pieces, they can exit the room above. When they complete the challenge and exit the room, all swapped personalities revert to normal.

Monsters: None, save those in the room. ;)
Treasure: None but hilarious memories

Complications: The only that may arise will occur is there are secrets written on a character sheet that another player may not know. In such a case, use a sticky note or other method over such secrets to protect the original players privacy. Otherwise, short of falling from a great height, there should be no issue.

The Menagerie

Introduction: It's always important to read the flavour text. For monsters, magic items, and spells, the flavour text can turn a blase encounter into something more. This very encounter is based upon the little details of one spell - Polymorph. (Page 266 of the Player's Handbook) However, instead of just using that spell as written, what if you created a special region affected by the spell, and tweaked it in such a way as to give the players more agency within the confines of this encounter? What if that special region was a Wild Magic zone? Mayhem!

Environment: Wilderness.
Suggested level: Any, but it should be high enough to justify the possible treasure.

Description: The party might be travelling along a lonely road or twisting path through dense woods, and the foliage seems to abruptly open into a single but large glade. The glade is enormous, and appears for all intents and purposes to be roughly circular. At the centre of this glade is a thick and tangled copse of trees, vines, and brambles. The central tree is an ancient oak, twisted and enormous. It's branches both reach to the sky and bend to the ground like an umbrella. Woven within these branches, innumerable vines twist and turn like a green tangle of webs, dotted by large white lily-like flowers. Shooting from the ground and entangled among the vines and trees are an equally abundant number of thorny brambles.

Standing next to the mass of vegetation is an elephant - very much out of place - and feeding on leaves and flowers. It seems to be unaware of your entrance into the glade. An eagle soars at treetop in a circle.

This imposing and tangled growth is not the most surprising feature, however. Starting from within the growth, and spiralling outward toward the edge of the glade is a dimly glowing and ever sparkling spiral of light upon the glade floor. Shifting through the colours of the rainbow, it gives the glade a fey-like nature. The air seems charged with some sort of energy.

The area is a Wild Magic zone, centred on the trunk of the oak tree and ranging 150' outward like a sphere in all directions. This, however, is not the main concern. The main concern is the Wand of Polymorph that was lost decades ago by a Wizard and has been grown into the centre of the base of the tree canopy. The oak grasps it without intent, and yet, grown into the centre of the Wild Magic zone, it now powers this Wand eternally so long as it remains lodged into this tree.

Both the Elephant and the Eagle are not native to this zone. Both are merely Goblins who wandered into the zone and were changed by the Wand in the tree. A third Goblin is among the brambles in the form of a Rat.

The fun begins when the players get to within 60' of the tree. Once per turn, the "Polymorph Tree" will act. Each one that closes to this range must make a Wisdom (DC 15) saving throw or be Polymorphed randomly into either an Elephant (MM, p. 322), Eagle (MM, p. 322), or Rat (MM, p. 335). Every time someone becomes one of these creatures, whomever was that creature beforehand is released from the spell. However, should another creature be released from any other form, that creature can be considered a viable target for a new form when randomly determining who makes a save.

Should any character be transformed, they will retain their mental attributes and personality, unlike the spell. Otherwise the spell behaves like in the Player's Handbook. Furthermore, should any character move more than 150' from the tree in any direction, the spell ends. Re-entering the glade does not make the spell reactivate, but closing to within 60' of the tree will certainly make that character a viable target in the Polymorph lottery.

The Goblins, however, have been here for so long that they have lost all sense of self and will not behave like anything other than their animal counterparts - until they are released from the spell. At which point they will try their best to flee from the region and never return. Should they be captured alive, they could be questioned about why they were here, and then may divulge that they know about the Wand.

If the party lets the Goblins go without questioning, they might yet discover the Wand.

If they are in Eagle form, they will be able to discover it with a Perception check (DC 20) at Advantage, using +4 to the roll in place of their own should they so choose by flying above the trees and looking down.

A character in Rat form could navigate the brambles with ease and would not require an ability check to do so. They could find the Wand by taking a full minute to navigate the tangles and would have to succeed on a DC: 17 Investigation check.

Once per turn, any character could make a Strength check (DC: 20) to pull branches away to search the foliage. Each check, successful or not, requires a DC: 15 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 1d8 Piercing from the massive thorns. A character in Elephant form will make the Strength check at Advantage, and will have Resistance to the Piercing damage due to their thick hide even if they fail the save. Spending one full minute doing so might allow the character to make a Investigation (DC: 17) check to find the Wand.

Once the Wand is removed from the tree, the random Polymorphing will stop as the Wand will be out of contact with the Wild Magic source. The Wand will then become a standard *Wand of Polymorph*.

Monsters: Depending on the state of the **Goblins**, there could be up to **3 Goblins** (p. 166 of the Monster Manual), up to three **Elephants** (p. 322 of the Monster Manual), up to three **Eagles** (p. 322 of the MM) and up to three **Rats** (p. 335 of the MM), not counting what happens to the player character party.

Treasure: *Wand of Polymorph* (p. 211 of the Dungeon Master's Guide).

Complications: Holy smokes, the complications. Since the target of the Wand is random, the chance exists for a character to be involved in an activity possible and safe for one form to be changed into a form for which that is no longer safe. A character in Eagle form who flies over 150' away from the tree at any height risks the fall from that height when they change into another form or back into their normal form. That could be significant. Even if they are transformed into an Elephant, depending on the damage taken, any damage that takes them to 0 hit points still carries over into their normal form.

It's important to remember that any damage that reduces a character/creature to 0hp or lower carries over into their normal form and dispels the magic. Since a Rat has only 1 hit point, a fall caused by changing from Eagle to a non-flight form could be significant, as only 1 hit point would be removed from the damage.

A character who is within the brambles in Rat form who gets changed into a larger form will have to deal with those series of Strength checks and Dexterity saves to free themselves, along with the associated damage.

A character who is among the brambles in Elephant form will lose any advantages and resistances of that form if they are transformed. A character in Elephant form who may be engaged in dangerous Strength related activities within the Wild Magic region could endanger their safety if they are transformed into a smaller form. Holding a large branch, rock, or other heavy item over themselves at the time of this possible alteration could be in a lot of peril.

With all this in mind, the intent of this encounter is not to kill or overly endanger the party. The intent is to have an encounter with the sort of mayhem that only existed in vintage Bugs Bunny cartoons when words like "Abra-ca-pocus" are invoked.

Counting Sheep

Introduction: I can't speak for every table, but I know mine likes to inject a little humour into serious moments. A touch of the ridiculous can often turn a normally staid affair into one that hooks players into memorable encounters. Even darker humour is often better than none. If you can add a description to that moment that earns you a "hunh?" expression, all the better.

"Counting Sheep" is intended along that line of thinking. It takes what would normally be a simple and straight forward encounter, but adds a touch of the ridiculous and the curious. How you run with those ideas is up to you.

Environment: Wilderness/Farmlands
Suggested level: 5

Description: Travelling down what would normally be a very busy route, the players may notice (Intelligence, DC: 14) that traffic on this route has been unusually sparse. This route normally sees more carts, wagons, oxen and the like as farmers transport their wares, travel to fields, or otherwise frequent their crops. The players have been the only travel on this route for a whole day. That is very unusual.

Perhaps as they break camp, or end a short rest, one or more may notice (Perception, DC:15) the distant sounds of animals in alarm. Should someone notice this (and succeed in a Wisdom/Animal Handling DC: 12), they may even ascertain that it is the sound of sheep or goats in serious distress or fear. If the entire party fail to pick up on this clue, feel free to reduce the DC by one for every 10 minutes they continue to travel, as they are getting closer to the source. Once all of them succeed, have them arrive at the entrance of what would be a cart path toward a farmstead. The path cuts through high wheat or other applicable grain crops (even tall grass if you wish), and winds slowly for about 300'.

A successful Wisdom/Survival (DC:15) check will discover very large footprints running parallel to the path toward the farmhouse, hidden in the tall crops or grass. The footprints are 18-24" long and are humanoid in nature. If they veer off the path even 20' once they make this discovery, they will find, hidden in the tall crops or grass, the body of a massive female humanoid (Nature, DC: 12 - Hill Giant). Investigating further, they will see that the back of her head has been broken open. Either or a successful Investigation or Medicine roll (an easier DC:10) of the head will discover that her brain is missing.

At the end of the path, the crops open into a simple and rustic property. A mud brick farmhouse, 20' square, with a thatched roof that stands maybe 12' at it's peak. Two windows in the front are shuttered in wood and the simple wooden door in the front is ajar. No light comes from within.

The closer they get to the farmstead, the louder the cries of alarm from the livestock get. If the characters walk around the farmhouse, they will see a small fenced-in area. It is adjoined to the farmhouse, and spans 40' outward, making for a fenced in area of 20'x40'. A small sheltered area, which used to be 20'x10, sits outside the fence and along it's far wall. It used to. Now it's flattened as if struck by a mighty blow through the roof.

The reason for the alarm and the crushed animal shed becomes clear as the characters view the fenced-in animal pen.

A large humanoid figure in skins and other savage accoutrements sits in the pen. Even seated, he's easily 8' tall, and likely stands a good 16' on two feet. He holds one sheep in his two hands, and four more shudder at the far end of the pen. Two more other sheep appear to have been torn in two. Their remains are discarded into the pen, uneaten.

If the players choose to watch what the Giant is doing, perhaps hidden from the tall grass, the following will occur. The Hill Giant ("Grunk") is looking at the sheep in an odd manner. He holds it close to his face, examining it all over. After perhaps 15 seconds, he tears the sheep in two like a loaf of bread. He then continues to examine the sheep's two halves for another 15 seconds.(Successful Wisdom/Insight, DC:13 will reveal he is obviously looking for something. And he's confused.)

When he does not find anything, he grunts or snorts, throws the sheep carcass halves away, and gets another sheep - then repeats the process. This whole affair, left uninterrupted, will last about 5 minutes. Once he has annihilated all the sheep, he will then fly into a fury and begin destroying the farm house with his great club.

If the players attack at range, they will have surprise for the first round, so long as they do nothing rash (like yell or scream before attacking). Grunk will respond with ranged combat as well. He might (50%) throw the sheep in his hands instead of a boulder or rock. If he does so, alter the damage from 3d10+5 to 3d8+5. If he throws that sheep, just for fun, make him throw the rest of the sheep first before ripping mud bricks from the farm house for normal damage. If pressed in melee combat, he will, of course, use his greatclub. He will be ranting in Giant, in case someone speaks the tongue. "Where it go?!?"

If the players still haven't attacked by the time Grunk has begun attacking the house, note the following. This will be very important if other players are inside investigating the house while Grunk is attacking the structure. For each round Grunk attacks the farm house, roll 1d10. If the result is equal to or less than the number of rounds that the giant has been attacking the structure, the house collapses. Anyone caught inside the house when it collapses must succeed in a Dexterity saving throw (DC:15) to dodge out of the door. Those who fail will take 3d10 Bludgeoning damage. Any trapped souls will need to succeed in a Strength check (DC: 15) to escape.

Should the farmhouse remain intact and not be destroyed, the players can determine (Intelligence/Investigation DC: 12) that the home was abandoned in a hurry. A hearth has only warm embers left, and a half-eaten apple lay on the floor. No valuables remain. A few simple cups and bowls of wood and clay remain behind - some of which were knocked over and broken during a hasty escape.

If, for some reason, the party chooses to somehow Charm the Giant, or use Detect Thoughts or other means of non-violent or telepathic investigation, they might find out (DM's discretion) that his mate, Urga, flew into an unknown rage and attacked him. In defending himself, he killed Urga. When she fell, something "came out of" Urga and fled into the fields toward the farm house. Grunk has been looking for it in the sheep.

If the DM wishes to continue this line of investigation and Urga's body has not been found, the DM may elect to allow the players to back-track Grunk's footprints backward from the farmhouse to the site of the body with a reduced Wisdom/Survival check of DC:10 (since they have Grunk's footprints at the farmstead site).

Monsters: "Grunk", Hill Giant (p.155, Monster Manual)

Treasure: Carries in a very large sack made from several animal skins - 1400cp, 50sp, a human hand wearing a ring worth 100gp. Also, if you have it available, roll twice on the "*Storm Kings Thunder: Items in a Giant Bag*" PDF available from:
:http://media.wizards.com/2016/dnd/downloads/SKT_Items_in_a_Giant_Bag.pdf.

Complications: The most obvious complication would be the collapse of the farm house with players inside, as stated above. The reasoning for Grunk tearing apart the sheep can be altered by the DM as they see fit. However, should the DM wish to continue this line of investigation, further information is coming in "Out of The Box #22 - The Passenger". >:)

The Passenger

Introduction: There's an old cliché that states "not everything is as it seems." Of all the genres in gaming, books, or movies, Horror follows this the most. Good horror has a bait and switch, or a surprise hook, that takes the viewer by surprise. There are many foes within the Monster Manual capable of this with the right delivery. What should follow is the generation of tension, and perhaps a little player paranoia, to add depth to the next few encounters. The right moment or delivery of this "bait and switch" can set the tone and give your players pause.

The following encounter, "The Passenger", is but one example. The foe that is presented here can not only be utilized with every single NPC and beast in the back of the Monster Manual, but with almost every living monster in the Monster Manual - so long as it has a brain.

In fact, the methodology for this foe has been seen in horror many times, from the Alien franchise, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Thing, the Half-Life computer game, and basically every zombie movie.

It can be anywhere. It can be anyone. It could be the person standing right next to you...or the duke's loyal hunting dog at his feet. Anyone.

Environment: Anywhere...
Suggested level: 2+

Description: Continuing their journey towards perhaps their next community, the adventurers come upon a very odd sight. They will find the remains of an adult male human laying face down on the ground. He wears simple peasant garb, and carries very belongings. He holds a simple shepherd's crook in his hands. There are, wandering about the local area, perhaps three stray sheep grazing upon local grass and weeds. A large stone lay upon his back. The stone is out of place with the local natural stone, as it looks handled by large muddy hands.

A quick investigation (rather obvious to any whom take a moment or two to look at the body) will show that the victim's skull has been broken open. A successful Medicine (DC : 12) check will reveal that the brain is missing. Further, if that same roll breaks a 15, allow the examiner to know that the skull was broken from within, and does not relate to the chest wound. A successful Survival (DC: 10) will show that more sheep were in the area, but are now missing. They will be revealed to have been moved further down the road in the direction that the characters are traveling. That same roll, should it break a DC: 12, will also reveal one set of human prints. A successful Investigation (DC: 12) of the site will also show another shepherd's crook in the tall grass beside the road. Nothing more should be found, regardless of how much the players look. A very hard (DC: 17) Nature or even Survival check will allow the players realize that there are no predators or scavengers watching or prowling the area, despite the carnage and easy meals. Should the players realize this, it is important for them to get a sense of how unusual this might be.

Allow the players to perhaps get two hours further down the road before entering the second phase of this encounter.

They will come upon a roadside campsite. Facing away from the party will be a human peasant, seated away from the party toward a campfire. Sheep graze nearby, seemingly unattended.

If the party approaches or attempt to communicate with the peasant, they will receive no response. Should the party approach the sheep, they will see (Perception, DC: 13) blood stains on the wool of three of the sheep. The sheep will otherwise act very placid and will not panic unless attacked. In fact, should the players approach the sheep in an inoffensive manner, the three sheep who are stained will slowly walk toward the approaching player(s).

Should the players look at the face of the seated peasant, they will see that the face is missing, as if (Medicine, Perception, Wisdom...whatever you choose) has blown open. vacating the skull. Blood stains the front of the peasant's garb. His body sits with his elbows upon his knees, propping him up artificially.

Here's the "bait and switch" moment.

Inside at least one of the sheep is an Intellect Devourer. How many you want to use is up to you. If you want to keep this encounter rather low level, use only one. However, multiple sheep as imposters for these "passengers" will create massive horror and shock. Keep in mind the CR calculations, and how loose they are. One Intellect Devourer is a CR 2. According to the DMG, two would be CR 3, and three would be CR 4. You may only want to use one.

The Intellect Devourers will erupt from the sheep in an action. Unless the characters are immune to Surprise, or implicitly state that they are watching the sheep in some suspicious manner, allow the monsters to do so as only 5' of movement. This will allow the aberrations to assault the party in their quest to both escape into the countryside and to acquire a better host to do so. The Intellect Devourer(s) will leap at the party like face-huggers in an attempt to spread their horror, and will start with their "Devour Intellect" ability.

Monsters: Intellect Devourer (1-3), p. 191, Monster Manual

Treasure: None.

Complications: The singular most obvious complication is "what if one or more Intellect Devourers win a new host?" This can be potentially a very character-deadly encounter, with all the repercussions of character loss one might expect. That established, it is also an encounter that could easily set the tone for an entire adventure, and opens up a plot hook of "how many have been Devoured?" You might wish to have any party NPCs be attacked first, and then have them escape into the woods. This one Intellect Devourer might then become a reoccurring villain. This could lead to a whole Mindflayer conspiracy, as the Devourer conveys what it knows to it's master.

The urgency that such an encounter, should the party triumph with no hands (or brains) lost, could potentially offer a journey into horror that many campaigns overlook - even for the time being.

It should also be noted that this encounter could be tied to "Out of The Box # 21 - Counting Sheep" either before or after it occurs. That's up to the DM and how you wish for this to play out.

Watchdog

Introduction: Another popular cliché or trope that seems to endlessly occur in every D&D game is this: Defeat monster, check its pockets, take its stuff. Here's a way to rethink that. What if the magic item is part of the encounter. What if that magic item defined the encounter such that it makes it very difficult to acquire without damaging it. What if that self-same magic item was also highly desirable?

Now, let's add something to that concept. Let's apply a template to that encounter that takes a common everyday monster (zombie) and applies it to a monster less common...say, one that makes it harder to just take the magic item?

So...here's my interpretation of that concept - take Daern's Instant Fortress, but place it on your selected terrain already deployed, and put a zombified Tyrannosaurus Rex inside it on the ground floor. How? Why? That's not important. "A wizard did it." Add locks and traps.

Then ask yourself - is the fortress worth the problem of dealing with the "watchdog" trapped inside?

Even better, if they deal with the "watchdog" and get greedy, there could be even more issues...

Environment: Anywhere you would like to place the fortress
Suggested level: 7-8

Description: Imagine a journey that leads the players to a lonely hilltop, upon which stands a 30' tall tower. Its walls shine of a burnished metal in the daylight. Each wall appears to be 20' on a side, and each 30' tall wall has two arrow slots stacked vertically...watching out over the waving yellow grass upon the hillock. The structure stands as a quiet sentinel over the landscape. No sounds issue from within, and no torchlight appears from behind the darkened arrow slots.

A single metal door greets you, closed and silent. No guards appear to be posted.

This structure is a fully deployed Daern's Instant Fortress. (Dungeon Master's Guide, p. 160) It has been abandoned (or perhaps not...) by a powerful Wizard, who has deployed some safeguards to protect his property.

The Fortress, as stated, is 30' tall, has four walls each 20' wide, and two stories each 15' tall. Each outer wall of each story has an arrow slot in the middle of it, looking out over the terrain outside. The tower is constructed of adamantite, so its metal surfaces are tough. Each wall has 100 hit points, is immune to non-magical weapon damage, excluding siege weapons, and is resistant to all other damage.

The front door is locked by an Arcane Lock (DC: 16 to dispel by Dispel Magic or Knock. Knock only unlocks for 10 minutes). Even if they circumvent this issue, the lower level is guarded by a Zombie Tyrannosaurus Rex. It is so large as to not to be able to leave through the small door, but it can certainly fill the door with a large biting mouth. The second the door is opened by anyone but the wizard who animated it, it will attack. Since it makes no noise until it attacks, it will gain surprise on the first round unless some method of scrying is used to detect it ahead of time.

The Zombie T-Rex cannot leave, as stated and anyone who enters the lower level to fight it will also open themselves up to the possible Tail Attack.

Inside the tower, the interior is divided into two floors, both with a 15' tall ceiling. A single metal ladder connects the ground floor to the roof, with trap doors in the floor of the second story and the roof.

The second floor trap door has a further Arcane Lock (DC: 16, as above), with a Programmed Illusion ready to go if it's opened without a command word. The illusion will be off a small glowing ball of fire hovering in the very centre of the room, the size of an egg. A quick Arcana check (DC: 13) will determine that it looks similar to an un-triggered Delayed Blast Fireball. If a player takes their action to examine it with a successful Investigation (DC: 16) will determine it's an illusion. The tiny ball will last for five minutes

then fade. Once the illusion plays for five minutes, it will fade for ten minutes, then restart. The “ball” will sputter and threaten to detonate, but never will.

The second level has one odd piece of furnishing. There is a male human corpse laying on the floor. It is not undead, nor is it trapped. It is, however, the remains of a captive that the wizard had, who was left to starve to death when he left. His hands and feet are shackled. He has rags for clothes and has no obvious treasure. Should the players think to cast *Speak With Dead*, they can find out all of the command words used in the Tower, including the word used to shrink or deploy the tower. The captive was clever enough to remember the words, but could not free himself to take advantage of them. The captive’s name will be up to the DM, and could also be a source of plot hooks should the DM decide.

The roof also has a trap door. It, too, is protected by an Arcane Lock (DC: 16, as above). It is further trapped by a Glyph of Warding if opened. The Glyph is inscribed on the bottom of the door, and has Explosive Runes (5d8 Fire. Dexterity saving throw DC:16). The runes activate if the door is opened without the command word being spoken.

Monsters: **“Fido” - Zombie Tyrannosaurus Rex.** - Use the **T-Rex** description (p. 80 of the Monster Manual), but add Damage Immunity: Poison, Condition Immunity: Poisoned, and Undead Fortitude from the Zombie (p. 316 of the Monster Manual).

Treasure: ***Daern’s Instant Fortress***...if they can resolve all the spell traps and the Zombie Dinosaur.

Complications: Well, I guess that depends. There’s a few traps, one monster, and a lot of spells to overcome. The biggest risk is depleting spells or healing, only to run into something else. For Dm’s who want to ramp up the risk, feel free to add extra Glyphs of Warding to other doors, or convert the captive to Undead of some kind. The point of the encounter is not to kill the party. It’s to test their resolve and see how many resources they are willing to throw at a desirable item...that is..if they know the tower is Daern’s Instant Fortress. The Fortress isn’t a gimme. Even if they overcome it.

The Wizard who owns this fortress may well be dead or on another plane of existence. Or...he may come looking for his fortress. How many adamantine fortresses are there anyway?

The Balance

Introduction: A good use of an encounter is to force the players to make a choice based on what they value. Furthermore, different characters will always have different motivations, so those choices can be rooted in the very basis of the character. The right encounter might flush those motivations to the surface. This can often lead to heated discussions, but can also serve to really clear the air on where characters stand with each other. That can only lead to character development.

Additionally, it has been said before that any treasure or magic items in the possession of a villain should be used by that villain. Previous “Out of The Box” Encounters have followed that mantra, and this will follow that trend.

“The Balance” is intended as an extension of both concepts, as well as an opportunity to reward players with a form of treasure that cannot be bought - a rare companion or familiar. To date, if we follow the official rules, only Chain Pact Warlocks can earn such companions. However, when we research the Monster Manual, there are several chances to win such an ally - if only the opportunity arises and the players act correctly.

Inspiration for this encounter came from, of all places, the “Trinket” table in the Player’s Handbook (p.160), #46 - “*Dead Sprite in a Jar.*” I asked myself, “how did it get there?”. I remembered the “*Iron Flask*” entry in the DMG (p. 178) where another creature could be held in a container, and combined the two. Adding a dramatic element, it becomes a balance - between saving a potential ally and acquiring a magic item. Which will the players choose...?

Environment:

Dungeon or any appropriate lair.

Suggested level:

4 (encounter could be scaled upward by changing the contents of the Iron Flask)

Description: Entering a large circular chamber, the players are immediately greeted by two things. The string acrid bite of the odour of strong acid, and the appearance of the strangest scale they have likely seen.

A wide pool, perhaps 20’ in diameter sits in the centre of the room. Balanced upon a hemispherical stone is a stone platform perhaps 10’ in diameter. A central vertical pole rises from the centre of the platform to a height of 8’. The top of the pole has a cross-member of wood as well, giving the structure the appearance of a letter “T” upon the platform. Suspended from the each end of the cross-member is a container on the end of a thin chain.

One container has the appearance of an iron jug, perhaps a foot tall, covered in markings, and suspended by it’s stopper. The round base of the jug rests upon the stone platform. A successful Perception or Investigation (DC:15) will indicate that the jug is resting perfectly straight up because the chained stopper, and stopper will not move so long as the balance of the platform is not disturbed. A successful Arcana (DC: 20) check might allow the players to learn that this container is an *Iron Flask*.

The other container is made of heavy glass, and is also suspended by a thin chain attached to it’s stopper. Within the container is a tiny humanoid creature with insect wings. She is nearly immersed in a strange translucent red fluid, and her neck is craned to keep her face above the surface. With a Perception or Investigation (DC: 15) of her, one could tell that her hands and feet are bound. A Successful Insight (DC:10) will show she’s in distress. A further successful Nature (DC: 12) might determine to the wiser in the group that this creature is a Sprite.

Herein lay the challenge - The platform is perfectly balanced so long as both containers rest upon it. If one is removed in some way, or disturbed in any way, the balance might be thrown off and one or both containers will have their stoppers pulled. The container(s) will then fall into the acid.

If the stopper is pulled on the Sprite, and the platform tilts, the round bottom of the glass jar will allow the jar and it’s contents to fall into the acid. The Sprite will suffer a gruesome death as the bottle fills with acid.

If the stopper is pulled on the *Iron Flask* because of a loss of balance, then the Succubus from within will issue forth in a cloud of smoke and appear on the outside of the pool. Because the stopper was not pulled

by someone in possession the flask, but by the trap, the Succubus will not be under anyone's command but her own. Because of that, she will appear in the form of a terrified slave girl. Since she can appear in the guise of any Small or Medium Humanoid, pick a race that would be the most attractive to your player-characters, be it Elf, Teifling or whatever. She will act afraid of the party at first, but it is only a ruse. When she has drawn the party close enough, she will Charm the character whom either looks the strongest, or whom is giving the orders in the group. It's best if you take the player aside when this effect is used and have them roll their saving throw in private - just to remove the meta-gaming. Anyone charmed will be asked to give the **Iron Flask** to the Succubus so that she cannot be so contained again.

She will, of course, attempt to sway and coerce the character, and the party in general, into heinous acts out of "revenge for her capture". The DM may want to keep track of any actions performed by a charmed individual.

If the Charm fails, she might simply go Ethereal and escape - only to tempt and try to Charm another character again at a later time.

If the party can solve this puzzle and rescue the Sprite, the Sprite will automatically use its "Heart Sight" to read the alignments of the group, and form a bond with a good-aligned rescuer. If the Sprite is rescued, but no good alignments are within the party, she might simply divulge a secret of her original captor (a great way to plug information into the encounter), then turn Invisible and try to escape on her own. Optionally, she may stick around while Invisible to judge the actions of the party. Should they perform good deeds consistently, she may reconsider bonding with a particular character.

With regard to resolution to this puzzle, I cannot offer many solutions. Players always act randomly and can also come up with genius solutions to the most complex problems regardless of any DM input. A Fly spell would certainly help in rescuing the Sprite or acquiring the **Iron Flask**. **Flying brooms** or other magic items of the same vein might also prove useful.

Keep in mind that the edge of the platform is a full 5' away from the edge of the pool of acid. The pool is 5' deep. Contact with the pool will do 4d10 Acid damage. If the Iron Flask falls into the pool, the flask will be ruptured in 1 round. It will be destroyed when it has taken 25 points of damage. If the flask falls into the acid and the stopper comes out in the process (50% chance), the Succubus will still be released and will be hostile from the start. She will still try to Charm a character, but will waste no time in turning a Charmed character on his allies. A Succubus is a very intelligent foe (Int: 15), so she is well within her means to charm fighters or rogues and turn them on the spellcasters.

Monsters: "Ophelia" - Succubus - (p.285 of the Monster Manual)
"Elwynn" - Sprite - (p. 283 of the Monster Manual)

Treasure: **Iron Flask** - p. 178 of the DMG
Possible Sprite companion, see above.

Complications: There are many. This is a complicated puzzle, so the most obvious complication is the amount of time that may go into its solution. DMs should allot a large chunk of time for this. If you have little planned for an evening, and want to make the players think more than roll dice, you have an opportunity here.

Furthermore, the Acid is deadly. Falling into it will likely be lethal to characters with fewer hit points, and will certainly destroy any non-acid-proof non-magical gear.

The death of the Sprite can be quite traumatic, and might cause good-aligned characters to respond accordingly.

The chaos that would ensue from a Charmed adventurer at the hands of a Succubus has a wide array of complications all on its own.

One the rare chance that the players can rescue both the **Iron Flask** (with the Succubus intact) and the Sprite, and Elwynn decides to stay with the party, her "Heart Sight" will see through the fiend's ruse immediately, and the fiend will know it. Ophelia will try to kill the Fey at her first chance, with or without the Charm.

Procession

Introduction: A fact that goes unnoticed in many environments or campaigns is the importance of rivers. Rivers were the first highways of the ancient world, and are still major thoroughfares to this day. The same should be true in a fantasy setting. Rivers should be a constant resource for encounters of all kinds, be it lizardmen, pirates, goblins in rickety steamships, or orcs in war canoes. In this instance, however, I will draw from ancient history and base this encounter around a funeral procession.

To build on that concept, this funeral procession is not just a funeral barge, but an elaborately carved vessel with a large single sail and a single cabin. Imagine, then, that this vessel is not of this world, but the next. The vessel itself is an expression of the Shadowfell. Now you have a river encounter that you could have at night, with all the haunting dread of what happens when the dead meet the living...

The intent behind this encounter is simple - sometimes is best to leave well enough alone. Curiosity killed the cat for a reason. In this case, that cat might end up worse than dead.

Environment: Wilderness/Waterway.
Suggested level: 8 (could be significantly higher - see below)

Description: Either while travelling a waterway at night, or while berthed at the river's edge, the characters will see a vessel moving quietly in their direction. It will be difficult to see at first, even with Darkvision, as the ship is almost completely made of a black wood. As it closes, lanterns hanging from the bow and stern become visible, much like in a dream when one accepts that things "were always there, even when you did not see them before." Their green glow barely illuminates the deck of the ship. Gold inlaid engravings and other scroll-work decorate the upper edge of the hull along its length. A single mast upon which flutters a single almost ephemeral sail stands at the centre of the deck of this nearly 100' long vessel. Long and narrow, its 13' wide hull cuts the water almost silently. A single steersman in ritual hooded regalia mans the till at the stern, while a single similarly-dressed watchman stands silently at the prow. A small and elaborately decorated cabin, only 5' tall, but at least 10' wide and 10' long sits just behind the mast. It is covered in further elaborate and gold-inlaid carvings in some ancient language.

The whole craft moves unerringly upstream, as if moved by unseen oars, yet without disturbing the water at all,

What happens next is up to the players. If they ignore it, it will simply pass by quietly. If this happens, feel free to have its "passengers" appear later in your adventure as villains up to no good.

If they board or attack the vessel, The first to react will be the two figures seen on deck. Both are Wights, and will produce bronze longswords from under their vestments if attacked in melee, or will lift longbows and fire from the deck if attacked at range. If they are in danger of losing, the top of the cabin will open, and "Apophisis" will rise. She will be a grey skinned woman with a striking appearance. Upon her head will be a carved ivory headpiece with gold accents, including a small cobra in the front. Her eyes glow a dim red below this crown. Gold snake bracelets twist around her wrists, and she wears an elaborate gold torc around her neck. Rings adorn her fingers, and a gossamer dress of white drapes her striking figure.

She will declare the attackers as "heretics and usurpers!" and will open with her Ring of Spell Storing. She will cast Lightning Bolt (Dex save, DC: 15) at the first opportunity to opponents attacking at range. If she is pressed and must escape, she will then cast Misty Step and retreat to the far side of the river. She will then attempt to escape through the wilderness beyond, only to return at a later date to seek vengeance upon the party. Once she casts both spells from her ring, the ring will contain no further spells, and will require recharging.

The two Wights, "Apep" and "Khagesh", will defend their liege to the best of their ability. They may even grapple with living creatures and then dive into the water, knowing that their undead nature will spare them from having to breathe under water.

Monsters: “Apophisis” - Vampire Spawn - (p.298 of the Monster Manual). Increase her Intelligence to 15, Wisdom to 14, and Charisma to 16.
“Apep” and “Khagesh” - Wights - (p. 300 of the Monster Manual)

Treasure: *Ring of Spell Storing* - p. 192 of the DMG. Contains *Lightning Bolt* and *Misty Step* at the beginning of the encounter. Two gold snake bracelets (100 gp each), gold torc (1000 gp), gold and ivory crown (5000gp), and three gold rings (50 gp each)
The funeral barge, though carved of mysterious wood and possessing gold inlays, will fade back into the Shadowfell five minutes after the Wights and Vampire Spawn are defeated. If the Wights are defeated and the Vampire Spawn retreats, then the boat will remain for 10 minutes, but fade after that. Any parts of the boat that are scavenged from it will also fade.

Complications: Fighting undead carries it's many complications. Fighting any creature on the water has additional ones as well. There is the risk of hit point loss from the Wights, which will make any future encounters that much more dangerous if only for a day. Similar hit point loss can occur at the hands of Apophisis, should she gain a sucessful grapple with the player characters. Not only will subsequent bites by the Vampire Spawn heal her for the damage done, but any character reduced to 0hp in this manner will die.

She will be fearful of the running water, and so will not risk falling in - instead choosing to Misty Step to an escape if that begins to occur.

Characters slain by the Wights will arise as Zombies under their control the next day, unless their body is destroyed or is restored to life. These Zombies will then seek out Apophisis and the Wights if any of them have survived, or will maraud in her name if she and the Wights have not. You may even wish to precede this encounter with a Zombie horde chanting “Apophisis....Apophisis...” (Think ‘The Mummy Returns’)

Wights and this particular Vampire Spawn are intelligent foes. They should fight as such. The Wights do not fear the water, but the Vampire Spawn does. The Wights have no reason to retreat unless commanded to do so by Apophisis. Apep and Khagesh will do so like loyal soldiers when so commanded.

Where the procession is going and where they have come from is completely up to the DM. You may wish to include the Vampire Spawn as an ongoing villain, or use her here in this one-shot.

Ribbet, Ribbet, WHOOSH

Introduction: The Monster Manual is loaded with a lot of gems that seem to go unnoticed. The Templates are but one of them. Templates are a great way to take what the players are familiar with and shaking them up. What this does is two-fold. First, it generates an encounter that the players are not ready for. That is it's own reward, as it freshens up what would be a very ordinary, and possibly predictable, encounter. Secondly, it takes that omni-present "meta-game" aspect and turns it on it's head. Ask a DM what value they would place on making that one experienced meta-gaming rules lawyer at their table give the "WTF?" expression, and I'll bet that they'd rate it pretty high.

The following encounter is intended to do both. It applies the "Half-Dragon" template to something that we would normally not consider. As per the "Half-Dragon" template, we can apply it to a beast, humanoid or giant. That's a lot of choice. This is but one example of such an application, and might open up a series of encounters where one rather amorous dragon has seeded a campaign with it's brethren, creating a whole list of choice encounters. One would have to finally convince the dragon of the concept of "planned parenthood" to end this series of events - a discussion I'll leave to your players.

In this instance, we enter the swamps to deal with a squad of mounted Bullywug cavalry mounted on Giant Toads, lead by a Half-Black Dragon Bullywug. I present "Ribbet, Ribbet, WHOOSH".

Environment: Wilderness/Swamp
Suggested level: 4-5 (although one could scale it by adding more "cavalry")

The characters, as they traverse a lonely swamp, will be surrounded by the sounds of all the wildlife in the area. Insects, birds, frogs and the like, all chiming in on the cacophony of sound. All of a sudden, the birds and insects will go silent. Only the frogs will remain. Then, after a minute, the frogs, too, will go silent. The tall grass around the characters will part suddenly as the silhouettes of large amphibians will leap over them, raining down javelins into the crowded travellers - only to disappear into the thrushes again.

These will be Bullywugs mounted on Giant Toads. They will wait silently for their chance, and will then leap over the party into the swamp beyond, throwing javelins from the backs of their mounts. Only those that cannot be surprised can react (Alert Feat, 7th level Barbarians with Feral Instinct, etc.). The first wave will be two Bullywug/Giant toad cavalry. If they have Surprise (see above), they will launch a Javelin each at Advantage. Determine the target(s) randomly.

If the players turn to face the direction where the Bullywugs went, or change their facing from the front at all, the second wave will have Advantage on their initiative roll. They will burst from the front through the reeds, and will launch a brutal offensive. Two more mounted Bullywugs will appear. One bullywug will appear much larger and will be armored in studded leather. He's powerfully built, especially for a Bullywug, and will make his presence known this round - with a breath weapon. "Blacktongue" will spit a 15' long, 5' wide gout of Acid (Dex save, DC: 11, 5d8 Acid damage) into the party, and then charge among them. The Bullywug beside him will hurl a Javelin and then follow suit. Both of their mounts will attempt to Bite a foe. Each bite (as per Monster Manual p. 329) will risk a Grapple on a successful Bite (escape Dc13). If that target is Grappled, they risk being Swallowed (upon a successful Bite attack upon a Grappled target) the next turn. Once these two are engaged, the other two Bullywug cavalry will leap into battle and join in with spears and Giant Toad attacks.

Should the party turn the tables on the Bullywugs, they will retreat if either their leader "Blacktongue" falls or if their numbers drop below half of the party. They will attempt to leap away on their Giant Toad mounts, or if the mounts are dead, on their own. The Giant Toads, if riderless, will certainly press the attack unless brought to below 50% of their hp. They are, after all, wild beasts without the influence of the Bullywugs. Feel free to have them return with reinforcements later, especially if Blacktongue is one of the escaped.

Monsters: **Bullywugs (4)** - As per Monster Manual, p.35. Add three Javelins as missile weapons in addition to their spears.

Giant Toad (5) - One for each Bullywug. As per Monster Manual p. 329.

Blacktongue - Use “**Bandit Captain**” to start (p.344 of the Monster Manual)

- add **Bullywug racial abilities** (as above, p, 35 of the MM)

- add **Half-Dragon template** (p. 180 of MM), with Black as the base. The Breath Weapon will be as per **Black Dragon Wyrmling** (p. 88 of MM), and he will gain Blindsight (10’), Darkvision (60’), Acid Resistance, Draconic language.

- add +1 further AC due to +1 Studded Leather Armour.

Treasure: **+1 Studded Leather Armour** (on Blacktongue), as well as assorted coins. 100 sp, 50gp, 2 pearls (50 gp each), and a carved bone statue of a grinning frog god with tiny ruby eyes (150gp).

Complications: The biggest complication from this is being Swallowed by a Giant Toad. That becomes a real risk, as any characters that are flanked by more than one unit will be attacked with Advantage. Those that are swallowed will take ongoing Acid damage (3d10), and will be Blinded and Restrained for the duration. Attacking from the inside is possible, but any attacks will be at Disadvantage, as per the Restrained condition.

Now, you’re probably asking how Bullywugs and Giant Toads could be a level 4-5 encounter. That’s because they are a coordinated unit being lead by a Half-Dragon. They will have Advantage during surprise, and will have further Advantage opportunities given successful Grapples by the Giant Toads, or by attacking an opponent on foot while mounted in combat. This makes even normally weak foes like Bullywugs a threat to opponents. Add a breath weapon and a leader who is more than a common Bullywug (even beyond being a Half-Dragon), and you have a conflict that may surprise the average experienced gamer.

Keep this in mind when you scale the encounter upward. A massive Area of Effect spell like a Fireball could potentially end this encounter prematurely, but given everyone will be intermingled, it will pose as much danger to the characters as it does to the Bullywugs.

Jailbreak

Introduction: While researching something else entirely in the Dungeon Master's Guide, I glanced at the passage on the "Mirror of Life Trapping" purely by mistake (pages 181, 182, DMG). Because of the fluid nature of this mirror's possible past, it may contain up to twelve random creatures already. How they got there and why they ended up in the vicinity of the Mirror could be any number of reasons.

That means this encounter, if you set it up right, could be infinitely adjustable to your group's level and abilities. It could be a campaign starter. It could be a campaign ender - even if only by accident. Since the contents set the challenge level, take care in making sure you stock the mirror wisely.

For the purposes of this encounter, only one of the twelve cells is free, so as to not trap the entire party, and to deliver enough random oddities to truly challenge your group. This encounter should only trap one character, leaving the rest to solve the problem. It may well set up one of those moments where the entire party say "What have we done?"

Environment: Dungeon
Suggested level: 4-5 (although it's infinitely scalable)

Description: The characters will enter a room or cavern roughly 50'x50', with a ceiling 30' high. The room is covered in patches of bioluminescent fungi, giving the entire room an ambient glow.

The most unusual feature in this room appears to be a very thin rectangular object floating flat and horizontal over the floor at a height of 15'. It has an elaborately carved 1" thick wooden frame around its outer rim. It shows no obvious signs of suspension and hovers silently in the air. It is roughly 4'x2'.

A steel ball is suspended 5' above this object by a rope. That rope continues straight up to the ceiling, where a pulley redirects the remainder on an angle downward to a metal ring attached to the far wall. The rope is attached by a thick knot to this ring.

No occupants are in the room that the party can see, and no other exits are visible. The only way in and out appears to be the entrance the characters came through when they entered this chamber. Aside from this odd display, only the dank smell of the glowing fungi greets them.

The object is a "**Mirror of Life Trapping**", and it's suspended by ancient magic. The reflective mirror surface faces downward directly at the floor below. Should anyone under it look up at it, the magic of the mirror will kick in. The first person to look up will require a Charisma saving throw (DC:15). Optionally, if more than one character looks up, have them all roll a saving throw, then determine who suffers the effect among the lost saves randomly. Should someone fail, they will, along with everything they are wearing and carrying, will be sucked into one of the fog-like cells of the mirror and be trapped there.

The command words are written on the back of the mirror if anyone can make their way above it without breaking the mirror. The words will have to be read aloud. Feel free to make up your own command words or even a riddle. This itself might be a great hook for a later adventure. Additionally, the mirror can be attacked with ranged weapons. It has an AC of 11 and 10 hp. It is vulnerable to Bludgeoning Weapons. Breaking the mirror will release all the creatures trapped inside. Should anyone do this while standing directly under the mirror, they will then be subject to having all of the creatures fall on top of them. If the mirror breaks in this manner, have whomever is standing directly below make a Dexterity saving throw (DC:15) or take 6d10 Bludgeoning damage when the monsters fall on them. The falling creatures will also suffer 2d6 Bludgeoning damage from the fall.

Furthermore, the players might elect to untie the rope holding the ball, or cut the rope to do the same. The ball will fall and shatter the mirror, also releasing all the creatures trapped within. This simple mechanism should be pretty self evident, but if your players are struggling with it, allow them a simple DC:10 Intelligence test.

If the mirror is broke, the following creatures will fall from it to the floor below:

1. The player character
2. A grown Owlbear - who was chasing Goblins.
3. A Rust Monster - who ate a Gnoll Pack Lord's chainmail
4. Six Goblins - who were running from an Owlbear
5. Two Gnolls - following their lord after a Rust Monster
6. Gnoll Pack Lord - who chased a Rust Monster that ate his chainmail

If the Goblins survive the fall, they'll be panicked and running from an Owlbear.

The Owlbear will be pursuing the Goblins. If none survive the fall, determine his next target randomly from all the targets present in the room.

The Rust Monster will immediately seek out the largest source of metal in the room. This will likely be a player character.

The Gnoll pack will be in hot pursuit of the Rust Monster. If the Rust Monster dies, the Gnolls will do what they do and attack something else. Determine this target randomly, as Gnolls live for carnage, not logic.

If anyone attacks a monster that has it's sights set on another that fell from the mirror, that monster will then turn it's attention to whomever attacked it.

Monsters: **Goblins (6)** - As per Monster Manual, p. 166.

Gnolls (2) - As per Monster Manual, p. 163.

Gnoll Pack Lord - As per Monster Manual, p. 163, but reduce the AC to 14 due to the loss of his chainmail.

Owl Bear (1) - As per Monster Manual, page 249

Rust Monster (1) - As per Monster Manual, p. 262.

Treasure: Possible "**Mirror of Life Trapping**" if the players do not break it and cast Dispel Magic on the spell that's holding it in place. This will require an Intelligence test, DC: 19 to break if the spell is cast.

Complications: Getting permanently stuck in the mirror is the single greatest complication here, followed closely by being crushed by falling monsters. Depending on who attacks what and when, this could go well or it could go poorly. There may be characters running around with rusted or destroyed armour and weapons. There will certainly be a lot of chaos, so this encounter requires that the DM stay focussed and organized.

In the end, I hope that you will have an encounter that is both memorable and possibly hilarious....or you'll have naked and dead characters...which might still be memorable and hilarious. Who said adventuring was easy?

You'll find that this encounter is easily scaled. The mirror has no size limit on what it can contain. It only requires that the creatures look at the mirror and fail a Charisma saving throw. So long as you do not stock it with blind creatures, anything else is legal. Anything from a tiny Stirge to a grown Dragon can be stuffed in the mirror. Heck, the Tarrasque can fit in the mirror...if you could get that close, make it look, and survive for four rounds for it's legendary resistance to wear off. (Good luck)

As said in the introduction, this encounter could serve as a campaign starter. The release of vile villains, a dragon, a demon, or any number of horrors upon the world could be the start of an epic adventure to capture or kill these escapees. Conversely, a lost queen or heir to the throne might be trapped in this mirror, along with the monsters also trapped within as a safeguard to make sure they never see a true escape.

How you use and scale this encounter is up to you. Have fun, and make it something the players will talk about for a long time.

Council of Three

Introduction: This is yet another dungeon-based encounter. It uses spells instead of monsters for it's basis, and provides a minor puzzle. Depending on how this goes, the players could receive a boon, a trap, or even a future adventure. To be fair, since everything in this encounter is completely based upon player choice, they are truly in control of how good or bad this goes. This will be player agency in action.

An encounter like this might give a DM who might be running a lot of combat-based encounters a chance to switch things up a bit. Mind you, if they set off the trap in this encounter, they might get the sort of combat they might be looking for.

Environment: Dungeon
Suggested level: Any

Description: As the characters enter this chamber, they will be struck by it's ancient and ritualistic feel. Ancient carved reliefs decorate all of the walls, and depict several scenes. (I see them in an ancient Mayan or Aztec style, but feel free to use whatever fits your campaign). When you enter this chamber, you enter a long and rectangular room. Your entrance is in the centre of a 20' wall, and the room extends out from this entrance to a distance of 40'. A raised stepped platform occupies the furthest 10' of the room. Upon this platform is a stone plinth with what looks like three heads upon it.

Should the players choose to examine the carved reliefs on the walls, allow them a relatively easy Investigation (DC: 10) to discover the following:

The left wall depicts scenes of ancient figures in tribal garments. They are kneeling with hands raised upward. Rays of light or energy beam down from above upon them.

The right wall shows figures in tribal garb cowering before an oversized figure wearing an elaborate feather head dress and wielding a massive saw-toothed blade. A halo of blades hovers above the head of the oversized figure.

The far wall behind the plinth shows a depiction where tribal figures worship some sort of small sphere.

If the players look behind the plinth, they will find a small cavity. In this little storage area, there will be three jars. Each clay jar is 8" tall and are stoppered with clay plugs sealed with wax. If they open the jars they will find the following:

One jar contains a small 1" diameter sphere carved from wood and painted white. It has a single black dot painted on it as well. The sphere is packed in sand which fills the rest of the jar.

One jar contains a small 1" diameter sphere carved from grey stone. It has a single red dot painted on it as well. The sphere is packed in sand which fills the rest of the jar.

One jar contains a petrified chunk of flesh. A character may make a Medicine check (DC: 12) to determine that this is actually a tongue. If the total of the roll equals 20 or more, then the character will also know it's Human. The tongue is packed in sand which fills the rest of the jar.

The three heads on the plinth are as follows:

The left head is a severed mummified head. It has empty eye sockets and it's mouth is wide open. (Medicine DC: 12 - it's a human head). A further successful Medicine (DC: 12) check will determine that the head has no tongue.

The center head is elaborately carved from stone and resembles the stylized carvings on each of the walls. It's whole construction seems very square and has pronounced features. It has 1" diameter hemispherical indents where the eyes would be, an open mouth carved into it, and a 1" wide, 3" long groove carved onto the top inside of the lower jaw.

The right head is carved of wood and possesses a smoother and more rounded quality. Its features are

far more smooth and seem as if they were carved by a different artisan than the stone head. The features are almost cherub-like. It, too, has 1" diameter notches where the eyes would be, and a mouth that has been carved open like it's laughing. A similar 1" wide, 3" long groove exists inside the mouth on the top surface of the inside bottom jaw.

Here's the catch. A head will activate if both spheres are placed in the eye sockets of a single head, and the tongue is also placed into either the carved slot of a carved head or the open mouth of the mummified head. A single head must have all three items to function. It is not important if the eyes are placed in the left or right eyes. So long as they go into the same head at the same time, you're good to go.

If a single head receives all three pieces, they will lock into place and the head will glow with a greenish light for a moment, then float upward 5' into the air. The following effects depend on which head receives the "eyes and tongue".

Mummified Head - The head will rise and say "Wisdom shown is wisdom given." It will then cast the *Augury* spell (page 215,216, Player's Handbook). This will allow the players to ask a question about the dungeon in which they are exploring. Once the head answers the question, the eyes and tongue will disappear and the head will slowly descend to its previous resting place. The "eyes and tongue" will not reappear for another year, and will reappear where the jars were behind the plinth.

Stone Head - The head will rise and say "From stone. To stone." A small panel will open in the back wall where the sphere being worshipped was carved. It will reveal a small cavity where a grey and specked stone-like egg is being hidden. A successful Nature (DC: 17) check will reveal this to be a Basilisk egg. It is unknown how long it has been here. The egg has been in stasis for a number of years. Now that it has been removed from its magical stasis, a Basilisk (as per page 24, Monster Manual) will now begin to hunt the party. It is up to the DM when and where the Basilisk will attack. It will be seeking the egg, and will attempt to kill or petrify any who possess it. Note that the egg will not petrify. If this head is activated, the eyes and tongue will disappear forever.

Wooden Head - If the "eyes and tongue" find their way into this head, the head will rise up and begin to babble incoherently. It will cast "Crown of Madness" (Wisdom save, DC: 15). Determine the target randomly. The spell will last for its full duration unless the player makes a successful save or the spell has been ended with Dispel Magic (p. 234 PHB), Dispel Evil and Good (p. 233, 234 PHB), Protection From Evil and Good (p. 270 PHB), or any other effect that can end a Charm-like effect. Once the spell is cast and the save is failed, you'll want to roll initiative and conduct combat as per normal.

Monsters: Possible **Basilisk** (p. 24, Monster Manual)

Treasure: Possible free *Augury* spell, possible Basilisk Egg (DM to determine value)

Complications: There are a few possibilities here. A Crown of Madness cast on the right player character might have deadly consequences. The normal duration is 1 minute (10 rounds). Feel free to reduce that duration if you feel it's necessary.

Possibly being hunted by a Basilisk will have its own issues. Drop hints to the players about tales of people being turned to stone wherever they have been. It's up to you when and where the beast strikes. Make it memorable.

Dogs of War

Introduction: This game is filled with assumptions. Perhaps that's because our life is filled with the same. We assume when we see how a person is dressed that they have a level of intelligence or wealth. We assume that someone may have a specific level of education if they have glasses.

These same assumptions carry over into D&D. One thing I like to do is shatter assumptions. This encounter is all about that. Below you'll see a race filled with assumptions involved with a monster that bears its own. When we turn these assumptions upside down, we can truly surprise a jaded group of players.

Environment: Wilderness/Forest
Suggested level: 4+ (add more Wolves if you want to raise the level)

Description: Whether travelling at night or while camping in the forest, the party will either hear signs of distress or arrive at an abandoned horse-drawn carriage. The horse will be dead. It appears slaughtered as if torn apart by a wild animal.

Surveying the outside of the carriage will reveal that both rear wheels have been damaged to the point where they are shattered at the bottom. A simple survey of the surrounding area (Intelligence: Investigation check, DC: 10) will reveal that this carriage has dragged the damaged wheels for quite some time.

The carriage itself has a door on either side of it and a coachman bench on the front. No coachman is posted at the front of the carriage, and both side doors are ajar only a crack. No light comes from within. If the players check, the doors open easily.

The sight inside is horrific. Two bodies, roughly human-sized, lay within. They have been brutally slain. The interior is an abattoir of severed limbs, blood, and torn upholstery and clothing. There is nothing of value within.

At this point the characters will hear (Passive perception DC: 10) a low voice calling out "Help...me..." from the dark forest ahead. Should the characters investigate, they will approach a large tree, and peeking out from behind will be a young Halfling adult male in torn clothing (Perception or Investigation, DC: 12 - it's coachman's garb) covered in scratches, blood and mud. He will appear frightened and suspicious of strangers. He will engage the characters in conversation, but will not readily come out of hiding. If questioned, he will indeed confirm that he is the coachman, and that his name is Bingley. He will claim Wolves attacked the carriage and that he barely escaped with his life. Feel free to require Persuasion rolls (say, DC: 15) to divulge the information, or have it come out through roleplaying to speed things up.

When they get him to divulge his name, the howls of Wolves, not far away, will echo through the woods. When that happens, have Bingley whimper audibly "Oh...no..." Bingley will then claim that he is hurt and needs help escaping. Should the characters volunteer an Insight check, a successful DC: 15 check will reveal that some form of deception is at hand. If they do not ask for an Insight check, do not volunteer one. Allow the event to unfold naturally so as to surprise the players. If the players discover/realize that he is lying, or if he can lure them in close, he'll transform into a Werewolf and howl to call in his wolf pack allies. Those four Wolf pack mates will arrive at the beginning of the next round. They will attack in two flanks with two attacking from the right flank and two attacking from the left. Wolves are pack-oriented team players. They will work as a team.

Monsters: "Bingley" - Werewolf - As per page 211 of the Monster Manual except Small in size.
Wolf (4) - As per page 341 of the Monster Manual

Treasure: None.

Complications: The biggest possible complication is the possibility of being afflicted with Lycanthropy. The rules for this are detailed on page 207 of the Monster Manual. To simplify that procedure, anyone bit by the Werewolf must pass a DC:12 Constitution saving throw or become infected with the curse. If the character embraces the curse instead of fighting it, the character's alignment becomes that of the Lycanthrope. It is up to the individual DM how gradual or instantaneous this change is, or if the full change into the lycanthrope places the character under the DM 's control. A character that wishes to fight the curse should be given roleplaying or other avenues to seek a cure. The point of a game like this is to provide great stories, and a cursed hero seeking a cure is most definitely a great story. Feel free to allow that to unfold.

Fire for Effect

Introduction: One trope in D&D that needs work is the concept of the encounter as a “one thing shows up and does one other thing.” There should be no reason why, unless otherwise specified, that multiple monsters of similar alignments and motivations would not work together. Similarly, if these creatures work together more than once, they should have some sense of how each other works as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Grouping like-minded individuals might turn what would be a typical encounter into something a little less predictable.

The following is one such encounter where two monsters, tactically minded and ruthless in combat, work together to create a small fighting force that would be dangerous to deal with, especially in a confined setting where collateral damage is something to consider.

As an example of this, I am presenting two races that fit the bill - Fire Giants and Hobgoblins. Both love war, are tactically sound, and would likely work in concert to achieve a goal. Both share the Lawful Evil alignment, so you can expect them to behave in similar fashions and seek similar solutions to the same problems.

In the correct environment to add complications, and you have a problem that needs to be solved - quickly! The introduction of this encounter might well be used as a doorway to start an adventure, so this could be the start of something larger.

Environment: Urban/Small Town
Suggested level: 10

Description: Whether while stopped for the night in a small town or village, while normal life carries on around you...suddenly there's a rumble...then a slight tremor. A 20' diameter sinkhole opens up in a crowded small street or alleyway, with the wooden structures to either side of it creaking and losing at least one outer wall to it. In the dust and the screams, what surprises you are the tops of ladders quickly appearing, with red-skinned Hobgoblins issuing forth. They will immediately begin attacking any nearby villagers.

As bad as this is, what really worries you is the abrupt appearance of a massive black-metal-gauntleted hand, which grips the edge of the hole and pulls up an enormous 16' tall figure. It's black plate armor glints off the light of torches and lamps, and a long red beard appears from the bottom of a frightful black plate helmet. Upon the back of this figure seems a small structure not unlike a hunter's blind or a small guard post. It's framework is not easily seen, and it's covered in either fired mud or ceramic plates. One wide horizontal slot below a capped roof spits arrows tipped with burning rags.

All around is chaos. Fires begin in several locations as flaming arrows stick into wooden structures. Guardsmen quick enough to act in response to the Giant before you can are cut down like kindling by its massive greatsword. Hobgoblin troopers quickly take advantage of the carnage and advance as a shield wall to protect the legs of the juggernaut.

The titanic figure roars in challenge, with only screams of the civilians in response. The Hobgoblins cheer and advance even more.

Who will save the town?

What you have is little guesswork on who or what the problem is and a few problems to deal with as a group. The Fire Giant will act as a siege machine, destroying structures and launching boulders into guardsmen. Anyone who gets close enough to him to be a threat will be dealt with by either his Hobgoblin troopers on the ground or the two Hobgoblin Captains in the archer hut on his back.

The Hobgoblin Captains in the hut protect the Giant's back, and have Spears and Longbows. They have a stock of arrows in the structure that have rags on the ends soaked in pitch. They have a small covered lantern they use to light the arrows and start fires. The fires they start present no problem for the Giant, so

it can walk confidently through any created fires, using its great strength, heavy armor, and immunity to fire to great effect. Holes created by this colossus will be taken advantage of by the Hobgoblin troopers to either attack guardsmen or effect carnage on the civilian populace. The Captains on the Giants back are protected from outside flames by the structure on the Giant's back, and have 75% cover from other outside attacks. They also have a store of 10 Alchemist Fire grenades that they will throw at the feet of the Giant if attackers try to get below their arc of fire.

Note that these Hobgoblin Captains can assist their allies, including the Giant, with their Leadership ability. There are two Captains, so you have two shots at this ability.

If the players choose to attack the structure itself, it has an AC of 15, is Resistant to Piercing weapons, and is Vulnerable to Bludgeoning weapons. It has 100hp. If its destroyed, the Captains, if still alive, will fall to the ground (2d6 Bludgeoning damage), and all remaining Alchemist's Fire will ignite.

The Hobgoblin troopers below will fight as a unit. Think "Roman Shield Wall". They'll protect each other and flank opponents if possible. Hobgoblins believe in martial supremacy, and will not take foolish chances. They will seek to protect their juggernaut as best they can, trying to keep annoying guardsmen or constabulary from getting too close. They will avoid engaging foes that the Giant is swinging his massive blade at, as they are well aware of what happens when things go wrong. Given that there are eight of them, four will fight with Longsword and Shield, and the four behind them will attack with Partisans (use Glaive, but change the damage type to Piercing) over the shoulders of their allies. This means any one Medium foe might face up to four opponents (two swordsmen, two polearmsmen) at once. These troopers are not immune or protected from fire in any way, so if the Giant and Captains wander into a conflagration, they need to hustle around the fire to get to a place where they can assist again. Note that all monsters working in tandem with each other might well give each other Advantage on attack roles against common foes

The entire forces objective is to suppress this entire community, thinking all they would face is simple guards. They might seek to capture any powerful or political figures for ransom and control of the area. The Giant may not be a long term thinker, but the Hobgoblin Captains are.

Monsters: "Kurskaar" - Fire Giant - As per Monster Manual, page 154.

"Mergol" and "Hershekk" - Hobgoblin Captains(2), page 186 of the Monster Manual However, alter their stats to account for the following: 75% cover in Archer Hut. +4 to AC (total 21) and Dexterity saving throws. Replace weapons with Spear, Longbow, and alter Longbow damage as follows: 1d8+2 Piercing, +1d4 Fire, Ignites. Alchemist Fire (1d4 Fire, Improvised Ignites, +1d4 each round a target does not use its Action to douse the flames, Dexterity DC:10.

Hobgoblins (8) - As per Monster Manual, page 186. Except 4 have Partisans (as per Glaive, page 149 of Player's Handbook, but change damage type to Piercing) and no Shield. Therefore four swordsmen have the standard AC of 18, and four polearmsmen have an AC of 16.

Treasure: A unit of this size must have SOMETHING in their pockets. The Hobgoblins have a total of 105 EP and 70GP. The Giant has a Heward's Handy Haversack worn on his belt like a pouch, and contains a Spell Scroll (Blight) crunched up into a ball out of frustration, 1000 GP, a gold bracelet (250gp), an elf-sized lady's silk robe with golf embroidery (250gp), and a coronet forged of bronze in the Dwarven style (250gp). He also has a large sack which holds two rolls on the "Items in a Giant's Bag" table... (or if you can't find it, a rocking chair (medium sized), a large bag of salt, and a wagon wheel)

Complications: Okay, aside from dealing with an organized mob of monsters, the biggest complication is the threat of fire. The Hobgoblin Captains will be setting blazes about as often as they can. Consider all wooden structures to Ignite if they are shot with flaming arrows or hit with Alchemist's fire. The damage for entering these blazes should be determined by the length of time they have been burning. A recent blaze might be easily extinguished with a DC:10 Dexterity check and the right method (perhaps water). For

each turn the blaze continues, add 1d6 to the damage on a failed check and raise the DC by 2. When the DC reached 20, nothing short of magical means like a Wall of Water or a Water Elemental will stop the conflagration. Use your judgment when dealing with this.

The sinkhole from which the enemies entered is your doorway to another adventure. How did the Hobgoblin sappers get here? How did they get a Giant underground? Where did they all come from? Why did they attack here? All of these (and more) are questions you can present to the players or choose to expand on yourself. This may be a part of a larger Giant/Hobgoblin offensive, or it might be a singular raid by a small but organized group. That's your choice. Run with it!

The Dinner Party

Introduction: The Dungeon Master's Guide is full of tables, information, and colourful references. However, an encounter idea can come from a simple reference to an item, property, or game mechanic. In this case, I stumbled upon the Sample Poisons listing while looking up Short Term Madness. (Hey, I know what you're thinking...don't judge) What I saw was Truth Serum. (p. 358 DMG)

Imagine your player characters sitting down around a table in an inn, tavern, restaurant, etc., and unknowingly imbibing food tainted with Truth Serum (ingested poison). Do they have conflicting ideals or flaws? Do they have secrets? Do they have secret desires? If you thought last Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner was embarrassing, strap on your big boy pants, because this could get messy.

Environment: Urban/Small Town/Tavern (or similar setting as you so choose)
Suggested level: Any

Description: Before you begin this encounter, set-up is key. Have each of your players roll 1d20, a pair of d20 together and a Percentile (d100). If possible, have them roll these dice at least 1 or 2 sessions early so they aren't focussed so much upon it when you want to run this encounter. Record those numbers on a list beside each character's name. Keep this handy in case the players complain that they were not given saving throws. Keep track of those characters that might have Advantage on such saves, and contact them at a later time for "one more d20 roll, just to check something", perhaps by email. If you want to make it really random, use the "random draw rule" listed below instead of the d100 Percentile roll. Being a Dungeon Master sometimes means being great at poker. Never let them see you bluff.

When they sit down to a formal meal, in any number of settings, the meal will be laced with the Truth Serum poison (page 258 of the Dungeon Master's Guide), and if they fail their save (only a DC:10 Constitution) after eating/drinking whatever's laced (make it everything so there's no guess work), they cannot knowingly tell a lie, as per the Zone of Truth Spell. Inform each character of this with a pre-written note. When you hand out the notes, even though they all say exactly the same thing, sort through the notes behind your screen like you're looking for something specific, and then be certain when you hand them out. Building the illusion that there's a specific thing for a specific person is important to creating the right illusion.

Now, insert the right NPC. Perhaps it's a barmaid, perhaps it's an inappropriate drunk. Perhaps it's an agent of the Thieve's Guild or a master spy serving the evil burgomeister. The key is to have that NPC ask leading or really private questions. Like who really likes who, or "who do you work for" or "You look strong. Which of you has magic items?"

If they say openly that they stop eating when they're handed the note, feel free to end the effect there. But if they continue to eat, even if they passed the secret saving throw, bump up the DC on the save by 5. If their saving throw still makes it, then they're fine. If not, either use their roll on the d100 Percentile to determine a Short Term Madness (page 259 of the Dungeon Master's Guide), or use the "Random Draw Rule" below.

The "Random Draw Rule" will take a lot more set-up, but creates player agency. Take the time to write each of the "Short Term Madness" effects on individual pieces of paper. Fold them up tightly and put them into a bowl, hat, or similar container. Should a player fail it's second check as per above, have them draw once from the container and RP appropriately. Have them hand you the paper after they understand it and place that paper by their name you recorded earlier.

What may ensue is an evening of hilarity. What may ensue is the blame and murder of the serving girl. What may ensue is nothing. When it comes to player characters, one never knows.

Monsters: Only the players, unless you have other plans.

Treasure: Embarrassment. Humour. Laughter. It's all about the RP.

Complications: That's entirely up to your players. Depending on how much they like to RP, how willing they are to give themselves over to this encounter, there could be no end to it's options. You might have player's who divulge Flaws, secret loves, hidden plans, or divulge that they've been stealing from each other. It's a Zone of Truth, but through poison. If they fail that save, they might blab anything. If they fail the second save, then Short-Term Madness could spell any number of random roleplaying opportunities.

I will add this: if your players are not much for roleplaying, I'd use another encounter. You and your players should be having fun together. But, if you and your players are willing to give some RP a shot, and you don't want to run a combat encounter, this might be for you. All I ask is that everyone have the right frame of mind and have fun with it.

Phoba's Bet

Introduction: The following encounter takes on two challenges. First, it addresses an issue that has been brought up around multiple tables where a DM seeks to have some sort of bounty hunter or assassin. Perhaps this is to address some offense the player characters have created against a king, noble, wizard to guildmaster. Perhaps it's to address some action that the player characters have done in a city where vital laws were broken.

Second, it looks at the unique issue of adding player character class levels to a monster.. The DMG touches on this, but really leaves it up to the individual DM to make the final call on how the CR of the monster is affected. This starts on p. 273 of the DMG, and stretches all the way to 283 before it addresses "Monsters with classes"...and yet, has you refer back to those 10 pages. In the end, they call it a case by case.

I think the secret here is asking yourself "What do I want this monster to do?", and then build for that purpose. To that end, the purpose is to be able to capture player characters in a dramatic fashion, and return them to the "employer" (be it king, criminal boss, or angry mob) alive...or at least relatively.

Environment: Anywhere. That's the point. But the example below will be in the wilderness.

Suggested level: 6-8

Description: To properly set this encounter up, one needs to put the players in the right frame of mind. Players can become very complacent when they do not have random encounters at night for a few nights. Go out of your way to make things very peaceful and calm if you want to. Make fake encounter rolls that don't count and gloss over them as if you're unconcerned. This will give you a great feel for who they put on watch and when. Consider this time that the bounty hunter is spending observing the party at a distance. She might even be "handling" those who might be thinking of attacking her valuable bounty. One can't collect on a fee if one's targets have been killed by Ogres. ;)

Next, it's good to think of whom you have selected for the role of Bounty Hunter. In this case, I present to you the one and only Phoba. Phoba was an experienced Rogue, who tricked, seduced, lied, and manipulated her way across the continent. However, she stole from the wrong temple and was transformed into a Medusa. Making the most of her curse, she takes bounty after bounty in the hopes of earning enough to find a cure for her condition - and she doesn't care whom goes down to cure that effect. Her services come with a high price. Not everyone can hire their own Medusa. She will be cold and ruthless. She will be patient and methodical. She will wait for the right time to pick off her prey. She cannot end her curse if she dies either. And she will always...always...keep to her contract. Keep all of this in mind should you choose to employ Phoba. I've also given Phoba one unique ability. She can also return one of her victims to life with a kiss. This kiss is given rarely, and costs extra. Phoba is intended as an ongoing villain. That requires something extra.

The players will be holding up for the night. They will have a campfire burning, they'll be swapping stories, but they will likely have a watch posted. The sound of crickets or peeper frogs will fill the air, along with the crisp, fresh air that only the night can bring. Aside from the tension that may come from sleeping in the wilderness, all seems calm.

Phoba, under the cover of her Ring of Invisibility, will approach your chosen member of the party when they are on watch. She's not the kind to rashly attack when everyone's ready. When she's close enough and her target is unaware, she'll get close enough to see him face to face. Only when she's good and ready will she reveal herself so the person can see her. Hopefully, the target will be petrified. If not, she'll use her Cunning Action to Use Object and activate her Ring again and escape. If the target is Petrified, (DC: 14 Constitution save to prevent), she will then open up her Portable Hole below the target, let it drop in, and escape. Everything will be done via her Stealth (Expertise: +8), so be sure to account for that should Passive Perception be required to know what she's up to.

If she can nab her target, she will then open the “Hole” right next to the target and then push him or her over into it. She will then fold up the Hole and make good her escape. She may leave some calling card or sign behind to give a clue to any characters that would be otherwise unaware of the event.

If Phoba truly succeeds on her Stealth check, you may want to gather your selected party member away from the table to RP what happens next, or to let them know what you have in the works. Players are generally willing to be part of a storyline if you let them “in on it.”

Monsters:

“**Phoba**” **Medusa** - (as per page 214, Monster Manual), but add 3 levels of Rogue (Thief). She’ll have Sneak Attack (+2d6), Expertise (Stealth +8, Investigation +7), Cunning Action, Fast Hands, Second-Story Work. Skills: Deception +5, Insight +4, Intimidation +8, Investigation +7, Persuasion +5, Perception +4, Stealth +8, Thieve’s Tools +5. She is an intelligent foe, and would rather flee to gather a bounty on another day than die. She will, however, have no problems with petrifying multiple foes if she can just to collect on the one that carries the best price. She should not be trifled with.

Treasure:

Phoba carries a few magic items to help her. She has a **Portable Hole**, a **Ring of Invisibility**, and will have at least 200gp of pocket money for bribery and other necessities. Any additional treasure she might have on her will come if she actually collects on her bounty on the abducted character. This may be up to the DM to decide.

Complications: The most evident complication is petrification. The second most obvious complication comes with intentionally splitting the party. Both can resolve problems that you may have in play already. If you have an angry tyrant/lick/other mean boss guy that has been wronged and you want to use Phoba, consider the following:

Does one of the party members suffer from a disease? If so, Petrification stops all aging or disease action. It’s like suspended animation. That character is not cured, but their condition cannot get worse. Choosing that character may buy you time to resolve the issue to the benefit of the player.

Do you have a player that cannot show up on a regular basis? Will they be away for a period of time? This is a great way to remove that character and create a story arc that will occupy the rest of the party while that one player is away from their character.

It’s important to remember that an encounter can not only be a way to challenge the party or fill time between adventures, but it may also be a way to resolve issues in a fun and different way. Phoba may be your answer to that, while providing a re-occurring villain that can pop up from time to time to create her own story arcs and interactions with the party.

Wooden Dragon

Introduction: One standard preconception modern gamers have about any fantasy world we game in is this - the common person is just as sophisticated as we are. Before you laugh, allow me to explain. It wasn't too long ago in our history that we collectively believed that the Earth was the centre of the universe. We believed that medicine was witchcraft. We believed tomatoes were evil. We believed that washing was bad for us. We believed that royalty were godlike beings. Visiting anything outside an hour's walk was too far. News came by strangers, rumour, superstition, or what your local leader told you.

We've come a long way in our understanding of science, politics, geography, communication, and travel. Planes, cars, modern roads, medicines, and the internet have connected the world in a way our ancestors in the Middle Ages could never have dreamed of. This advancement has created a sophistication that even the most ignorant among us have over our ancient counterparts.

Building an encounter around this ancient ignorance and lack of sophistication means that you can create a rumour in a local town, village, hamlet or crossroads that could spread fear and superstition as quickly as a virus. Something we would, with our modern understanding, quickly dismiss as something else would have been accepted as fact back in that day. This gives devious villains or monsters a method of terrorizing a populace, and may well be a great spark to start your campaign.

Presented below is one such circumstance whereby a clever and devious sort uses simply timing and puppetry to paralyse a populace. I present to you "Wooden Dragon"

Environment: Wilderness - best suited for a rocky pass, but put it where it suits you.
Suggested level: 1-3

Description: Many campaigns start with a "bandit" encounter or some other highway robbery. This encounter is one such "highway toll", but taken with a different spin. The players will be making their way through a winding pass where the view ahead is obstructed by the terrain - typically rocky and difficult to negotiate. The pass will have the sun peering through it (so time of day and your own personal geography is important here), when the players will encounter a striking silhouette. It will appear as if a large dragon head at the end of a stout neck, will be peering low around the pass, blocking it. It will have bright eyes and a gaping mouth. Smoke will be issuing from its maw. A loud roar will issue from the beast, and a voice, speaking in Common, will proclaim, "Leave your valuables and turn back, and I might spare your lives!"

The dragon head awaits your response.

The players will have a few avenues open to them. The players can retreat. If they do so, the head will not move and no dragon will pursue. Feel free to keep this fact from the players though unless they directly ask about it.

The players can talk to the dragon head. It will speak in a booming voice, and will only speak in Common. Characters who try to parley in Draconic will be met with silence and inaction. See below for why.

The players can charge and attack. Given the tables I've either played or DM'ed at, I'm betting this will be the majority of cases.

The Dragon Head is a construct of wood and canvas. It is operated by ropes and pulleys mounted to a framework behind the immediate pass out of view. It is being operated by a team of six Kenku, all of which are being directed by Skrivix, the Bandit Captain. It's he who's talking, and the Kenku are supplying the roar. The head is equipped with a makeshift Flamethrower made from a clay pot of oil, some hosing, and a bellows. If the players flee, Skrivix will laugh and taunt the players. If they try to negotiate, Skrivix will demand their belongings or he will threaten to roast them alive. He will give unseen cues to the Kenku hiding out of sight to supply further roars, all of which will be magnified by the natural rocky structure of the pass.

Skrivix has three charges in his improvised flamethrower. If he feels pressed, he'll use one to intimidate the players. Players who pass a successful Nature check (DC: 12, given the backlit sun) will easily determine something's afoot. They'll figure out that this isn't a real Dragon. It will take a further successful Insight (or even Perception) (DC: 10, given the Nature check) to figure out that deception is at hand.

If they attack the head, Skrivix will try to get off at least one gout from his improvised flamethrower. The flamethrower will act as a Burning Hands spell (Player's handbook, page 220, Dex save, DC: 13 for half damage). The head is made of wood and painted canvas, and if they attack it directly, it has an AC of 13 and takes 30 points to destroy or render inoperative. This will expose Skrivix to normal attacks. If the players use Fire attacks on the Dragon head, this might set the head ablaze if the head actually catches fire. (DM to determine, but fire and canvas are generally quite flammable). If the head does catch fire, roll a d20. On the first round, the flamethrower explodes on a five or less. Every round thereafter, add 5 to the chance. (10 or less, 15 or less, explode). If the head explodes, it forces a Dexterity saving throw in a 10 foot radius, DC: 15, 4d6 Fire damage, save for half. Skrivix will have Disadvantage on this save. The Kenku behind the rocks will have Advantage on this save due to their cover. The players can try to shoot ranged weapons into the "mouth" of the head to hit Skrivix, and if so, he has three-quarters cover. This will afford him a bonus of +5 bonus to AC (making it an AC of 20).

If the players attack the head in melee, the Kenku will abandon the puppet show and climb to the top of the rocks and show their shortbows down on the players. They will have +2 to their AC for cover. Characters can scale the rocky surface to engage the Kenku in melee with a successful Athletic check, DC: 12.

Skrivix will have a hard time trying to escape, even if he wanted to, but the Kenku certainly will if things go poorly.

Monsters: "Skrivix" - Bandit Captain (1) - As per Monster Manual, p. 344, except as noted.
Kenku (6) - As per Monster Manual, page 194

Treasure: Each Kenku will have some pocket change (3d6 gold pieces). Skrivix will have the same amount of gold, as well as 2 gems worth 50 gp each and a large silver key. The key, just as an object, is worth 10 gp, but feel free to have it belong to a lock of some kind in the future.

Complications: This encounter is pretty straight forward. It's not intended to be too complicated. The worst thing that could happen is the explosion of the improvised flamethrower device. This is significant damage to a low level party, and may prove fatal. The improved flamethrower itself will be massively bulky and cannot be easily carried. The whole device is easily 200 pounds, takes three large components and at least two people to operate. It's cobbled together and will not survive travel. If the players insist on trying, have an Intelligence/Tinker Tools check, DC: 20 to safely disassemble it and distribute the weight. If they fail this check, it either explode or be rendered useless (50% chance of either one. See above for damage). Even then it will take a successful Intelligence (DC:15) to reassemble and to operate. Failure will have the same result as above. It's up to the individual DM whether or not to allow this device.

Madam Versiliplex's Magical Wonders

Introduction: I'll bet that one of the most commonly asked questions placed at the feet of any DM is "Is there a place where I can buy magic items?" This might have been a common occurrence in past editions of D&D, but Fifth Edition has limited access to a magical marketplace. That's not to say that they do not exist, nor can one never find purveyors of such rare and wondrous items. Far from it. But the danger in dealing with such a market bears the risk of trying to prove it's own economic worth. Rare components, or those gained through dangerous tasks, would make most proper magic items either impossibly expensive or priceless. Those that might be common enough for sale would be overpriced due to their difficult creation or high demand. It truly would be a seller's market.

This encounter would be for those brave DMs who would wish to rise to that question with an even more difficult bargain. For those familiar with such works as "Needful Things" or even Pixar's "Brave", a shop might well exist to address the player's needs. The answer to the question "Is there a place where I can buy magic items?" might be "How bad do you want it?"

For your possible use, I present Madam Versiliplex and her Magical Wonders.

Environment: **Anywhere. You could make this a small shop in a city, or a cabin in the woods. For the purposes of versatility, I have made this a horse-drawn wagon.**

Suggested level: **Any, but for those who wish to take on Madam Versiliplex, level 5**

Description: Perhaps the players are seeking someone who deals in magical wares, or even more suspiciously, are just discussing where to find such a place. At that time, feel free to have a local unnamed peasant wordlessly direct them to an approaching oxen-drawn cart.

The cart will be drawn by a single ox - the bell hung from the yoke below its neck loudly clanging to the rhythm of the beast's stride. The cart will be an elaborate affair. Constructed from wood with simple wooden wheels, it will have several strings of bone, crystals, and small bells hung from a low arched roof. A single lamp hangs from both the front and the back, both of which give off an eerie green glow. Tiny wisps of smoke trail into the wind from each lamp. The walls of the cart are covered in sun-baked paint, peeling in some areas from wear and neglect. A single window, tightly shuttered, marks each side and the front of the cart, and a small metal stove pipe trails white smoke from the ceramic tiled roof. Painted in elaborate, yet faded, paint are the flowing script-like words in Common: "Madam Versiliplex's Magical Wonders."

A single small door allows entrance. A knocker in the shape of a grinning child's head biting a loop, bids you welcome.

If the characters approach, the cart will stop and allow them to approach. The door will remain locked until the characters knock. If they knock with their hands, they will wait at least one full minute. If they use the knocker, each knock with it will sound thunderous inside - like a massive empty room lay beyond. When they knock three times, steps of wood will unfurl below the door like they were made of cloth. The click and clack of several locks will be heard beyond the door, and it will creak open.

Greeting the characters will be a small Gnome woman of great age. Her white hair will be long and tied up in a massive bun. It will be adorned with tiny bones and gold chains with delicate charms. Red robes covered in sigils are tied at the waist with belt heavy with pouches, vials, and scroll tubes. Her arms hang with many bangles, and rings decorate every finger. A Rat, its eyes reflecting red by torchlight, pokes its head out of her robe to peek at the strangers.

"Ah, my curious little children. I wondered when you would finally come. Come in, come in." She will beckon them in, and offer tea. When the characters enter, what will unfold might be surprising. The interior of this tiny cart will be a 20'x20' cabin. A roaring fireplace adorns the far wall, with a large pot happily bubbling along. Shelves line the walls, covered in books, scroll tubes, and dusty bottles. A suit of armor stands quietly in one corner, while a dusty rack of several melee weapons stands in another.

A large round table sits in the very centre of the room surrounded by six chairs, and a rocking chair sits beside the fireplace. In the centre of the table sits a large, sealed, glass jar filled with a smoky, swirling fluid or gas. The table sits upon a fat, wooden barrel instead of legs.

The whole place smells of wood smoke, tallow candles, and fresh bread. The taint of mildew and sulfur are also present.

She will greet them and be very inviting. Madam Versilplex will listen attentively to their needs and concerns, and will offer hot tea to those who wish it. But always keep this one fact in mind:

Madam Versilplex is a Night Hag who has polymorphed herself into tis Gnome guise to throw off suspicion. She is cunning and experienced, and will not reveal her intentions until she has the players truly hooked. If they ask for simple magical wares like Potions or Scrolls, she might have a few on hand, especially when things might be more common. The first couple of Healing Potions might be a little more expensive than normal (say, 1.5 times cost). If the players cannot afford them, then she might offer them a deal. She'll be willing to trade potions and such for simple tasks. She might claim that a local magistrate has been taxing her unfairly, so she only has a few items to spare. If that magistrate's bully son were dealt with, maybe she could be more generous. Or perhaps she'll claim that wolves are harassing her ox. She might have a special bait for the wolves to eat that will make them stop attacking the local cattle. Feel free to invent your own task.

But the task should have a twist. The magistrate might well be unreasonable, or have a bully son, but perhaps they are trying to find out more about Versilplex. She cannot allow this, so she'll set up events so that the "offenders" fall victim to a tragic "accident", likely when the player characters are present. Her pet rat, Skek, is actually an Imp familiar, so he'll work behind the scenes while Invisible to track the players and set up any accidents. Perhaps **Wolves** are actually attacking cattle. But her bait will transform them into **Death Dogs**, and they will then begin to ravage the countryside. Should the players track down and kill the Death Dogs, they'll still have to somehow deal with any diseased by the Death Dogs. Versilplex may have the cure...but there's this thing she needs you to do... These are but examples.

The following items are in the shop. Each will have it's own complication, as noted under the item. She will warn them that everything is either older or has "a personality" due to former owners.

Potions of Healing - Five in stock. She can make more after a few days. These will heal like normal Potions of Healing (2d4+2 hit points healed), but for every one consumed, similar potions from other sources will work less. For every one of Madam Versilplex's healing potions drunk, remove a cumulative minus 2 hit points healed from other potions. For example, if you've drunk two of her Potions of Healing, then you heal 4 less hit points from the next Healing potion that's NOT made by her. This effect ends with a Remove Curse cast upon the drinker.

Potion of Ogre Strength - Only three in stock. This potion acts like a Potion of Hill Giant Strength (page 187, DMG), but with only a Strength boost to 19 instead of 21. The effect lasts for 1 hour like all other potions of this type, and has no boosting effect upon a character whom already has a Strength of 19 or greater. For every potion of this kind drunk, the imbiber must make a Constitution saving throw with a cumulative -1 per "Potion of Ogre Strength" drunk to resist the desire to each raw flesh. A character who fails will be driven to eat anything raw (insects, small animals and the like) raw. If a character gets to the point where they fail a saving throw and the penalty is -5 or worse, then the character becomes cannibalistic until a Remove Curse is cast upon them.

Goggles of Night - one in stock. She will need a task done for this that's equivalent to stealing an item from one innocent victim, and "returning it" to another unknown innocent victim. She will be adamant about the player not being discovered. She'll claim that the item was wrongfully taken and she would like her friend to get it back without violence or further embarrassment to either family. Her plan is to reveal the item and start both families fighting with each other - likely leading to someone being beaten or killed - if she has her way. The player's will not know this or be told this willingly. Furthermore, the Goggles carry an additional property. Madam Versilplex will see everything that the character sees. Otherwise they work like standard "Goggles of Night". (page 172, DMG.)

Spell scrolls - Madam Versiliplex does have access to spell scrolls. For the list of spells available, see page 176 of the Monster Manual under “Coven Spells”. She will claim that her list of spells is limited and that her resources have depleted over time. These are all she has left, she’ll say.

Plate Armor, Mariner - This suit stands in the corner, and although dust covered and neglected, it bears fine engraving and looks very well made. The design of a giant squid covered it’s breastplate, with the engraved tentacles spreading to the arms and the legs. The suit acts as Mariner’s Armor (page 181, DMG). Madam Versiliplex will claim that “she can’t possibly part with it.”, and will take some convincing...which is all a ploy of course. She will demand some silly price for it, like 5000 gp, but will allow herself to be talked down to half that amount. She will then carry on like the suit was meant for that character, as it fits so well. Furthermore, once donned, it will refuse to be doffed. It will take a Remove Curse to get the armor off. Once it’s on, the wearer will be Vulnerable to Fire damage, and at Disadvantage to any resisting any effect that has a Fire component. (Fireball, Burning Hands, extinguishing Alchemist’s Fire, etc.)

Longsword +1 - One of the many weapons on the dusty rack is an enchanted sword. Madam Versiliplex will be very resistant to parting with it, but may let it go for a successful Persuasion check that’s over 20+ and a bribe of 1000gp. She’ll claim that a dangerous beast has been lurking about the area, terrorizing the populace, and she intends to use it to slay the beast. If a character volunteers to do so for her, she’ll let it go for half the price. The beast she’ll want slain is actually a local Druid in Bear form that she’ll claim is a lycanthrope gone mad with an ancient curse beyond her ken to cure. (use **Druid** from page 346 of the MM). Should the character or party fail to kill this Druid, the sword will animate as per Flying Sword and attack it’s former wielder. (**Animated Object, Flying Sword**, page 20 of the MM)

Monsters: **Madam Versiliplex - Night Hag** (page 178, Monster Manual)
Skek - Imp (page 76, Monster Manual)
Animated Armor - page 19, Monster Manual
Flying Sword - page 20, Monster Manual
Rug of Smothering - page 20, Monster Manual

Treasure: See above for “treasure”.

Complications: The items all have their own, as do the associated tasks. Versiliplex will wish to have as many complications as possible. Keep in mind that it is always Madam Versiliplex’s intention to have the characters gain these items if they want them, but she will make them think that these items are more precious than they actually are. She’s a very long lived Night Hag with centuries of experience in lying, manipulating and duping mortals. When the players are in negotiations with her, do NOT prompt them to make Insight rolls to tell if she’s lying. If they OFFER a roll, by all means allow it. The DC on any Insight check against Madam Versiliplex’s deceit will be a 20 to know something’s up. To know that she intends harm to them will be a DC 25. This is quite high, but this is her con, and she’s played it well for over 200 years.

Should the players wish to attack the Hag in her wagon, she will not be alone. Not only is her Imp “Skek” always with her (unless it’s spying on the players), but the **Armor** and the **Sword** will animate as per **Animated Objects** (pages 19. 20 of the Monster Manual), and the carpet on the floor will also become a **Rug of Smothering** (page 20 of the Monster Manual). Her first action will be to go Ethereal and escape, letting the Animated Objects fight in her stead. The wagon itself is her “Hag Vehicle” (Volo’s Guide to Monsters, p.56), and obeys her commands. The Ox is there simply for show, and is pushed along by the cart. If the Objects are defeated, and the Hag is not within, the wagon will also go Ethereal, leaving the characters behind wherever it was last.

Madam Versiliplex will simply gather her forces and move along to another place to “sell her wares”. She may take the time to harass the party through her “Nightmare Haunting” ability. Pick one character at random and have her target them, unless one particular character was very pointed in dealing with her. In which case, that character will be the target of her Nightmare Haunting.

The Girl with the Dragon SNAFU

Introduction: To finish out the run of “Out of the Box” for 2016, I thought that it would be appropriate to use the one creature that is likely the most difficult to run. A dragon. The problem with Dragons is that they are immensely powerful and capable of destroying a party outright within a few rounds if played to their potential. It then falls to the DM to try and create an encounter that is both reasonable to the players and yet fair to the beast in question. You want the moment to be memorable, and the only way to do that is to do the creature justice.

That can be tricky, because older dragons will create regional effects and gain lair actions - on top of flying past the players and breathing fire, cold, poison gas or the like. Younger dragons are less refined and can be easier to corral for the more cunning player. So, where does one fit a challenging, yet rewarding, dragon encounter that is neither a TPK or murder-hobo-fest?

I think it’s in the young-adult range. But, to make it more interesting, make it a metallic. The metallic dragons are not only known shape-shifters, but all come with personality quirks that make them more relatable as “persons”, despite being vastly powerful. The problem is that the notation for shape-shifting is rather vague, indicating only that “at some point in their long lives” they learn to do it. Less powerful metallics seem to take longer to learn it, and that strikes me as arbitrary. I see no reason why a dragon, let’s say a Copper Dragon, could not learn this trick earlier in her life if she has some sort of talent for it, a great mentor, a genetic tendency to learn it earlier, or some other trait that triggers this effect ahead of time.

To flesh this encounter out, you need a reason for her to be in disguise, and some reason for the characters to help her. Powerful creatures generally are more capable of helping themselves out of a problem, so you then need to create a scenario that requires player character input. If you have her show up in dragon form, you either have players who seek to avoid her, or the murder-hobo gene is triggered and it becomes a bloodbath one way or another. To reinforce a dialogue, it’s also a good idea to make sure that there’s some reason to keep the dragon out of the affair as much as possible. Cursed magic items, high level spells or enchantments, or interference by a being more powerful than the dragon are all possibilities. The following encounter will suggest some of these directions.

Environment: Urban/Town/Village/Inn

Suggested level: 7-9 (lower if you wish this to be a purely social event)

Description: The player characters will find themselves for one reason or another in an inn, tavern or similar establishment. There will be music, laughter, and lots of conversation. On this occasion, the place is filled with it’s normal array of patrons. The smells of ale, pork stew, and pipe tobacco fill the air.

A human minstrel, dashing in appearance, sits upon a wooden stool on a low wooden stage on the far side of the common room. He sings of heros and villains, tall ships and taller castles. He stops occasionally to add a joke or two to break the tension, much to the delight of the crowd.

The crowd itself, once you work your way through, is arranged in an odd circle around a young and attractive lady. She sits at a table at the edge of the stage, with her head in her hands looking up at the minstrel. She wears beautifully embroidered travelling garb in earthen tones under shining copper-plated scale mail armor. Her auburn hair is long and full, with lush curls spilling over her armor and clothing. Emerald green eyes beam up to the minstrel with a content expression.

A successful Wisdom/Perception check (DC:10) will show that the rest of the crowd, although also enjoying the show, are remaining a good 3 to 5 feet away from the girl. Insight (DC:12) will determine that none seem outwardly afraid of her so far. A successful Insight on the girl (DC: 10) will determine that she truly appears to be enjoying the performance. A further successful Investigation (DC:15) when looking at the lady will pick up that she has what looks like a thin steel collar around her throat. It is not part of her armor nor matches her garb in any way.

Should the players ask the patrons or the barkeep whom the girl is, they will tell the players in their own common way that they don't know whom she is. They will admit, depending on the patron and your individual tastes, that they are either intimidated by her presence for some reason, or that they regard her as "the prettiest flower in the place". One might be jealous of her or suspicious of her for some strange witchcraft, but none feel that she is of such a threat as to be negative toward her in any way...and none really know why. The exception to this rule will be the barkeep, Angus, whom will know her as "Aescypra" (Ay-SIGH-pra). Angus will tell them that she comes in from time to time to enjoy the local entertainment, loves to laugh, and generally is well behaved when she's not heckling a travelling jester. He will regard that she seems quite taken with tonight's entertainment.

That entertainment is "Vallius of Annap". Vallius came into town almost immediately after Aescypra arrived, and volunteered to entertain for merely a night's lodging. He's been singing, joking, and playing his lute for almost an hour now.

Should the characters inquire further with Angus, a successful Charisma/Persuasion roll (DC:12...DC:5 if they tip well) will also reveal that the last three times Aescypra came to town, Vallius also showed up - an odd coincidence that he'll pass off as "just the way things are sometimes".

If the player characters wish to speak with Aescypra, she will be willing to discuss whatever they like (within reason) - but AFTER Vallius finishes playing (which will be in another few minutes). If they are patient and polite, she will certainly address them in kind. If they are rude, she will ignore their questions. (Keep in mind that NPCs of any kind are people too, and have their own motivations and desires. If players choose to be dicks to them, the NPCs are well within their rights to act appropriately to their core dynamic).

When Vallius finishes his "set", the girl will applaud the loudest of the crowd and smile at him broadly. She will watch him leave the stage, and even look around the players and the crowd to watch him go upstairs. She might even sigh before turning to the players to address their inquiries.

Keep in mind that she is very smart (INT: 16), wise for her age (W: 13), and quite charming (CH:15). She will be well spoken, will be polite unless offended, smiles readily and may even flirt with an appropriate character. She will not reveal her true nature (see below), and may be evasive when questioned where she comes from (answers like "far away" or "not local"). Persuasion checks to get her to reveal more might involve a Charisma contest, with her Charisma score as the DC. Should the person asking her questions be a skilled Bard, allow them to make such checks with Advantage (but do not tell them why). When she answers a question, have the characters in front of her who can see the thin steel choker she wears make a Wisdom/Perception check (DC:17). Those whom succeed will see tiny runes appear when she answers a revealing question, and she might be even more vague when that happens. Should the players catch on that this collar has something to do with it (perhaps by succeeding in an Intelligence/Arcana check, DC:15) after noticing these runes, and point this out to her, she might nod or shake her head in a "yes/no" fashion to some direct questions. These responses do not activate the runes. If asked, she will say that the choker is a gift, and that she treasures it dearly. A successful Persuasion check (DC:15), or a really good roleplaying trick-question opportunity might get her to reveal that she received it as a gift in a small box the last time Vallius came to town, and assumed that he left it for her as a reward for her patronage and appreciation of his talents. Unfortunately, she'll say, she hasn't been able to go home since, and fears her father will be angry with her if he sees it. So she's stayed here in town and has been wondering what to do about it. She will convey that dreads having to give it up, but knows that she'll have to deal with going home at some point.

Should a character cast *Detect Magic*, the caster will see Aescypra glows with an aura of Transmutation, and the necklace flares with a brighter glow of the same enchantment. However, a successful Arcana (DC:17) check will also detect a Curse upon this necklace, should the caster choose to check will the spell is active. It's important to note that all such "glows" and "auras" are only visible to the caster. An attempt to *Remove Curse* or *Dispel Magic* to try and remove the collar will not work without overcoming a very high DC. (like, 19), and even then it only temporarily removes the effect on her speech - but does not break the collar. A successful such check will allow her to convey that the collar prevents her escape from it without a special key, and that she does not have it. It will also allow her to forward that she would rather remove it.

This freedom to speak openly will only last for the next few turns (how long is up to the DM, depending on dramatic flow and if you feel you've passed on what you desire for information). At no point will Aescypra confess that she is a Dragon. A clever player who tries a *Detect Thoughts* might pull out this sort of information, but that's up to the player to arrive at and achieve (note how under the description of the spell in the PHB).

Players who follow Vallius upstairs will find him in his room. The door to his room will be locked, so a player will either have to unlock it (Thieve's Tools, *Knock* spell), break it down (Strength check, DC: 17), or ask for permission to enter. Vallius will need some convincing to allow a guest, but he is not without his weaknesses either. Vallius is vain and a womanizer. Appealing to either might help to get the door unlocked. What would normally be a Persuasion DC: 17 check might drop to a DC:15 with the right flattery (DM's discretion) or if the charms of a pretty lady were involved.

Vallius, in any regard, will be in his room tuning his instruments and enjoying some wine. He will be gracious and welcoming, polite and charming. His goals, too, are secret and he is not want to divulge them. He will discuss music, poetry, and have polite conversation. He will avoid direct answers and will only claim to me a "humble wandering entertainer". He will not admit to any specific knowledge of Aescypra, nor claim to have any knowledge of her collar.

However...

What the players will not know is this - Vallius is indeed up to no good. Vallius of Annap is actually an Incubus is the employ of a Greater Devil. This patron has tasked Vallius with tricking Aescypra into wearing this collar. The collar prevents her from changing shape back into Dragon form. In fact, the collar can only shrink, and never gets bigger, so if she tries to shapeshift into a sparrow to get out of the collar, she'll just be a sparrow in a metal collar. If she tries to grow to a shape or size larger than the collar will currently allow, the collar simply gets smaller and she will lose her head. The intent is to force Aescypra's father, an Old Copper Dragon known as Rexuroptolus (say that 10 times fast...) to yield his territory and hoard over to a diabolic cult in the Greater Devil's name. (Feel free to have other diabolic schemes instead). Vallius does indeed have the key to opening the collar - his own fiendish blood - which he is obviously not willing to hand over.

With all of that in play, the players have a mystery to solve, a maiden to rescue (who is ironically a dragon too), and lots of RP to do - and perhaps some combat. Should they suspect, discover, or turn on Vallius, his first objective will be to escape. He may try to Charm one of his interrogators or attackers. If pressed, he might also reveal his true form and try to fly out the window. Once out of sight, he will try to assume a new form - but will always be too vain not to be a handsome, rakish type - which may lead to his undoing.

The intent is to start a story arc or adventure. It might lead to a real cat-and-mouse affair as the party seeks to track down Vallius and rescue Aescypra from her collar. The reward for doing so will not come in the form of gold and silver. The players will have a Young Copper Dragon as an ally and possibly friend. (which is it's own double-edged sword). Along the way, she might befriend a Bard within the party, as Copper Dragons seem drawn to this sort with their love of jokes, pranks, music and conversation. That's up to the DM and the associated players to unfold and discover.

Aescypra will try to stay out of her father's sight until the collar is off, and will be deeply thankful.

Monsters: **"Aescypra" - Young Copper Dragon** (p. 111 of the Monster Manual), but with the ability to Shapeshift like older dragons.
 "Vallius of Annap" - Incubus (p. 285 of the Monster Manual)
 Commoner (several) (as per page 345 of the Monster Manual)

Treasure: Possible alliance and friendship with a Copper Dragon

Complications: Vallius has a few tricks up his sleeve. He can either Charm on of the party, turning that person on his or her fellows, or if cornered, could use his Draining Kiss. The Charm only works on one

person at a time, but can be done whenever the fiend wants to outside of that constraint. That means he could Charm local law enforcement, a mayor, a character's loved one - whomever - to elude capture. His job is to keep that collar on as long as possible, and certainly not to have his blood spilled.

Furthermore, please note that Aescypra will not reveal herself to be a Dragon in front of the fine folks in town. She did not nor does not wish to alarm anyone. It was always her intent to just enjoy a good time away from the boredom of sleeping her years away like many dragons do.

Heart of Darkness

Introduction: There are many different kinds of players, but one that never goes away is the murderhobo/vandal. Their style of gaming lay in the foundations of D&D when it first hit the market. It's still a popular style of gaming, especially with the rise of video games. Monsters and puzzles are seen as sources of loot. Everything is opened, broken, killed, or avoided if it can't be one those three. Despite the harsh style of play, these players are also the fire under the bottoms of players who struggle with decision making or need to follow sixteen steps before opening a door. The murderhobo/vandal is always the first to launch into combat, explore a new passage, or open a stuck door. As much as they lead the way, the style of play can sometimes cut off roleplaying or problem solving opportunities, or create problem solving issues for others in their party.

The following encounter is for the DM who might have a runaway murderhobo/vandal. Here's the catch - if the murderhobo/vandal doesn't act, there's no treasure. But if the murderhobo/vandal does act, there's danger. Isn't life awesome? ;)

Environment: Dungeon

Suggested level: 6-8

Description: The door to this chamber is expertly carved to depict ancient warriors in elaborate feathered garb holding aloft toothed swords. Upon entering the chamber, one can see why.

The chamber is 30' wide and 40' long with a flat ceiling supported by a singular pillar in the centre of the room. There are four statues made from reddish-brown terra cotta. Each is an exquisite reproduction of the warriors seen upon the door. Each statue sits 10' from a corner of the room, and all are shown holding the same saw-tooth bladed weapons to their chest. Faded and chipped paint in shades of turquoise and red remain upon the depictions of feathers upon the warriors' garb. More striking, though, is the gold inlay that cross-crosses the carved terra cotta breastplates on each of the warriors, and the large turquoise eyes in each statue.

The central pillar in the room is 2.5' in diameter and reaches from floor to ceiling. It has what look like long flame-like decorations rising up from the floor and down from the ceiling. These flame-like tentacle decorations rise up and descend down an equal 2.5 feet. A successful Intelligence/Investigation check while inspecting this pillar will find small chips of black paint remaining in the flame decorations. The remaining areas of the pillar not covered by the flame-like carvings is covered with yellow-painted hemispheres with a garnets in the center of each yellow hemisphere. If the characters take the time to count them, there are ten such yellow hemispheres with garnets.

The walls show scenes of an army of warriors, like depicted in statuary form or upon the doors, forcing an enemy army into a sea of some sort. The water's waves are irregular and long, and look like they are reaching for the enemy army as they fall into the sea.

The ceiling is covered in painted terra cotta tiles of yellow, green, red, and black. The floor is also covered in stone tiles of the same size, but travel may have worn off any sort of painted decoration long ago.

Should any character volunteer a Religion check, a successful check versus a DC of 20 will reveal hints of an ancient reference to worship of Jubilex, Demon Lord of Oozes.

If any character removes any of the garnets from the central pillar, a Magic Mouth will appear on the face of the statue in the far left corner of the room. It will declare in an ancient Common (Intelligence/History check, DC:10 to understand) that this warrior will punish any tomb robbers. For every round that the players continue to loot, another Magic Mouth will appear on the next statue (moving clockwise around the room) and shout warnings and insults to all heretics, infidels and thieves. One all four statues have broadcast a warning, they will go silent. A Programmed Illusion will then take over. The Illusion will be that of the statues animating and preparing to throw their saw-toothed swords (called macuahuitls if anyone asks). Feel free to have the players roll initiative to begin the combat phase of this encounter.

The players may elect to attack the statues of their own accord. In any regard, if you roll initiative, it's important to make sure that the statues "lose initiative". Feel free to fudge or fake a roll. You may optionally choose to actually roll initiative, but save the roll for if/when a statue is broken.

If a player chooses to remove the turquoise eyes or gold inlay from the statues, the statues are rigged to crack or break like a house of cards when they are robbed. These statues will also break if hit for more than 5hp of damage, and are Vulnerable to Bludgeoning and Thunder damage.

If/when the statues are broken, the following will occur:

Far Left and Near Right statues each contain a Black Pudding, which will attack any intruders in the room, and will pursue outside the room. Note that the doors to the room are made of wood, and the Black Puddings can dissolve their way through the doors in a single round. Their acid will not destroy gems or gold.

Far Right and Near Left statues are filled with Green Slime, which will spatter any characters standing within 5' of these statues should they be broken by any means. Once this spatter has occurred, the Slime will collapse into a 10' diameter pool centred on where the statue stood.

Monsters: **Black Pudding (2)** - page 241 of the Monster Manual
Green Slime (2) - page 105 of the Dungeon Masters Guide

Treasure: Turquoise (8 total, 2 in each statue) - 50 gp each due to size and expert cut
Garnet (10 total on central pillar) - 100gp each
Gold inlay - 1000gp worth, 250gp per statue if you take the time to collect it.

Complications: Black Puddings create their own complications due to the fact that it can end up dividing multiple times when struck with the correct weapon or attack (not the reference in the Monster Manual). This division effects the total hit point of the divided Black Pudding sections, but not the damage per attack - meaning that the damage can really pile up. Oozes of all kinds tend to choose hunger over all decisions, so they may end up pursuing the player characters into a separate encounter depending on where you place this room, so be aware of that sort of event possibility.

A Walk in the Woods

Introduction: The Players Handbook is loaded with spells that could be the key to an interesting encounter. One that strikes me as having a lot of potential is *Awaken* (Players Handbook, page 216). According to the spell, it grants a 10 Intelligence to a single plant or beast under the right circumstances. It also allows plants the ability to move. Speech in one language is also included. From what I can see, this effect is permanent. Now, imagine applying that entire array of abilities to any number of beasts or plants. Not only can this spell effect expected beasts like horses, dogs, elephants and fish, as well as plants like trees and shrubbery...but also to fungi and “giant” beasts. The only limit is a starting Intelligence of 3 or less and size of Huge or less, and the category of “beast” or “plant”

This awakened beast or plant could fulfill multiple roles in your campaign or encounter. Since it has average human intelligence, human-like senses, and can speak a language, you could run this as a roleplaying encounter in addition to a combat or puzzle encounter. That’s your choice. This beast or plant could be a full NPC or companion to another NPC. In this case, “A Walk in the Woods” is intended as a social encounter, but also a more specialized version of a social encounter, in that the NPC in question is an Awakened Tree with a service to offer. In essence, this is a merchant who happens to be a tree.

For this encounter to work, you’ll need a forest. This forest should be of a decent size, but one that is hard to traverse for more reasons than just having trees in it. Treacherous gullies, jutting rock formations, or even a forest that exists on a steep incline of a mountain are all valid choices. Feel free to use these or any others you might think of.

For the purposes of this encounter, the Awakened Tree will be acting as a way to connect two parallel roads at different (and difficult to access) elevations. This encounter is a method of arranging travel through difficult terrain that would otherwise slow, hamper and endanger the party. I would only use this encounter if those conditions are met, or if you have need to insert something akin to this in your world.

Environment: Wilderness/Forest

Suggested level: Any, depending on your campaign. Recommend 2-4

Description: The party finds themselves at the end of a path through the wilderness. The trees and underbrush have become thick and overgrown. Nettles, vines, and make the journey even more frustrating. The terrain rises despite this growth, making forward movement even more arduous. Frustrated, the party will typically start discussing or arguing about what they should do. Should they turn back, camp and start fresh tomorrow morning, or plug on and make what progress they can before it becomes too dark to safely proceed.

All you’ll need as DM is for the players to ask something akin to the following: “What do we do now?”

If they do, then they’ll hear a voice, deep and methodical, speaking from above them. It will offer “You could ask.”

Many Leaves (the Awakened Tree) will then wait and watch the party. He’ll judge their actions and questions/comments to ascertain if they will do him or the surrounding wood any harm. If they question him further, he will be elusive in his answers. Remember, he is trying to find the truth behind their motivations. Should Many Leaves think that the party will do him harm, he will not reveal himself. If they try to engage him in a positive and meaningful way, then feel free to have Many Leaves reveal himself.

This is not only an opportunity for great roleplaying, but a chance to reveal Many Leaves’ story. Social engagements like this can be hard to gauge. If you need a guide, consult “Conversation Reactions” (page 245, DMG) to figure out if Many Leaves will answer any given request or question. Start with him as and “Indifferent Creature”. Treat him in every regard as any other NPC, despite the fact that he is an Awakened Tree. Should the players gain his trust, he will reveal himself the next morning (or sooner should they wish to move through the thick wood before then). You can then have Many Leaves tell his tale to those who would ask.

Many Leaves will weave a tale of a former friend and ally. (Feel free to insert an important figure from your own world here. Note that only Bards and Druids currently have access to the Awaken spell). He will tell them in his ponderous manner about how he was once only a simple sapling, but was sung into awareness many years ago by a young girl named Elise. Of course, to an “old sap” like Many Leaves, these “fleshy two-legs” are all “young”. He will tell them of their many walks through these woods, and how he had carried her through these treacherous woods so that she would never come to harm in its many crevasses and tangles of nettles. He will not know of any current political or other events that the player characters may be currently enduring, unless the DM chooses to have such event affect the current woods in which Many Leaves presides. He will wax nostalgic about his time with Elise, and will have no understanding of what the vagaries of class or race are when pressed for specifics. He may go on about simpler times, when few roads carved through his “people”, and he may yearn for such a time again.

Should the players actually be patient enough for him to ramble on about this at length, he will recognize them as “soulful beings” and may offer to ride among his boughs to cross this wood. Should this unfold in this manner, crossing this wood to the upper reaches will take only an hour or less, as Many Leaves’ superior knowledge of the terrain as well as his ability to avoid obstacles due to his size and expertise, will allow him to travel in a near straight line upward. Even a Ranger with a Forest or Mountain as Favourite Terrain will not be able to move as fast, as Many Leaves is considered to have both as “favourite”. The only faster way over this terrain will be to fly.

Should this event unfold as such, he will regale his passengers with tales of saplings growing to full trees, of litters of fox kits living under his roots, and of the time a Goblin tried to chop him down - and was kicked over a gully for his trouble.

This is also an excellent opportunity for the DM to drop any vague lore about the surrounding region that an Awakened Tree might have experienced. Odd weather conditions, noises, sights or unusual creatures travelling his forest might be valid clues to pass on while he transports the player characters. Once he has gotten them to the top where they need to be (likely at the edge of a forested area, Many Leaves will bid them farewell. However, Awakened Trees have long memories of all the good and the bad. If they treat him well, he will never forget, and may even return to help them back down the mountain. However, should they treat him poorly, he will likewise never forget, and may take the chance to make future travel through these woods hazardous for cruel and evil characters.

Monsters: “Many Leaves” - Awakened Tree (Monster Manual, page 317)

Treasure: A possible future ally. Priceless.

Complications: The complications are pretty clear, and are all based purely on the player characters’ social interactions with Many Leaves. They will need to be on their most respectful and patient behaviours for this odd NPC. However, if they can pull that off, they may well end up with a loyal ally who can help them through the local treacherous wooded terrains for years to come.

Slither

Introduction: Volo's Guide to Monsters is an excellence resource for new and interesting encounters and campaigns. Furthermore, the lore on several species of monsters and humanoids have added new depth to the understanding of these adversaries, making them more of a developed foe than a simple two-dimensional thug.

One that I was glad to see further development on was the Yuan-Ti (which I pronounce WON-tee, given it's Mezo-American "feel"). These complex and (honestly) creepy foes are rich in culture, faith, architecture, and machinations. An encounter with Yuan-Ti (the same word in plural as it is in singular in my mind...like sheep or deer) should be more than a simple initiative roll followed by the swinging of martial weapons. Yuan-Ti are devious. Yuan-Ti are patient. Yuan-Ti are the stuff of nightmares. An encounter with them should leave the players wondering if they are being watched, and if this was but the first of many run-ins with these serpentine villains. The actions of these humanoids reflects the worst of what we think of when it comes to performing live human sacrifices. Like the Jaguar Warriors of the ancient Aztec Empire, Yuan-Ti will often range far and wide to capture victims for either sacrifice or to transform into one of their thralls.

To those who are not of the snake men, we are all but a resource to be used. That inhumanity should be evident when you unveil any encounter with the serpentine lot. The feeling of hopelessness among the common citizenry, or perhaps even whispered rumours or ancient paintings/pictographs of rituals performed by the Yuan-Ti (covered in growth, moss, dust, etc. for added effect) would be great clues to foreshadow any run-in with these humanoids. I would even suggest setting up such an encounter perhaps a week ahead of time just so the players are informed, but have again become complacent in looking out for such a thing.

Yuan-Ti are very much a Cthulian horror slithering through the jungles, so set-up and mood are essential. You may even wish to have positive interactions with a few common NPCs who are secretly Yuan-Ti Purebloods who have taken precautions to hide their true natures...only to be revealed later in this drama to have betrayed the player characters all along.

Environment: **Wilderness/Jungle is a primary source, but feel free to throw the players a loop by having this in a secret Urban setting too.**

Suggested level: **5-6, but can be adjusted upward by adding more Pure Bloods.**

Description: The players may find themselves in jungle territory. The oppressive heat and humidity may make day-to-day activities stressful. Biting insects fill the night air, and the sounds of wildlife never, ever go silent. Huddled around their campfire for the night, if only to drive some of the mosquitos away with the smoke, the players may notice (Wisdom/Perception DC:10) that something is amiss. For a brief moment in the night, the sounds of crickets, frogs, cicadas, and other noisy vermin fall silent. For those who succeeded in their Wisdom/Perception checks with a 17 or higher will have noted that the silence not only occurred, but moved. The silence picked up by the higher roll seemed to pass by the camp as if moving slowly from one side to the next.

Nothing more will happen that night. The next morning, however, the player characters will awaken to having their backpacks, doffed armour, and other items with open space, to be inhabited by small, harmless grass and tree snakes. These tiny beasts will slither away if allowed to escape. For any character who puts out their local campfire, allow then an additional Perception check (DC:15). Those that succeed will notice a strange pattern in the ashes. Should they make anyone trained in Religion aware of these markings, those that are trained in such a skill can divulge (Religion, DC: 17) that a symbol associated with "Sseth, The Sibilant Death" has somehow burned its way into the ashes of their fire. You may even wish to allow any Warlock with a Great Old One patron to make a Wisdom check even if they do not possess the Religion skill. One resident of the Far Realms may well know of another, and so the connections between a Warlock and their Patron may allow for this connection to unveil such a secret.

As the party breaks camp, have them notice periodically that it seem like the snakes in the trees are

watching them pass. Their eyes on slowly swivelling heads, always watching - never blinking. Tongues flicker to taste the air as the player characters pass. The undergrowth will become dense and unforgiving. Leaves wet with rain that fell days ago will brush them and soak their clothes, hissing as large leaves brush leather and metal. Thick, wet vines will drop upon them as if on command, brushing against bare skin and then slithering to the ground by either gravity or an unseen will.

It's important to harass the party this way for some time. They will become frustrated and likely wish to find some sort of clearing or break in the foliage to find respite. Make note of the heat and humidity, and play up the insects that get into everything, including their drinking water.

Then, periodically, introduce a similar moment of pure silence as the night before. They will likely not notice it while moving because of the wet leaves, so increase the DC to 15 for a successful Wisdom (Perception) check.

As the party proceeds through the thick jungle, start having them encounter thin vines upon which grow small orbed fruit covered in thorny spikes. These vines will create a tripping hazard, and will take a successful Perception (DC:15) to avoid, or a successful Dexterity (DC:12) not to trip. These will occur perhaps once every ten minutes of game play, and do no damage. Even a fall from one is not intended to do any damage. However, the fruit will rattle loudly when such a vine is struck. Once this has happened three times, begin the final phase of the encounter.

Watched by their snake spies, signalled by their wild cucumber trip-vines, watched at length throughout their journey in these jungles, the Yuan-Ti know exactly where the party are and have been waiting in ambush. Like the Jaguar Warriors of our own ancient world, they see the player characters as fresh offerings for their Great Old One. They will want them alive if possible.

"Xochipek", the Mind Whisperer (Volo's, pages 203-204) will start the offensive. He will open with casting Hypnotic Pattern on the party (Wisdom save, DC:14 - see page 252 PHB for details). The two Purebloods, "Yaretzi" and "Zolin" will use their first actions to throw Nets on two characters, preferably obvious spell casters. (Net - PHB, page 148). Two Broodguards (Volo's, page 203) will rush in and grapple two other randomly selected characters who are not already restrained by nets. Note that Broodguards have been specially indoctrinated in ancient rituals that give them Advantage on any Hypnotic Pattern spells, and are blindingly obedient to their Pureblood and Malison masters.

The success or failure of this opening gambit is important. If it succeeds, then the Yuan-Ti will take the time to tie up their victims and lead them back to their temple for future "use" (Volo's has a sample Temple, pages 100-102 in case you need a quick reference). If this opening assault fails or has less than 50% success, the Yuan-Ti Purebloods will then try Suggestion (Wisdom, DC:12) on two of those not affected. The Suggestion will be akin to "We mean you no harm. We are here to protect you from the dangers of this jungle. Why else would we try to capture you unharmed?"

If this fails too, then they will try to escape as best they can. The Broodguard will then attack to kill to buy their Pureblood and Mind Whisperer masters time to flee.

But worry not, like a wise man once said - they will return, and in greater numbers....

Monsters: "Xochipek" - Yuan-Ti Mind Whisperer (Volo's pages 203, 204)
(2) "Yaretzi" (female) and "Zolin" (male) Yuan-Ti Purebloods (MM, page 310)
(2) Yuan-Ti Broodguards (Volo's, page 203)

Treasure: Xochipek wields a *Rod of The Pact Keeper +1*, explaining why his spell DC is 14 and not 13. Xochipek also wears elaborately carved jade bracelets (100gp each) and a golden torc worth 500gp.
The two Purebloods each have a set of one fine gold necklace (75gp each) and Jade rings carved to look like coiled serpents (50gp each).

Complications: The biggest complication is being dragged off to be either sacrificed or turned into Broodguards. However, even the threat of this demise has a silver lining. This may only be the set-up for a larger "dungeon crawl/prison break" based out of a Yuan-Ti step pyramid temple. If the player characters succeed in fending off this attack, and you wish for the set-up to be the case, feel free to try again with a larger force or have the player characters chase the Yuan-Ti to the clearing where their Temple lay. This is an excellent opportunity to show the characters (and yourself) that failure can be a success in disguise.

Enemy at the Gate

Introduction: A great villain who sees very little action is the Oni (otherwise call the Ogre Magi or Japanese Ogre). Oni are special in the ranks of the giantkind in that they are talented spell casters and shape-shifters. They walk the line between brute and Hag, making for a villain that could be very accomplished as both. Some Hags might employ them as minions, but to be honest, given an Oni's intelligence and accomplishments, any "service" to someone might be temporary at best. Dangerous, intelligent and strong villains are rarely anyone's minions for long, usually having plans of their own and no small amount of ambition. The Oni might be even more dangerous when it's in the service of an even more powerful villain like a dragon, greater devil or demon, lich, or mummy lord. This would give the Oni access to greater resources, perhaps a helpful organization, or even it's own pool of agents like cultists or spies.

For the purpose of this encounter, the Oni will be the agent of some greater villain in your world. I've used medusas, succubi, and nothics in this fashion, and they're all great in their own way. An Oni can be just as great but, like the succubi, be anyone...anywhere...and really ramp up the paranoia. The Oni could have been hidden among a tribe of Orcs, then disguised as a human guard, and then as a wandering monk...one never knows.

The text in the Monster Manual states that the entire appearance changes size if needed, but their glaive only changes in size. Taken as written, that means they'll always have a polearm. That makes it essential for the DM to place the Oni in roles where the existence of such weapons would be logical and acceptable. You may even wish to make such weapons more common in local soldiery and among peasant militia. This is supported in historical fact with such weapons as the bill and the military fork. You could even give the Oni in question a magical Glaive that has the ability to temporarily change shape, or even give him the Eldritch Knight ability to call his weapon from anywhere via some sort of teleportation. There are lots of ways around the predicted metagaming of the experienced and cunning player.

In this particular case, the Oni will be ready to greet them as they return to civilization - either ahead of them as they arrive in a new town, or to "welcome" them as they return to a home community. Just remember, the Oni is a very intelligent opponent. They will act with cunning and a decent tactical sense. They will retreat if things turn badly for them and strike when they have some sort of advantage.

That's what makes them deadly.

Environment: Urban/City or Town gates.

Suggested level: 7

Description: The road before the party ends in the large wooden gates of the community before you. Two individuals in chain mail wielding pole arms watch you approach and appear to be conversing with each other out of earshot.

What is actually happening is that one of the guards is an Oni in disguise as a human guard he eliminated earlier. As Katsuro watches his chosen targets approach, he casts Charm Person on the guard and then instructs the guardsman that these approaching people are trouble and should be stopped at all costs.

To that end, the Charmed guardsman will be belligerent and seek to deny passage to the characters. If things devolve into combat, the Oni will likely say something to the effect of "These people are trouble. We cannot let them pass. Do you agree?"...and then he'll grasp his weapon in an offensive manner...but he'll allow the other guardsman to attack first. Given the level of the party, they will make quick work of this simple guardsman. That's when the Oni will cast Darkness on the group and then fly directly up and over the player characters. Unless the player characters have Devil's Sight (or similar) or have an Imp familiar (who also has this sight), they should not hear or see the Oni leave the melee.

On his next action, he will then cast Cone of Cold from directly 30' above the party. It would be reasonable to expect that the party will either scatter or move well away from the Darkness at this time. Katsuro will know this, and will use the Darkness Sphere like a barrier to hide behind - using it to keep the party off balance so that they will find it hard to know where he is. He will seek to separate one or two away

from the group so that he can properly deal with them. He may even take one of the party members who may have fallen and place them in the darkness so that he can assume their form. He may whisk away with an unconscious party member so that he can leverage the party to act on his benefactor's behalf. He may try to assess if some members are weak enough to succumb to a Sleep spell after his Cone of Cold, and then take those individuals. He may try to surprise an individual and strike them with a pair of Glaive attacks before casting Sleep. The choice is up to the DM. Parties change in composition and tactical application - allow the Oni to act accordingly. In all cases, he will seek to fight another day if he can. He is cunning and intelligent - allow him to be so. His goal is to either kill, capture, or gain leverage over the party. If he cannot do one, he will always do another. He will never assume true form unless he has to. It's better to keep the party guessing. A party that cannot identify their adversary will start assuming everyone might be.

Because the Oni has a Ring of Mind Shielding, the players will not be able to track him through the Darkness with spells like Detect Thoughts. They will also not be able to pinpoint him with spells or abilities that track creature type. That means he really COULD be anyone, and placed in a variety of circumstances.

Monsters: "Katsuro" - Oni. (page 239, Monster Manual)
"James" - Guard (page 347, Monster Manual)

Treasure: James will have little on him save for perhaps 10 sp and a hand-written note from his wife asking him to come home safe. (Yes, I'm that kind of DM)
Katsuro, if defeated, will have his Glaive (which will revert to giant-size and therefore be hard to carry or use), a missive from his overlord identifying the party (likely with some special sigil that the overlord uses to sign the missives), 70gp, 110 ep, and a Ring of Mind Shielding.

Complications: There are a few that come to mind. Death, kidnapping, being accused or tracked by local authorities for killing their guard...the list goes on. Keep in mind that Katsuro couldn't care less about simple human guards. (or Dwarf guards, or elf guards....you get the idea), so such repercussions from his actions do not play into his motives. His singular motive is the killing or capture of the party. He may even kill one party member and take his place much like a dopplganger would. If this happens, feel free to take the dead character's player aside and discuss your plan with him. You may be quite surprised when you discover that the ruthlessness of the Oni is only surpassed by that of the player who gets a chance to "be on the inside". If this happens, go for it - if only because your table will talk about it for years to come.

This doesn't include the legal or political fallout that could ensue from killing the constabulary of a local community. You have a chance there to insert local politics if you like, but if your players are not interested, or if they are not of a mindset to deal with such issues, it's perfectly reasonable to have someone inside the wall discover the victim that the Oni killed to take his place. You could have another guard on the wall, too far to get involved, see a flying, spellcasting version of what he thought was a compatriot, and thus facilitate an easier resolution of any forthcoming trial.

You could even go so far as to have the wife or older child of the guard slain by the party become a new villain for the party through some sort of Warlock process.

The options here are truly endless.

Three Eyes are Better

Introduction: In conjunction with previous encounters, this will also expand on the concept of making monster encounters less “vanilla”. As seen in “Phoebe’s Bet”, this will be another foray into granting class levels to a normally predictable monster.

The monster in question this time is the (lowly) Cyclops. The Cyclops has classically been seen as a dim-witted, superstitious, and ill-tempered brute who might fall victim to any assortment of late-night infomercials. Whereas that preconception should bear some merit, and some elements may be contained in this encounter, leaving it as-is defeats the purpose of delivering an encounter that challenges preconceptions. Drawing from inspiration from such sources as Bugs Bunny (The Abominable Snowman) and Star Trek TNG “Samaritan Snare”, this encounter was designed to take on the concept of a danger interjected with moments of humour.

To accomplish this, We’ll not only give the Cyclops three levels of Warlock (Fiend Pact of the Chain), but also a great little helper in the form of an Imp. The entire encounter is driven by this relationship, as the familiar, though technically a servant, is actually the brains of the outfit. This “cart before the horse” dichotomy should generate moments during the encounter where more than one player should raise an eyebrow and wonder who is calling the shots. The hope being that the players will walk away with both moments of laugh-out-loud ridiculousness and wincing when their characters are thumped by the Cyclops.

This encounter will also include some sample dialogue for the DM to insert should they so choose to give the players the right mix of the ridiculous and the dangerous.

Environment: **Wilderness/Simple ruins.**

Suggested level: **7**

Description: The players may be on the way to another location or may be exploring the wilderness for their own reasons. For the purposes of this encounter, let’s imagine them upon a lonely wooded trail. Out of nowhere, a domestic chicken will run across their path. This should (Intelligence/Nature DC:5) be obviously out of place. Those who succeed their Nature check (or you may wish to make this obvious enough to just narrate the fact) will realize that such beasts would never exist long in a wooded area given the existence of foxes, weasels, and birds of prey. This chicken came from somewhere - it can’t be wild.

Those characters who remain still and listen (Wisdom/Perception DC:15) will hear distant clucking. You players may, of course, just kill the chicken and then keep on moving. A free lunch is a free lunch. That’s players for you. Those who are curious, though, may take the time to search or listen.

Those whom succeed in the Perception check may know to head off the path (let’s say to the left for the sake of argument) in the direction of these fowl. They may be motivated to return this chicken to it’s owner, or the DM may place this encounter close enough to where the players seek to camp for the day, and so may request a night’s lodging with a local farmer. Heck, they just may be hungry for more chickens. I’m not judging.

When they have travelled perhaps 100 yards from the edge of the path, they will come upon an odd sight. The trees will part to reveal a small clearing wherein exists an old and forgotten ruin. Flagstones poke up through the grass, weeds, and fallen leaves. Low stone wall remnants create a ring perhaps 30’ in diameter. The wall remnants vary in height from a few inches to eight feet with no real pattern in evidence. The highest wall section has a section of stone chimney on it’s outside leading to a hearth on the inside.

Skins have been sewn into a peaked roof, suspended by a cable of several woven ropes and attached to a young by tall maple, which is slightly bent. The skins are secured to the ground around the base of the broken structure by several other ropes, and appear secured to the ground by large wooden pegs. The appearance, then, is like that of a peaked tent roof.

The outside of the ruined wall will be packed with tree boughs. Since this practice is common enough among the citizenry, feel free to volunteer that many homes do this for insulation and to block drafts. The tree boughs a freshly cut, and still smell of spruce, maple, and ash. These boughs almost cover the pegs.

Chickens wander about everywhere, contained within the low walls for the most part. A large pile of still-green leaves are stacked away from the hearth, yet still along a strong wall. This pile of leaves seems to have a central depression. Bones lay scattered about the property. Those interested could perform an Investigation check to survey the area. A successful DC: 10 will likely determine that the leaf pile is some sort of bedding, whereas a successful DC: 15 will reveal that the owner of this bedding is very big.

A successful Nature (or even Survival) check (DC: 15) will determine that these bones are a mix of wild deer, boar, and a few chickens. There are also scattered humanoid bones. That same check will also show that these bones have all been gnawed upon. Also inside the low stone wall ring will be several medium-sized sacks. These sacks will contain common items like grains and dried corn, rolls of cured animal skins, a large wax-sealed ceramic pot (filled with honey if anyone opens it), and a collection of smashed, dented helmets and ruined shields.

For anyone whom volunteers a Survival check for the purposes of looking for tracks, a Successful DC:10 will reveal only chicken tracks, whereas a DC: 12 will reveal wild animal spoor (Deer, boar...). Allow a successful DC: 15 to reveal massive soft-booted feet, and a successful DC: 25 to disclose an additional set of tiny clawed humanoid-like feet.

The DM, if possible, should wait for either everyone in the party or at least the vast majority to enter the structure before proceeding to the next stage. They may only send a scout like a Rogue or Ranger first to check it out. If they do so, have them make a Perception check for fun, but so long as they do not botch the roll, reveal scattered coins (perhaps 10gp worth) among the flagstones. You might even wish to have a small open bag with what looks like gold nuggets - but is actually worthless Fool's Gold (Pyrite ore). Nothing gathers player characters upon a zone like greed. Unless the party member in question has some sort of expertise in ore (like a Dwarf's Stone Cunning, a Guild Artisan/Clan Crafter with the right skill sets, etc.) then there should be no reason for them to know the difference between pyrite and gold.

Once the stage is set, the following will occur:

"Furgle" the Cyclops has been hiding in plain sight under the cover of a Potion of Invisibility. His constant companion and familiar, "Gizmit" the Imp, can become Invisible at will, and so will be with his master watching the party. This was Gizmit's idea from the start, who released the chicken for the party to find so that his large friend would get angry if the party tried to either take the Cyclop's belongings or killed a chicken. The Imp has also convinced the giant to drink his only Potion of Invisibility (taken from the body of a previous intruder) so as to lay an ambush for the incoming party.

"Furgle" the Cyclops will cast Darkness centred on the middle of his home and walk in. His Devil's Sight will allow him to see in it, but he has the odd flaw of being scared of magical darkness. "Gizmit" can also see within the Darkness, and will always convince his "master" to proceed. This spellcasting will break his Invisibility, but it's Gizmit's plan that the party will not know this as they should be covered in Darkness.

If you wish to insert some dialogue as the combat begins, try something like this:

The entire area becomes an inky black - impervious to torches and even those of you with darkvision. A low voice speaks as if to another (and ham it up to make it sound like an 8 Intelligence) "Now Gizmit?"

A high and scratchy voice retorts back in a hurried and sarcastic fashion. "Yes! Furgel, you dim....I mean...my 'glorious master....' ...now KILL THEM!"

"Oh, okay little buddy. Gizmit smart."

Any player who has a passive perception of 14 or more might hear something over the sound of this dialogue. That sound should be like a rustling all around them and the sound of trees moving quickly. What has happened is that Gizmit has pulled a tripwire that allows nets, previously hidden in the boughs around the ruined walls, connected to the ropes all around the structure, to be cast upwards as the maple suspending the roof is released. This will create a net wall barrier around the entire structure.

Those that are inside the ruin now have a problem. They are inside a low stone wall, in complete Darkness, are surrounded to a further height of 10' on all sides by a net, and have a leather roof blocking the top. Furgle stands outside the structure, his invisible Imp Gizmit on his shoulder, with a pile of boulders ready to be thrown at the first person to try and cut their way through the netting covering the large opening in the wall that the players likely used to enter the structure in the first place. At this point Furgle will clap his hands like a little boy and celebrate.

"Gee, Gizmit. It work! It work!"

"Of COURSE it worked you imbeci.....I mean, 'incredible master'"

Feel free to continually interject this sort of dialogue throughout the encounter.

The players have a few options. They can try to cut through the netting to escape. The netting has an AC:10 and takes 5hp of Slashing damage to cut an exit into it. This will allow one Medium sized creature to exit through a particular hole. They could burn through a hole as well if they choose. They could try to target the ropes or netting with attacks like Fire Bolt or Scorching Ray, which would ignite the netting on a successful hit, but any attacks against the rope have Disadvantage due to the Darkness. Disadvantage versus an AC of 10 isn't much of an issue, but it can certainly set up hilarious critical failures. Should any player fail such an attack, feel free to have Gizmit give them a hard time about it. The players could certainly cast Dispel Magic or Daylight to get rid of the Darkness (at which point have Gizmit reference the "Attack the Darkness" meme). One might Dimension Door to safety (so long as the conditions are met...there certainly is a risk of trying to Dimension Door into an existing tree for 4d6 Force damage), although anyone who wishes to Misty Step to safety will need to have Devil's Sight or some other means to see their destination. (like seeing through the eyes of a tiny Familiar of their own that could sneak outside of the net). Leave such options up to the players to discover, and be open to new ideas.

If the players do not come out of the Darkness for two or more rounds, Gizmit will fly above them and cut the master suspension rope. This will take a couple of rounds. During this time Furgle will threaten as best a simple giant can, and will be very protective of his chickens. If the players harm or threaten to harm his chickens he will lose his temper, and likely his concentration on Darkness. He will then start hurling boulders at the party with absolute fury once the tent has collapsed or a player breaches the netting. Gizmit can always "Help" Furgle in melee by remaining Invisible and harassing the giant's target. This Help action will give Furgle the benefit of Advantage on his attacks versus his melee target. This can be devastating under the right conditions. Gizmit will certainly advise whom the softer targets are - he is, after all, the brains of this outfit. If Gizmit is killed early, Furgle will certainly be confused and his tactics will become far more straight forward and less clever. If Gizmit is still around to advise, Furgle will cast Mirror Image on himself in combat to give himself a better chance.

If things go badly for Furgle, he might try to escape by pushing over smaller trees and such on top of the players and then running for it. He will cast Expeditious Retreat to speed up the process of getting away, or Mirror Image to make it harder for him to be hit. That choice is up to the individual DM. Keep track of Furgle's spell slots. He only has two, and used one to cast Darkness. What he casts next depends on his success or failure, and if he or the party has the advantage in combat. Dodging any tree that is used as a delay will require those within 10' of the cyclops to make a Dexterity save (DC: 15) or take 3d10 Bludgeoning damage and be Restrained until free. Freeing oneself will require a successful Strength/Athletics or Dexterity/Acrobatics check (DC:15). If Furgle can get away, he might become a recurring villain later on...and will always bring up his lost chickens...

Monsters:

"Furgle" - Cyclops/Warlock (3) - As per Monster Manual (page 45) with the following additions:

Warlock, Fiend Pact of the Chain. *Spell selections based on the Cyclops low Charisma and the fact he has difficulty with ranged attacks. Fiend spells are what they are, and are not open to change.*

Invocations: Devil's Sight, Beast Speech (he loves his chickens)

Cantrips: Prestidigitation, True Strike

Spells (2/short rest):

1st level: Burning Hands, Command, Expeditious Retreat, Find Familiar Hex.

2nd level: Blindness/Deafness, Darkness, Mirror Image, Scorching Ray.

"Gizmit" - Imp - as per Monster Manual (p. 76) or PHB (p. 306)

Treasure:

Buried under the ground in the centre of his "home" is a chest (unlocked) filled with the following:

2 Gold engraved bracelets (small humanoid sized) - 25gp each

A collection of 3 ivory chicken statuettes - 250gp each

Masterwork painting of an ugly cyclops woman titled "Mom" - 500gp.

Complications: There are a few complications that could arise from this encounter, but they are all based on who has the upper hand and when. The players may never enter the structure, in which case Furgle might let them pass so long as they do not harm his chickens or take his stuff. Furgle might, on a lucky hit given any Advantage, absolutely decimate softer casters in the party. Anyone foolish enough to cast large area of effect spells like Fireball in the confines of the structure might be interested in learning to calculate the actual volume of such a spell before doing so, as they might turn the broken structure into a short-term oven. Players who start throwing Fire-related spells around in a wooded area might risk Ignition on any miss, starting any number of brush fires. Gizmit won't mind, but I'm sure that Furgle, nearby communities, any Elven or Sylvan communities, and the animals will care. If you choose to make this a realistic possibility, I covered this previously under "Out of the Box #6 - Down on the Farm".

To recap, The DM can optionally roll a D6 every time such an event might occur. A fire of some kind will start 1 chance in 6, which will require actions by the players to stop. How they do it is up to the players and DM to resolve, but a successful Survival or Nature check (DC: 12) might do the trick.

A chicken on fire running around the woods setting everything alight might sound morbidly funny, but it becomes less so when the players are surrounded by a burning inferno.

Gizmit just sees it as an opportunity to expand some contracts...

Backstabber

Introduction: Many starting DMs struggle with how to make a new monster not already in an existing reference manual. The general advice is almost always “just re-skin it.” That can be tricky when that new monster doesn’t really fit into one category or another. So, in an effort to assist starting DMs, here’s an example of an encounter which blends aspects of two different “monsters” to create a new encounter to keep new and experienced players off guard.

In this example, we take part of the mechanics of “Swarm of Insects” (page 338, Monster Manual) and blend them with “Flying Sword” (page 20, Monster Manual) to create an animated Swarm of Daggers. This new “monster” will mimic some of the aspects of both entries, creating a monster that is neither one entirely.

The key to something like this is to pick two creatures of relatively the same Challenge Rating. It’s also important to remember that when doing this you do not unnecessarily ramp up or tune down the new creature’s abilities without some consideration first. You could, for instance, just create a Swarm of Swords, but this would significantly up the damage potential and thus the Challenge Rating. In this case, we’re trying to make this a new encounter for starting characters, and thus we’re going with Daggers instead.

The second step in generating a fresh encounter with a blended monster is to place it in the correct setting and in a way that will take experienced characters off guard. I’m a big fan of altering perceptions or challenging preconceptions, so creating something like this is key to establishing those preconditions where change is possible. A Swarm of Daggers might very well mimic the appearance of a “Cloud of Daggers” spell (PHB, page 222), so immediately experienced players will start looking for a spell caster who might be concentrating on this spell. Imagining the look on their faces when the “cloud” starts to move toward them...

Now, a single Swarm might not be much of an encounter, so we’re going to add a trap as well. To make things fun, we’re going to make that a pit that moves magically and randomly. This will blend a CR 1/4 with a CR 1/2 and then adds a minor Trap to take that CR closer to a full total of 1. Even if this CR is still a little low, it will accomplish two things:

First, it will establish that things might be a little different from here on in.

Secondly, it will demonstrate that even encounters below a party’s level not be something to take for granted.

Can you tell I come from a tradition where “Funhouse dungeons” were the norm?

Environment: **Dungeon.**

Suggested level: **1-2**

Description: The players, in their efforts to explore the confines of a dusty dungeon or crypt will come upon a square room, 30’ on a side and with a 10’ ceiling. A passageway opens on the far side and two closed doors are in the centre of each wall to your left and to your right. The doorway behind you spills into the center of the near wall and is exactly across from the open passage beyond.

Two things of note are evident.

A cloud of spinning, whirling daggers flies and darts in the dark opening to the passage across from you. They dart and twirl in this shadow like hungry mosquitos in the shade of a tree in the summer sun.

In the very centre of the floor in front of you is a full 10’x10’ square pit or shaft - from your current angle it’s hard to see the bottom. The inside walls appear to be painted in yellow and black stripes for some unknown reason.

Once all the members of the adventuring group are within the room, the entry door will slam shut and lock. For those willing to pick the door lock, it requires a DC:15 and proficiency in Thieve’s Tools. For a solution with less finesse, the door has an AC:15, Resistance to Piercing and Cold damage, and takes 18hp of damage to destroy. That’s just in case they choose not to move forward and deal with this room. Refusal is just one of those things a DM has to deal with.

For those who are in the room, the following event unfolds.

The pit will then move, as if by magic, like somehow the stone round it were malleable and the opening of the pit could slide from square to square. The players, at this point, should roll initiative. The pit will act on initiative count 15. The Daggers will act on 14.

On every turn where the Pit will act, roll a die. Initially, roll 1d8 and count clockwise around the pit, starting at the front facing the players. The Pit will move into that 10'x10' square. If the Pit moves into a square against a flat wall, the next time it moves, roll 1d6, ignoring and re-rolling 6s, determining the 10'x10' it moves as before. If the Pit ends in a corner, roll 1d3 (a d6, but you count 1-2 as 1, 3-4 as 2, and 5-6 as 3), and use the same method.

If the pit moves into a square where one or more player characters are, they must roll a Dexterity (DC: 13) saving throw or fall in, taking 1d6 Bludgeoning damage. Of course, standard rules for jumping over a 10' Pit apply, but the players should be careful not to jump where a Pit might move.

The Swarm of Daggers will attack a random character in the room, unless someone tries to escape the room. In that case, the Swarm of Daggers will attack the first person trying to escape the room, even if it means changing opponents or risking an attack of opportunity.

Combat will ensue thusly until one of two conditions are met - the Swarm is destroyed or everyone escapes the room. If the Swarm is destroyed while all characters are in the room, the Pit will cease to move and remain in it's current square. If everyone escapes the room and the Swarm is not destroyed, it will return to it's original place and the Pit will return to the center of the room. Re-entering the room will begin the entire event again. Unless the Swarm of Daggers has been reduced to 0 hp (and therefore destroyed), it will reform to full hit points at the dawn of the next day.

Monsters: **Swarm of Daggers** - Use Swarm of Insects as a base. Use the Attributes and hit points of the Swarm, but give it the AC, move, damage immunities, condition immunities, senses, and languages of Flying Sword. It's monster type and size will be "Medium swarm of Tiny constructs, unaligned"

"Swarm of Insects - page 338 of the Monster Manual

"Flying Sword" - page 20 of the Monster Manual.

Treasure: **None (not every encounter needs treasure. Sad but true)**

Complications: The greatest complication of this would be the potential lethality of this encounter at lower levels. Reducing the Swarm to at least 50% hit points to reduce it's damage, as well as avoiding the pit are essential. This is the sort of task, especially at lower levels, that will either make or break a party. Groups that work well together and stay focussed will succeed early on, whereas a group that tends to spit up and run around will likely suffer one or two casualties at least. A DM should not be disheartened by this. Sometimes a player needs a bloody nose to realize the adventuring world is a dangerous place - and that's okay. They will become smarter for it, or will become really good at rolling characters.

Hopefully this style of "some from column A, and some from column B" encounter building will inspire creativity in both the DM and the players. Good luck!

Fibble's Fantastic Familiars

Introduction: Okay, DMs, how many times have your players asked you about familiars and other companions? A DM who has at least one Wizard or Warlock (Pact of the Chain) in the group will likely display how fun this relationship can be, and that may lead to a desire for others to have their own “little friend”. Some will want one for colour or roleplaying. Some will want one for the power it gives for scouting and “Help” actions. Some will want one out of sheer envy. Players are all different.

Furthermore, despite any plot hooks that you might think are obvious, or some clear indications that the players should take on a task or head in a specific direction...they will still seek out something that they WANT. Feel free to jump on this opportunity as a way to create new encounters, plot threads, and campaigns. No player will be able to honestly or fully shrug off any culpability in any events which spawn from their agency...if and only if...you allow the story to follow their direction.

To that end, you might even wish to take a page from Harry Potter and have a district in a larger community filled with places like this, along with potion apothecaries, arcane focus dealers, and material component “spice markets”. Even in a lower-magic setting, so long as you have no “magic item dealers”, you could run such establishments in their own section. They might even come with their own social stigma or, more likely, their own array of con men and fakery salesmen who would more than gladly pawn off their junk as “magical”.

You may even wish to make some of these vendors transient. They would take their wares from town to town like the “snake oil salesmen” of our own glorious past. Imagine mixing fake magic trinkets with actual oddities (perhaps from either the Trinkets or Gothic Trinkets tables) as the make up of their wagon-bound inventories.

The options here, really, are truly endless.

In this specific case, we address Fibble and his Fantastic Familiar shop.

Environment: Town/Village/City/Roadside wagon

Suggested level: Any

Description: With regard to this specific encounter, the player characters are within a town, village or city that allows for a shop of oddities. Nestled in this section, a simple wooden-faced shop front exists with wooden shuttered windows painted with stylized pictures of small animal companions. The shutters are closed and the door to the inside is also closed. Above this simple wooden door hangs a sign painted in peeling bright blue with a stylized black cat upon it. Painted in yellow upon the door is “Fibble’s Fantastic Familiars”.

Knocking on the door will bring a verbal response in a high-pitched squeaky voice. “Come in! Come in! HEY! Get back here! (insert sound of commotion)” Should the players open the door, this is the visual that will greet them.

Inside this dust filled shop, the players will enter into a roughly 8’x15’ customer area, blocked by a 3’ high wooden counter to a larger area beyond blocked by a curtain. Upon the counter is a large glass jar with some sand and twigs, in which resides a large fist-sized black beetle. Another jar, ceramic and opaque, has black painted letters indicating “familiar treats”.

A voice issues from behind the curtain. “Be there is a moment!”, followed the sound of the sound of a bucket being knocked over, a ceramic object breaking, and a chicken clucking loudly. Immediately thereafter, a face will poke out from a split in the middle of the curtain and will greet the players with a large toothy grin. A scrawny human male, no taller than 5’, wearing broken spectacles and with graying black hair pulled back into a tight ponytail will smile broadly and nervously, all the while holding the curtain closed.

“Busy day, busy day....(nervous laugh)...so, what can Fibble do for such fine folks as you?”

What happens from here will be up to the players. Fibble claims to run a shop that sells only the finest animal companions to those seeking something unusual. To that end, he may or may not, but will always upsell everything in his shop. Here are some examples of that:

The Beetle on the counter is actually just a beetle. Large, well fed, and imposing, but just a beetle. He will sell it as a rare and unusual specimen rumoured to actually be a dragon under a polymorph spell. A victim, you might say, to punitive and powerful adventurers. He keeps this specimen on the counter in open view as the former dragon was also rumoured to be quite vain, and would love to be viewed by it's victims and captives. Fibble will then say that he hops that the dragon will take this public display into account when it finally breaks free and will be merciful upon Fibble if and when the spell breaks.

Behind the curtain, there is a larger 15' wide by 10' deep storage area filled with crates and cages containing the following for sale, which will all be upsold with a tale:

A black cat named "Nexus". Fibble will claim that this cat is actually the former property of a Hag named Agatha Blacktooth, who was allegedly slain at least a decade ago. The cat survived the fireball that killed her, and Fibble has not been willing to test what the cat actually is for fear of demonic retribution. The cat has a habit of staring unblinkingly at all who sleep as if planning something. He will suggest that it may be a great way to buy favour from any Hags they know, as a Hag may appreciate property that's been returned. "Anything to prevent being turned into a frog", he'll claim. The base price for this cat will be 25gp. Alter that price +/- up to half based on negotiations.

A chicken, panicked and constantly making noise. It's cage is covered in discarded feathers. Fibble will claim that this chicken was sold to him by a farmer. A cattle farmer. That had no chickens... This farmer's wife went missing one night, and the farmer (apparently named "Frederick") brought this chicken into his shop in a strange, almost controlled state (Fibble will claim). If Fibble remembers correctly, this chicken is actually not the wife, but the milkmaid taken on by the farmer whom the wife claimed was having..."relations"...with her husband. The wife, in her rage, called out to diabolic forces and the milkmaid was cursed to be a chicken. The farmer and the wife have since gone missing, but the milkmaid's beauty was reputed to be near angelic. She might be grateful to her rescuer. The base price for this chicken will be 20gp. Alter that price +/- up to half based on negotiations.

A spider in a small glass jar. The jar is wrapped in chains and carries a heavy padlock. Fibble will claim that this is no spider, but actually a demon. The demon took this form to escape judgement by its pursuers. He would gladly sell this spider at a bargain price if the party would promise not to release it inside the town border. The base price for this spider will be 50gp. Alter that price +/- up to half based on negotiations.

A raven that has free reign to fly about the place but never tries to leave the shop. This Raven, whom Fibble calls "Edgar", is trained to speak several words and phrases and also will start to mimic the players if they stay here long enough. "Edgar" has a habit of crying out "watch out" or "be careful" when it's dramatically appropriate. It's unknown if this is a repeat of something Fibble has said or something a wise customer has claimed. Fibble will avoid discussing a price on this Raven and will not divulge why. If pressed, everything is for sale, but Fibble will at least make it look like he's losing out by selling Edgar at all. The base price for this raven will be 100gp. Alter that price +/- up to half based on negotiations.

There's an empty cage that, when discovered by either Fibble or the players, will make Fibble become agitated. He'll claim that..."it LOOKS like a Rat...but that's what they ALL look like." He'll take up his broom and encourage the players not to enter any sewers for the next little while. If pressed, he might claim that he's had problem with shape-shifters in the past and having one of their kind in captivity kept him safe for a while.

Lastly there's a wooden box, approximately 3' cubed, covered in a black sheet. If they remove the sheet it will prove to have some small 1/2" diameter air holes in each side. Fibble will avoid this box when possible. He will tell the players that this box is only for the most powerful of adventurers, and not to be taken lightly. When pressed about this box, his normally confident and social air will chill, and he will become very serious. He will tell them that this box contains a powerful familiar for only the most bold and has to be won, not earned. It was sold to him by travellers from the far side of the realm and has cost him no small amount of other potential familiars and companions, but fears releasing it unless the buyer is truly strong and capable. Negotiations for this creature will only begin if a player offers a good price of 50gp or more. A Successful Persuasion (DC: 15) check will allow such a negotiation to begin. The players will have to win his trust to begin this sort of process, and a Persuasion check is reasonable.

This last box actually contains a Gazer. The Gazer can actually see through multiple air holes, and creates havoc in the shop, so Fibble tends to keep the box draped so that it reduces the damage done by this beholder. Lanoosh, the Gazer, wants nothing more than to be released and generate as much carnage in this shop as possible. Fibble knows this. If a player wishes to purchase this Gazer, Fibble will want a great price, but will be more willing to let it go.

Here's the catch. Fibble will want this creature sold without releasing it from the box. He will claim that it's too dangerous to be released inside the confines of the shop. The Gazer, however, will have other ideas. From inside the box, the players will hear this creature mimicking Fibble in a very high pitched and sarcastic way. This should be a great way to inject humour and basically make the players distrust Fibble's warnings of how dangerous this creature is.

This will result in one of two things:

The Gazer is released inside the shop. - "Lanoosh" will get out. He's a beholder the size of a basketball, a faded purple/pink in colour with four tiny eyestalks. Each eye is black with a white iris and the entire creature looks like it's covered in smooth and shiny satin. It's singular central eye sits above a wide mouth filled with human-like teeth; likely part of the reason it's so good in mimicking Fibble.

The Gazer will go on a rampage and will target the other small beasts of the shop with it's fury. This can only be prevented by either killing/incapacitating the Gazer or by being brought under the control of a spellcaster of 3rd level or higher. This control can be through some sort of social contest initiated by the player with a relatively high DC (say like a 17 or so) or by some means like a *Suggestion* spell (Dm's judgement).

The Gazer is released outside the shop - This will be the bane of any small animals, pets, other familiars, and children. Lanoosh will dart about the community creating chaos in his wake, as he punishes everyone and everything for his captivity. This can be brought to an end in the same way as inside the shop. Doing so quickly will likely reduce the ire of the public at large.

If Lanoosh can be won over by the right person, it can and will serve as a familiar. (see Gazer, Volo's, page 126)

If Lanoosh is successfully sold and/or released outside the shop, Fibble will lock up for the day immediately after the players leave and the door will magically add "CLOSED" in large red-painted letters. The Door will have an *Arcane Lock* with a DC of 15 for the purposes of picking it or knowing it down. If the players all move their attention to the box, it's contents, or anything else for more than a few rounds, feel free to have the very building that Fibble worked out of take on a completely different identity - as if the shop took over that space magically and is now gone elsewhere.

Monsters:

Fibble - Use "Commoner" with the following changes: Intelligence 14, Charisma 16, Expertise : Persuasion, Deception. skills: Persuasion +7, Deception +7.

"Lanoosh" Gazer - See Volo's Guide to Monsters, page 126.

The other beasts are up to the DM. They are either their mundane counterparts in the Monster Manual with 1 hp each, or they are actually what Fibble claims. That's up to the individual DM in question and the plot hooks associated therein.

Treasure:

That depends on the DM in question and whether or not Lanoosh is won over. The players may have a transformed beast of supernatural origin with a great back story, a mundane creature that they have been bilked out of honest coin for, or a brand new Gazer familiar. That's truly the DM's choice.

Complications: Again, this is dependant upon a lot of aspects. Lanoosh might destroy a pet store. Lanoosh might create no end of havoc in whatever community this shop is in, followed by it's fair amount

of angry villagers, pitchforks, torches and the like.

Or, based on the DM 's whim, one or more of Fibble's claims might be true, even unknowingly. There might actually be transformed dragons, damsels, and the like. There might actually be demons and misplaced familiars of Hags in play. This all depends on the DM in question and if he wants a charlatan or a magical salesman in play.

Furthermore, Fibble could be a constant arrival in towns, villages, and market squares. Fibble could have ripped off the players or sold them an angry Gazer only to try and pul the same sort of thing again with someone else - and the players have to show up and clean up after him.

Fibble could be even more than he seems. Fibble himself could be a Fey/Archfey, a wandering Fiend, Djinn or other creature that seeks to create chaos for his own pleasure and amusement.

The whole menu is open to the DM and how far they want to take this sort of encounter.

The Beast of Bellard

Introduction: This game is filled with a lot of preconceptions. Monsters are viewed, many times, in a singular way. Orcs are savages. Goblins are cowards. Trolls are unintelligent brutes, and the only way to beat them is with fire or acid.

This is a product of the long history of D&D. This game has a lot of back story based in player and DM experience, and has influenced movies, novels, games, and pop culture since it's inception. That is both good and bad. It's good to know that your fave hobby has had such an impact, but it's bad when the preconceptions become not only the norm, but expected. That removes the magic of discovery that we experienced players envy in the most nostalgic way when we see a new player discover something we've seen a thousand times. We look at that new player with it's sense of wonder and miss that feeling.

This line of encounters, I hope, breaks some preconceptions from time to time and gives the experienced player that refreshing feeling of having their experiences turned on it's ear - if only to have that "eureka" moment one more time.

To do this, it's important to not only be willing to take things in new directions, but read the fine print. Be willing to give your monsters the benefit of the doubt, give them souls and thoughts and wants. Make them "someone", not just "something". When you do that, the world is your oyster. The side effect of this may well be that you end up creating a series of great side-villains that can show up from time to time and give your players that same feeling that comic book readers get when they see that "The Vulture", "The Riddler" or "Price Robot" are up to no good again. It makes them feel more like heros because they start to develop their own rogues gallery of enemies.

This encounter, then, takes one of those monster tropes, reads the fine print, gives the monster a motivation, and generates a villain that may or may not return - perhaps different than the last time - all depending on the actions of the DM or players in question.

In this case, we use the much-used and stereotyped Troll. This monster is almost always seen as the idiotic cannibalistic savage that only stops when someone holds a torch. We now ask the old question "what if". The fine print under "Troll Freaks" refers to mutations brought on by what a Troll eats. That made of think of the villain "Sylar" from the "Heroes" TV series. What if a Troll ate something and mutated in a positive way? What if that Troll gained some measure of intelligence or understanding of what just happened...and wants more? Now you have a villain who, like the player characters, gains a story arc, a motivation, and may or may not increase in power level (again, based on DM and player actions). That makes an already dangerous foe in a basic melee sense a MUCH more dangerous foe in an overall sense. This troll may seek to feast upon creatures, other monsters, NPCs, or even the players to try an inspire a new and positive mutation that increases it's power.

More specifically, this Troll is the Beast of Bellard. He has already consumed one or two creatures in his ongoing life experiment, so when the players encounter him, he'll already be something more than the standard Troll. Now, despite this being called the Beast of Bellard, there will not be any reference to a community of Bellard. This in an encounter. Now a town. Feel free to make this The Beast of Your Town, wherever that town or village may be. That's the beauty of this encounter. This Troll could have any number or variety of mutations and locations - all based on the Dm's needs. For this encounter, we'll give the Troll two creature-based mutations that are not only plausible, but capable of making this Troll a handful. The Beast has fought, defeated and eaten an Ettin for control of this territory. Now he has two heads. The Beast also cleared out a ruin of Hobgoblins, killing an eating many including a Captain. Now he's not only two-headed, but smarter than the average Troll. This, arguably, is the Troll's greatest score to date. The Beast now not only gains greater self-awareness, but ambition and some tactical sense.

Environment: Forested hills

Suggested level: 5-7 (Potentially higher given the number of mutations)

Description: In an effort to assist the beleaguered citizens of Bellard (or other community of the DM's choice), the players have undergone a search of the surrounding hills and forests. The mixed woodlands of hard and softwoods have not been harvested by woodsmen for fear of the Beast for some time now. Undergrowth has begun to choke the spaces between the larger trees, making passage difficult. The canopy of ash and poplar, mixed with spruce and fir cast a near constant shade throughout. Crows and ravens fill the canopy with echoing caws and blackflies pester the ground life with itching bites.

Despite success in finding some of the traces of what would be a wandering beast of some kind (animal carcasses, dung, broken branches and other traces) the Beast has avoided capture at this point. It has so far avoided being successfully tracked by local hunters by sticking to the trees. The Beast's long arms and strong grip, combined with newfound cunning from some recent victims, have facilitated a completely new hunting dynamic. Some unwary hunters who have braved the woods in search of the creature have been grabbed from the above and turned into a screaming meal high above the ground. The bones and clothes were discarded below in an attempt to throw off any future attempts to ascertain its methods.

Movement through the woods is considered Difficult Terrain. Certain Rangers and magical methods can overcome this. The specifics of those methods are widely varied, so it's up to the individual player and DM to resolve this issue. For those who insist on trying to track the Beast, feel free to allow Survival rolls. Keep track of time while doing this. The result of that Survival roll depends on how high they roll. They will make one Survival roll every ten minutes of movement through the woodlands.

- DC: 15 A pile of broken and gnawed bones covered in ants. 50% wild animal, 25% domestic animal, 25% human.
- DC: 17 Small scraps or rags of clothes hanging from a high (6'-10' from the ground) branch.
- DC: 20 Smaller branches in the higher canopy (20'-30') have been sheared off.
- DC: 25 Claw marks high in the canopy.

The character(s) using Survival will need a minimum of three successes of 20 or higher to close in on The Beast. Optionally, you may wish to allow six successes of 17 or higher to perform the same feat. Furthermore, if any tracking character voluntarily realizes or suggests looking upward into the trees above, allow them to gain the benefits of the results from the next bracket above (example, making a DC:17 grants the benefit of a DC: 20 and so on.)

It's important to note that, for every ten minutes the players spend tracking, roll 1d20. On a 20 the Beast will become aware of the characters, modified as follows:

- +2 Each character moving through the woods in metal armor.
- +2 Each character singing, yelling or performing other loud action
- +4 Any character has an active torch, lantern, is smoking a pipe, or otherwise generates smoke or light.
- +1 Any one character is below half hit points (The Beast can smell blood easily).

If the Beast of Bellard becomes aware of the players, he cannot be surprised. He will seek out the players and attempt to ambush them. Given that he will be attacking from above, he will have Advantage on his Stealth check. To determine if he has surprise, compare the players' Passive Perception to the Beast's Stealth result.

The creature will attack with cunning, and will not attack the obviously biggest foe. He has learned that what he eats may affect a future mutation. That means he may want to select prey that look differently than the humans he has been eating. It's motivation is not only survival, but gaining power and future mutations, so grabbing a target that is not only different, but special in some way is key. If a character displays some special feature like spellcasting or other unique abilities, he might choose them. If no one shows obvious spellcasting, but looks unusual and non-human, he may go for them in the hopes of triggering some unknown mutation. Something, it will think, is always better than nothing.

However, it should always be noted that The Beast also has a newfound self-awareness and value for its

own life. Should the beast be brought to 50% hit points and is still outnumbered, it will attempt to escape into the trees. This may trigger one or more opportunity attacks, but it would rather survive, regenerate, and return later when recovered.

The Beast will continue this trend until it either collects it's desired prey or the player characters successfully kill it. If he can Grapple and carry off a smaller character, he will.

The overall effect of this hit-and-run war of attrition should be one of tension. The player characters should realize that they're not up against a standard Troll, if only because it has two heads and a climbing speed. Consider movies like "Predator" and "Surviving The Game" to give the players the right "feel" for being hunted and watched. Keep the idea of "Sylar" from "Heroes" in mind when thinking of The Beast.

Monsters:

- **"The Beast" - Use Troll** (Monster Manual page 291) as the base for the creature
The Beast will have all the aspects of the Troll for AC, Hit points, STR, DEX, CON, CHA, attacks, Keen Smell and Regeneration. And of course Speed 30'
- Use **Ettin** (Monster Manual page 132) for the following: Skills (Perception +4), Senses (Passive Perception), Two Heads, Wakeful
- Use **Hobgoblin Captain** for INT, WIS.
- Add Climbing Speed 30'
- Depending on if The Beast has one arm occupied, you can optionally swap one of the two Claw attacks for an additional Bite attack from the second head.

Treasure:

Sometimes survival is it's own treasure.

Complications: This encounter involves two aspects that can create issues: resource attrition and party separation. Resource depletion can be a serious problem when the foe you're fighting can avoid the terrain, comes with it's own weapons, and regenerates. The Beast's hit-and-run tactic works well for it, especially in this sort of terrain. The players will need to manage their resources in ammunition, healing, spells, and even hit points.

Furthermore, the DM may wish to consider the very real possibility of a smaller character like a Gnome being carried off, or spellcasting Elf character being killed and carried off. The Beast may develop a taste for someone special who evaded his capture, and the Beast will then ghost that character like the Crocodile in Peter Pan. This may create a new reoccurring villain for that one character or even the whole party. The Beast may take it upon himself to track and devour friends, allies or relatives of this character to lure them into the open, or may take on a new obsession for a tastier and stranger fare in hopes of developing new mutations.

Left alone, there's no reason why The Beast may take on further mutations making his CR climb even higher. Left too long, you may end up with an arch-villain who can challenge them much later in their careers. This is entirely up to the DM in question.

Old Yeller

Introduction: Monster synergy. It's something you do not hear all that much. Surely we all know that different goblinoids will work together, or that some creatures like Ettins and Ogres will work others for the right bribe. However, when it comes to some, they are generally overlooked except in the most obvious cases. We have seen lesser animated undead like Skeletons or Zombies work with each other or the creature that animated them - but not with something equally mindless.

Way back when I first started playing D&D, what are considered "Dungeon Hazards" were considered monsters. Green Slime, Yellow Mold, and other colony-based micro organisms were part of the Monster Manual and added to "Wandering Monsters" in that you could stumble into a growth of them while walking about. Organisms like these can prove deadly, but lack the ability to move on their own. That doesn't prevent them from growing on something that can provided that it could be a viable host and not be affected by the nature of the fungus or algae. It is entirely plausible that Zombies could be overgrown with Yellow Mold, just as Volo's has re-introduced Russet Mold and it's life cycle.

The trick would be explaining and delivering this encounter in a way that would be both unpredictable and believable.

Environment: Dungeon

Suggested level: 3+ (Scalable by adding more Zombies)

Description: Entering this large, circular chamber, you are immediately struck by the beam of what may be sunlight shining straight down from the centre of the apex of the domed roof. It's beautiful and haunting light showcases the central feature of the room - a tall circular dais at least eight feet tall. The bottom of this feature must be at least 10' in diameter, getting progressively smaller on each of it's four steps to support an ornately carved chair or throne above the floor. Upon it sits a lone figure, gaunt and skeletal - it's mouth agape with it's head tilted to one side.

It's empty eye holes stare at you while something shiny in it's forehead glints and sparkles in the light. The smell of mildew hangs heavy and sour in the air. The darkness of the surrounding chamber possesses highlights of a faint yellow in spots around the outer regions which might be faded mosaics, subterranean fungi, or maybe even the remains of grime covered gilding. One cannot say for sure in the darkness.

In reality, there's a story unfolding before the players without their knowledge. The dais itself is ornately carved with tiny figures of humanoid figures in gaunt and skeletal form holding up the step above them. These figures (Religion or Investigation, DC: 15) represent worshippers of Orcus. The figure atop the dais is the remains of a former Wight. One could arrive at this discovery only through a successful Intelligence/Arcana, Intelligence/Religion or Intelligence/Investigation DC:15 check. It's forehead is still pierced by the silvered dagger that killed him. His figure is still adorned by the tattered remains of rusted metal armour and ruined weapons he once wore. Aside from the silvered dagger, he possesses nothing of value.

Stationed equidistant around the outside of the room, against the wall in the dim light, are 8 Zombie servants. These servants are in tattered and destroyed ceremonial garb of an ancient religion. The moisture and darkness have allowed spores of yellow mold, likely carried from other regions in the dungeon, to flourish. Now each Zombie servitor is covered in these deadly fungal spores. The yellowish patches that they are standing in are temporarily inert, having already covered the Zombies themselves in the deadly spores, but the patches that cover these undead are still active and capable of delivering their deadly burst.

As the characters enter the room, the undead will remain motionless. They will activate if attacked, approached, or if any character approaches the dais. The Zombies will behave as normal, with the following exception: The first time any Zombie is struck with a weapon, the Yellow Mold colony growing on it will burst spores in a 10' diameter sphere. Those caught in a burst will require a Constitution (DC: 15) saving throw or take 2d10 Poison damage and become Poisoned for 1 minute.

While poisoned this way, the Poisoned target will take a further 1d10 Poison damage at the start of each of its turns. However, a Poisoned target can roll another Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns. A successful save ends the condition.

A character can choose to retreat to the dais or remain on the dais when attacked. Should any character be attacked in melee by a Zombie while on the dais, the sunlight will both kill a Yellow Mold patch on a Zombie while it's in the sunlight and neutralize any spores burst into it. The sunlight does not end a Poisoned condition nor stop or reduce an already infected character, as the spores are now internal.

Monsters: **Zombies (8)** - As per Monster manual, page 316
 Yellow Mold (8 patches, one on each Zombie) - DMG, page 105

Treasure: None, save one Silvered Dagger

Complications: The greatest danger is if a character gets hit by multiple bursts of Yellow Mold at once. The damage can really add up in a hurry. If the DM is truly concerned about how much damage overlay might occur, then the DM can feel free to reduce the number of infected Zombies. Note, of course, that the Zombies are immune to both Poison and the Poisoned conditions, so the Yellow Mold has no effect on them at all. The encounter could be further down-scaled by changing the Zombies to Skeletons, or upgraded by applying the Zombie template to a larger monster or even use Zombie Ogres. Use care when considering up or down scaling.

Gang of One

Introduction: How many times have you, as DM, heard this phrase: “Wait, a (insert monster)? In (insert environment)? Don’t they normally occur in (insert different environment)?” How many times has THAT been a headache? Well, this Out of The Box addresses that sort of dilemma. True, many random encounter generators, whether digital or printed, separate the reasonably possible creatures into the environs that they should be expected in. However, the DM may wish to use a creature because they may never have tried a new one, or find the list of possible encounters uninspiring.

The simple solution is to re-skin a creature in such a way as to MAKE it plausible. If real world species have variants that occur in strikingly different climates, then why not fantasy creatures? If foxes could have species variants ranging from the arctic to dry deserts, and we already know that D&D dragons have VERY specific sub-species for different environs, then applying that same logic to other monsters might be not only possible, but opens up an entirely new toolbox for a DM to use.

Building on both of those concepts, I intend to use the Chimera as the basis, but will be placing it in an environment that it is not native to. Then, we’ll either swap or re-skin the heads so that it is actually thematic with the terrain as well as believable. Taking lessons from our own world, the Chimera’s “lion” head will now be a Siberian Tiger, and the Ram will be that of a Mountain Goat. The dragon’s head is the easiest to change. We simply change the Red Dragon head to a White Dragon head, and therefore change the breath damage from Fire to Cold, and the saving throw from Dexterity-based to Constitution.

Now we have an arctic-based version of a Chimera. Using the same logic, one could create a monster for different climates, including such extremes as aquatic or elemental depending on how much work the DM may wish to put into monster creation or alteration.

All that remains now is to create a motivation for any monster. Chimera are typically proud, greedy and stubborn. They are also not that intellectually gifted...to say the least. This can be quite limiting in the context of usage. Experienced players may know of the Chimera’s intellectual limitations, and coupled with action economy, turn a typical Chimera encounter into a quick exchange of blows to resolve it. The easiest way out for DM to make this less predictable is to increase the monster’s Intelligence score. While this could be explained as an atypical mutation, such explanations have always earned at least one set of rolled eyes in my experience. Magic, then, becomes the next easiest answer. This tactic was used in “Out of The Box #14 - The Argument”, whereby a magic item from a previous edition (Helm of Alignment Change) was applied to one of the two heads of an Ettin to alter behaviour. Whereas that created a possible roleplaying opportunity with the injection of some humour, in the case of the Chimera we seek to make the monster less of a standard encounter and perhaps more of a villain. Playing on the dragon head’s greed, it’s entirely plausible that a magic item like a Headband of Intellect might fall into the “claws” of a Chimera and be taken by the greedy dragon head. This would alter the monster’s outlook in a wholesale manner and would make one head far superior in its ability to direct the actions and schemes of a creature normally subject to infighting. This is in keeping with the trend of turning two-dimensional monsters into something more.

Environment: Arctic

Suggested level: 6

Description: The party trudges through snow and cold on their way to a distant destination. The wind bites where gaps in clothing occur, and snow has begun to fall, making anything at a distance difficult to see. The air is cold and crisp, smelling of ice crystals. The path winds through small hillocks and snow banks, channelling the wind like a snake.

Now, “Dregedag” will try to ambush the party. Given the snowfall, Wisdom(Perception) checks to spot the ambush are at Disadvantage. Dregedag is well camouflaged in this environment and is hidden in a soft snow bank. That makes any Passive Perception check to spot him outright very difficult (DC: 20), and a similar chance to notice anything unusual when actively using Perception.

Bursting from one of these snow banks is a massive white creature. With a roar, it exhales the essence of

the weather upon the group, chilling the first two ranks to the bone. Dregedag will breath a 15' cone upon the first ranks and then take flight into the sky, gaining 60' of altitude for at least two rounds. He'll hope to use his natural colouring along with the snowfall to hide his progress. The Chimera has stashed away several icy boulders in multiple locations that he uses to bomb travellers with. He will return five turns later with an ice boulder he's stashed behind another snow bank. He'll try to drop this among the largest group of them to create havoc and panic. He'll fly by at full speed at a height of 60' and drop this ice boulder among the party. This will require his (random) target(s) to make Dexterity saving throws (DC: 15) or take 2d8 Bludgeoning damage. He'll perform three such passes before descending upon one character. Because he's now far more intelligent, he'll choose a target that is either outlying, injured, or poorly armoured.

Dregedag will then use his breath weapon again. Follow the standard Chimera battle tactics after this, with one exception: Should Dregedag drop to one-third of his hit points (38hp), he will attempt to flee. The Chimera is very proud and will not want to have his territory endangered with a show of weakness. Once he recovers, he'll be back again. The Chimera understands the territory and knows the dangers of the cold - he might wait for a moment of weakness or perhaps the cover of darkness. For hints on how to play him, remember that he still bears the flaws of a Chimera. He may have a much increased intelligence, but he still bears pride, greed, and stubbornness. That may lead to hubris. That's something smart players can exploit.

Monsters: **“Dregedag” - Chimera** - As per Monster Manual, page 39, with the following changes: Dragon head changes to White from Red, changing the breath weapon from Fire to Cold (Constitution DC:15), re-skin the lion to a white tiger, and the ram to a mountain goat. Their attack and damage statistics remain unchanged. Dregedag is white in colour, blending into the arctic terrain. He also wears a Headband of Intellect on the Dragon head, so his Intelligence has increased to 19.

Treasure: ***Headband of Intellect***, as per DMG page 173.

Complications: Softer targets are the preferred prey for this Chimera, so they might be more at risk in this encounter. Tension and surprise are key in this encounter, as is a willingness to capitalize on both the strengths and weaknesses of the monster in question. This combat demonstrates certain actions that I have stated previously should be possible by intelligent flying creatures whom are also strong enough to take advantage of it. DM s should expect that more than one character to raise an eyebrow when creatures act outside of how the Monster Manual might show them. Remember, these entries are “the average or typical” monster for that entry, and not unusual examples like Dregedag. Hopefully, such re-skinning and re-tooling will add flavour and keep experienced players on their toes, while adding new wonder and variety for newer players. Good luck!

Pay to Play

Introduction: Sometimes, you just need to lighten up and have fun. A series of high-tension encounters filled with danger and worry can certainly establish the right tone, but sometimes you just need to laugh or have fun. It is my hope that the following encounter will combine what would normally be dangerous D&D imagery with good old fashioned random fun.

In this case, what we'll do is create a moment or encounter that can be dropped into various settings, whether it's a dungeon, a marketplace, a circus, or randomly appearing in a wilderness setting. The encounter itself is random and unpredictable, so it could logically be placed wherever the DM might think it's fun. It's location is less important than it's purpose - to have random fun and lighten the mood.

Furthermore, to make sure that this has less to do with an overarching issue or have any permanent detrimental effects, we'll make any effects of this encounter temporary - an hour or less. These effects should not severely hamper player characters. The short duration should aid in that aspect. The effects will be randomly generated, and by the players themselves, just to add to the random fun and inject agency and fairness.

Environment: Any (DM's whim)

Suggested level: Any, but it's more appropriate for low to mid levels.

Description: For the purposes of this encounter, we'll place this moment in time in a dungeon to remove outside influences so that we can focus on the encounter itself.

Entering into this 30' cubical chamber, the central feature is immediately evident. A low one-tier circular platform no higher than 1' tall and 5' in diameter is home to a levitating device of the strangest origin. Hovering perhaps 2' above this platform is a 5' diameter spherical construct slowly rotating, revealing a 1' diameter, circular and shuttered portal along it's equator. Atop the sphere rests an oversized jester's cap with four tails. Each tail ends in a white 3" diameter sphere. Each hat tail is painted a separate colour. There is one each of red, yellow, blue, and green.

In scratched and peeling gold paint above the closed porthole, written in common, are the words "Play Your Fate". For those who succeed in either a Wisdom/Perception or Intelligence/Investigation at a DC:10 will notice a small 1" vertical slot next to the porthole. The gold trim which would normally make it visible is worn and faded, making it difficult to spot from any distance. Tiny writing above it, also in Common and equally worn reads "1 gold per play".

If the player characters speak to this odd construct, nothing will happen. In fact, unless one of them puts a coin into the slot (and it doesn't have to be a gold one, in case the specific player is especially "thrifty"), the machine will remain inactive. However, should this one condition be met, things will start to change.

Loud calliope music will start to play, which is able to be heard as far away as 200' under normal conditions. The four tails of the "hat" will start to slowly spin like helicopter blades, but will not move faster than making one rotation every 6 seconds. The shuttered portal will open, revealing a large, metal hand-painted, eyeball. This eyeball will dart around as if to randomly look at each player then look in random locations. This eyeball isn't actually looking at anyone, but feel free to play up when it does, and when it looks past the players at something that may not be there.

So long as the person who put the coin in the slot remains in the room, they will be the target of a random ray from one of the balls at the end of one of the hat tails. The beam of light will match the colour of the hat tail. The player can chose to try and dodge the ray of light. If they do, they will need to succeed a Dexterity saving throw, DC:15. Otherwise, the ray will strike the player character and an effect will occur according to the ray colour that strikes it.

If that person whom placed a coin in the machine leaves the room during the activation or successfully dodges the ray, then the machine will revert to it's inactive state at the end of that turn and will require another coin to start the cycle again.

Should the player who placed the coin in the machine remain in the room and either choose to be struck by it or fails it's save, then consult the table below to determine randomly which ray struck the player character, as well as it's corresponding effect:

- Red:* Increase one random Attribute by +1 (Maximum 20) for 1 hour. Roll 1d6 to determine the Attribute.
- Yellow:* Decrease one random Attribute by -1 (Minimum 3) for 1 hour. Roll 1d6 to determine the Attribute.
- Blue:* Gain +1 to all saving throws for 1 hour. This stacks with current saving throw modifiers.
- Green:* Suffer -1 to all saving throws for 1 hour. This stacks with current saving throw modifiers.

At the end of the duration, the effect of the ray fades. The machine only works for each character once. The rays do not stack with each other. Therefore a character cannot try to get a ray to affect them twice by any means. The machine can detect whom it's affected and will not target the same player character twice. Any attempt to do so will always fail.

If the players come up with the idea to try and break into the machine to see how many coins are in it, the construct has an AC of 19 and 27hp. Should the construct be reduced to 0hp by any means, it will explode. The explosion will cover a 20' radius sphere and will do a total of 6d6 Piercing damage (as small metal fragments fill the room), with a Dexterity saving throw (DC:15) for half. The construct will have contained a total of 50 gold pieces, 25 silver pieces, and 50 copper pieces. These will be scattered about the room by the explosion and will take a full hour to collect among the debris (divided by the number of people collecting....so it would take four people 15 minutes to collect).

Monsters: None

Treasure: A temporary boon is treasure-like, isn't it? And who doesn't like picking shredded coinage out of their hair. I do.

Complications: There are a few complications. Attribute modification's most significant change will be in the alteration of hit points and hit point maximums. This could alter player character fates for the next hour significantly and should be monitored by the DM. It's important to note, though, that this machine in no way unfairly inflicts anything upon a player character - a player character had to place a coin in the machine....mind you spells like Suggestion, Domination and the like could alter this voluntary choice. That's important to note as well. The intent of this encounter was to inject some old school fun house dungeon hilarity into a game setting. That's why the effects are temporary and relatively short-lived. It will mean, however, that the DM should keep an accurate track of time as of the first ray effect's initiation. It may well be the case that the players gain some benefits, want their coins back for some reason, and end up dying in the blast or wasting the duration of the ray collecting coins from the constructs wreckage. Trust me, I know - I've had "those players".

Try to have fun with this in any regard. I hope that it inspires similar randomness at your table to break up what may be some very serious or high-tension moments and remind us all that we are still playing a game.

Shadow of Your Former Self

Introduction: Ask any DM what the most dangerous thing in a D&D game is, and I'll bet that the majority will come back to you with "the players". Players can range in power and abilities more than any monster, and will always find the cracks in any system and crawl through. Players will think outside the box more often than no, and will work around problems you might think they need to face head on. I can remember playing "Zelda: The Ocarina of Time" forever ago, and the most frustrating encounter was fighting a shadow mirror image of yourself.

That being established, perhaps a DM stuck with how to resolve an evening's encounter can pull from this resource without worrying about level requirements, CR, or terrain. All one needs is the right setting.

The one drawback to something like this comes down to the same resource: the players. Some players can be very defensive about their characters and may not be open to sharing character information, or they may worry that their character concept will somehow be violated or disrespected. This is sensitive ground. Tread carefully. However, with their cooperation and agreement, you could use this sort of encounter with rewarding results.

This encounter will require a little bit of preparation. Players may have private information on their character sheets like alignment or secret flaws. You may be able to get the players to more easily cooperate with the mechanics behind this encounter if you respect that privacy. Therefore, you should gather the players character sheets at some point and record publicly know information like ability scores, saves. AC, hit points, hit dice, and a few trademark abilities, attacks or spells. create an alternate character sheet with this limited information and hold it in store for when you need it. When the time is right, you can spring this almost like a trap. Given the fact that this will use refined versions of the player characters themselves as the "monsters", this encounter is also unique in that it could apply to any game system or setting.

Environment: Any

Suggested level: Any, but be careful to scale any damage as appropriate. Remember, "the most dangerous game" is often "Man"...or in this case, the players.

Description: This encounter can be placed anywhere the DM wishes to imagine it, but for the purposes of this encounter, we'll place it in a dungeon environment. It's generic enough that a clever DM could place this encounter into another setting like an art gallery, wizard's inner sanctum, temple, or other appropriate setting.

The players will enter a room, perhaps a 30' cube, with reliefs carved into the walls showing figures in combat. In the very centre of the room, hovering above a three foot tall podium of carved stone is a gem. This gem silently and slowly spins above the podium as if blown by a breeze unfelt by the player characters. The gem itself is massive, perhaps 3 inches in diameter and of an opaque black colour. Each facet reflects the light of any torches or light spells used by the party, reflecting them about the room and filling the chamber with lights that dance over the carved reliefs.

For those interested in the wall carvings, a successful Intelligence/Investigation (DC:14) will reveal that the figures in combat are exact duplicates of each other, right down to whatever weapon, armour, or method of combat.

The podium under which the gem hovers is carved to resemble two faces. One is calm and placid, and the other is very angry.

The gem itself is expertly carved (perhaps the appropriate artisan skill like Jeweler, or a Guild Artisan or Clan Crafter of jewels, or a Rogue from a Thieves Guild expert in jewel thefts), and shows no physical means of remaining aloft. A successful Arcana check (DC: 12) will indicate that some sort of Transmutation is in effect, as well a Detect Magic spell (no DC required). If the Detect Magic is actually cast, it will also reveal that the gem is a source of some sort of Conjunction magic as well.

It's important to ask how the players are examining or investigating the contents of the room. The reason for this is clear: the second anyone touches the gem in any way (including throwing a bag over it), the next

phase of the encounter will begin.

Once anyone touches the gem for any reason, black rays will shoot out and target each person in the room. Every target (player or NPC) will require a successful Charisma saving throw (DC: 17) or have their own shadows rise up to face them.

At this point, the DM will access the abridged character sheets as the “monsters”, each facing their own duplicate. A player that defeats their own duplicate can assist another player with their duplicate, otherwise risking attacks of opportunity from their own duplicate (and perhaps Sneak Attack in the case of a Rogue’s duplicate) by turning their back on their duplicate to face someone else’s prematurely. Each player’s shadow will always attack their host first and foremost above all other targets, disappearing if or when they defeat their host.

Should all the shadow duplicates be defeated, the gem will transform. It’s opaque black nature will clear, as will the magic suspending the gem in place, and the gem will become a normal and non-magical diamond. The evil magic will have flawed the gem, so despite it’s size, it will still retain a value of 2000gp.

Monsters: The player character shadows. This requires preparation as detailed in the introduction of this encounter.

Treasure: Should they players succeed, they will win a large yet flawed gem of 2000 gp value

Complications: Given that the player characters can be their own worst enemies, the concept of defeating the player characters is a real possibility. Also, given how much any player character can do, this encounter will require a lot of preparation on the part of the DM in creating the player character shadows, as a DM will want to trim down the number of spells or abilities to a few key and easy to run abilities that make each player character distinctive, yet easier to run.

The players may well walk away from this encounter with an increased respect for their own abilities, and perhaps a newfound understanding of what the DM faces every time they pull out an encounter to challenge the player characters.

Smells Fishy

Introduction: I once found a free adventure online that delved into a concept that D&D has often covered, but essentially in reverse. We have seen Underdark versions of several surface races. Duergar, Derro, Drow, Svirfneblin, etc., have all been a part of D&D for decades, and the public has accepted them as part of the D&D canon. It's often the case whereby we will take any number of surface races and apply this non-specific "Underdark template" to these races. However, this online adventure did one thing that has been, at least to my experience, never been done before - it turned that concept around in 180 degrees. It had surface, swamp dwelling Kuo-Toa. Perhaps this is due to a particular and very popular MMORPG that shall remain unnamed in this article.

This was a concept that immediately struck a cord with me, as it opened up an entire selection of races and creatures that needed only slight modification to exist in another terrain. It was simple yet brilliant. Even with that door opened, the concept of surface Kuo Toa still stuck with me, and made their way into my steampunk, island-jumping, ship-based adventure. Using the chaotic-yet-ever-present Kuo-Toan tradition for affecting transformation through acts of their mad faith, I inserted a Kuo-Toan Paladin of one of one of the player characters. This was something that I also drew from the Monty Python classic, "The Life of Brian". I used the concept of an accidental "messiah", threw in the Kuo-Toan transformative ability based on their cult-like belief, and created an NPC who would be that player characters' "head of the faith" wherever they might roam. This Kuo-Toan would garble their praises to all how would tolerate it, bringing humour to normally serious encounters as well as adding personnel to an otherwise thin party roster. All it took was two simple changes. The surface Kuo-Toans lost the 120' darkvision in favour of 60' darkvision, and therefore lost Sunlight Sensitivity in the balance. Done. A new race was added.

With regard to the rest of this encounter and how it should scale, we'll do something a little different. Instead of measuring the difficulty by the level of the group, we'll do it based on the number of players in the group. Typically this sort of encounter should be at lower levels, so we'll factor that in as an "obvious" thing. Most player characters can individually crank out a certain amount of damage, and given that this encounter can repeat in a certain way (see below), making it deadly would defeat its entertainment value.

Environment: Wilderness/Swamp

Suggested level: Any, but should be 3+

Description: For the purposes of this encounter, we'll keep the theme swampish, just to make the scenario more "believable". This will give a reasonable location for this surface Kuo-Toan (which should be enough to raise an eyebrow for any experienced player), as well as utilize a common surface terrain that can be commonly experienced by travelling bands of adventurers.

The player characters will be travelling down a winding path through twisted alder bushes, nettles, and swampy pools. The sound of insects, the smell of stagnant marshy water, and the sour scent of algae, milkweed and broken thrushes fills the air. Alders twist into the path, creating annoying tangles in gear and lashing at open skin every time the thin, springy branches are bent and not constrained. Mosquitos whine in ears and sneak into gaps in clothing and armour to deliver itchy bites. The entire experience is unpleasant and strains the patience of even the most level-headed of compatriots.

Suddenly breaking the drudgery of swamp travel are the odd screams and shouts of alarm from beyond the next copse of alders. When the player characters break through this tangle, they will witness the following:

The alders, thrushes and swamp grass open up in a small, circular clearing. That clearing houses a strange pantomime of alarm. A five foot tall humanoid fish-man runs about the clearing. It shouts with its arms flailing above its head in alarm, running about in wild patterns. It's being pursued relentlessly by a translucent creature. This creature appears as a large mouth ringed with jagged yellow teeth, perhaps five foot in diameter, with wriggling black tentacles swirling about in an aggressive fashion. A large tongue darts out from the maw of this creature, dripping with saliva. Despite having no visible eyes, the creature seems to chase the fish-man with unerring precision about the clearing, only being just being evaded.

At first, the fish humanoid takes no notice of the party. A successful Wisdom (Insight) check (DC:10) will reveal the slightly obvious fact that this creature is obviously in fear.

The fish man, it's scaled skin glistening a bright green striped with black, has bright red eyes rimmed in yellow. It's simple tribal garb is fashioned in leather and wicker. What looks like a flat wooden club rimmed with jagged pieces of black stone or glass lays in the middle of the clearing.

The Kuo Toa, named Gloplop (after the same such NPC in my past campaign) is being chased, literally by a figment of his own imagination. Here's the trick - he fully believes that this creature exists, so based upon the nature of Kuo-Toan belief, it DOES exist - if only temporarily. Kuo-Toan belief is such that if a large enough number of them collectively believe in a certain thing, then that thing will change to reflect that belief. Gloplop is unique in that his belief is very powerful, but only affects himself. So if he truly believes that something might help or harm him, it just might - but only if it serves a story or creates humour or drama. Otherwise this ability might get abused. It's always wise to build safeguards into this sort of thing.

This figment of his imagination is a horrendous creation, which for the purposes of this encounter, will scale with the number of player characters in the group. This imaginary creature has 20 hit points for each player character in the group. It has a base AC of 10, plus 1.5 for each character in the group, rounding up. This figment has a number of attacks equal to the number of player characters on the group divided by 2 (rounding up). The bonus to attack is equal to half the number of player characters in the party, divided by two (round down). The damage per attack is 1d8 Bludgeoning, plus 1 for each member in the group. It has no skills, and it's saves are all +1. It Hovers at a rate of 30'

Therefore, a party of four would face a creature with an AC: 16, 80 hit points, 2 attacks at +4 each, dealing Bludgeoning damage equal to 1d8 + 4. It's saves are at +1, and has no skills. (so all perception or other rolls are flat with no bonuses). If or when the party defeats this creature, which has no "type (beast, aberration, giant, etc.), whomever delivers the killing blow becomes the "saviour of Gloplop". Whomever this "saviour" is, they will gain Gloplop as a follower. He will change from being a basic Kuo Toa into a Knight (see below), devoted only to that PC. They will become an NPC with a level equal to 4, or 2 less than the player character who wins him, whichever is lesser. Gloplop will be a loyal and devout follower of that player character, regardless of his race or class, and will try to follow his "liege's" orders to the letter. He will gain the ability to understand that PC's native language, but will only speak the Kuo-Toan garbled version of Deep Speech. It's up to that PC to find a way to speak with him.

For statistics on Gloplop, once he becomes a follower, change his ability scores from "Kuo Toa" (page 199, Monster Manual) to "Knight" (page 347, Monster Manual), with the following exceptions. Gloplop will not magically gain an armor, and will want to use the macuahuitl (the weapon in the center of the clearing) as his chosen weapon. His armour class will stay the same as the standard Kuo-Toa, he will retain the 60' darkvision and will retain Amphibious, Otherworldly Perception, Slippery, and Bite. He will gain the ability scores, saves, CR, Multi-attack. and Leadership of the Knight. That Leadership will be used to benefit his saviour/liege whenever possible.

The macuahuitl can be considered to be a greatsword, but is not made of metal. That changes nothing about how it works outside of an invulnerability to rust.

Monsters: The "Figment" detailed above

Treasure: A follower!

Complications: The complications to this are twofold. This encounter bears the standard dangers of an encounter where physical danger exists, but also gains the additional fun of a possible follower that the party are not ready or trained for. This adds an element of roleplaying to a normally combat oriented series of events, and also adds a social element where the "liege" will have to develop methods of communication with their new follower, as well as any new and unusual behavioural traits that a clever DM will want to insert for Gloplop to challenge or entertain the player characters. Given the range of these possibilities, I'll leave that up to the individual DM. That sort of freedom can allow a given DM to insert plot hooks for Gloplop (like where he came from, why he thought this monster was attacking, how he came to be in the clearing, etc.), as well as challenge the party in other ways apart from combat.

One Crow, Two Crow, Three Crow Scarecrow

Introduction: A continuing challenge, especially for starting DMs, is how to take the mundane and make it special. Fortunately, there are a wide array of D&D monsters that fit the bill. Each has their specialty. Mimics can stand in as mundane items. Piercers look like stalagmites, as do Darkmantles. Grey Oozes can resemble wet stone or pools of water. After a time, though, players will come to expect this. Then it's time to bring out classic themes from horror and surprise player characters when they least expect it. In a dungeon setting, they might well be ready for something. When travelling from "this town or village" to "that town or village" in patrolled or protected lands, the player characters will let their guard down. Farmlands are perfect for this setting, as they are cultivated lands typically already under the auspice of a local sheriff, regent, baron or other leader. They should be safe.

That's when you can spring the surprise.

Doing that sort of thing early in a campaign can set the tone for the entire event. This is perfect for when a DM intends to later add a Hag, evil Wizard, or other supernatural foe as a central villain to a campaign. It provides the correct "feel" for the rest of the adventure or campaign. Tension is an important element for some campaigns, and will define the nature of the ongoing undercurrent to all other events that follow.

This specific encounter will draw upon the cultural acceptance or fear of scarecrows, as well as the almost ubiquitous presence of their intended target...crows. Both set within farmlands should be a normal and expected occurrence, allowing any DM to spring this encounter on lower level parties with little or no set-up.

Environment: Farmlands

Suggested level: 2 (adding 1 Scarecrow and 1 Swarm of Ravens per level after.)

Description: The road is the same. More dirt trail with more ruts made by wagons laden with goods, and more corn fields lined with tall grass. Crows caw in the distance and scarecrows stand a silent vigil over crops. The birds either circle and caw at the crops' guardians to mock them or to warn them of your passage. You cannot say which.

You've seen it all before a myriad times.

Or maybe not. A successful Wisdom (Perception) roll (DC:15) will pick up something unusual. The "eyes" of this/these scarecrow(s) flash with an eerie green light. A further successful Arcana check (DC:12) will determine something magical is at hand. Otherwise, it might be the fatigue of walking long hours, or it may just be the leaves of the corn flashing before their button eyes. Sometimes a DM just has to shrug and be vague.

As the players take their eyes off them, they may ignore this sight (or perhaps not) as their minds may be playing tricks on them, and continue on with their travel. When they look back at these silent guardians, they are no longer at their posts.

The Scarecrows are now active and will cross the cornfields quickly. If the party failed their perception check, they will not have seen the green flash, and will thus be Surprised by the incoming scarecrow(s). It/They will burst out of the tall cornfields and wade into melee with the group. Once the Scarecrow(s) enter melee, a Swarm of Crows (Ravens) will enter the melee one round later. One swarm will enter for each Scarecrow in play. The hope is to make this combat confusing and chaotic. Feel free to tune this encounter up or down as the DM desires, adjusting for any difficulty. The intent is to create shock and fear, not to wipe out the party. If it fits within the theme of the party, have any defeated scarecrows burn or create a strange magical sigil into the road upon their death. That sigil might (Arcana, DC:15) be the signature of a specific Hag, Wizard or other related magical foe. This attack, therefore, could be the first salvo in the long campaign to defeat this dark and sorcerous villain. That sort of detail is completely up to the DM in question.

Monsters:

Scarecrow (Monster Manual, page 268)
Swarm of Ravens (page 339, Monster Manual)

Treasure:

A plot hook!

Complications: Given the special abilities of both monsters in this encounter, balancing is important. The intent is to create fear and paranoia, not to wipe the party. The supernatural and unexpected nature surrounding this combat should create plot hooks and drive the players forward, if only for revenge. Keep in mind that, although the scarecrow (or scarecrows) will not retreat, the swarms of crows just might. Furthermore, should a party be defeated, they might find themselves outside the hut of a Hag and forced into some sort of magical deal to release them from a gigantic cooking pot...or in the prisons of a magical overlord who punishes all non-tax-paying residents who enter his realm. That's the call of the DM in question.

All That Glitters

Introduction: I've already explored the concept of monsters or treasure as encounters, but not usually as monsters covered in treasure. It's one thing to face a foe and rifle their pockets and pouches after defeating them...it's another thing entirely when the monster you face is plated in treasure that you risk damaging should you defeat this monster through conventional means.

For this encounter we will use the infamous Stone Golem, but not in the usual format. Stone Golems are essentially magically animated stone statues, which means that any statue should suffice. Additionally, by plating this Stone Golem in gold, we both disguise it's true nature and turn a monster into a lure to guarantee the encounter. By changing the form of the statue from a humanoid shape into something less obvious (yet totally believable as a statue) like a horse, we have complimentary elements to disguise the encounter. This enhances the lure.

Yes, I'm that DM.

All that remains is placing this encounter in a believable space. Surroundings lend themselves to the encounter just like any monster does likewise with it's environment. One makes the other more acceptable and plausible.

Therefore we'll insert this Stone Golem where one might find one - guarding something.

Environment: Dungeon/Castle

Suggested level: 10

Description: The player characters enter a vast and well-lit chamber. the lighting comes from lanterns that hover without chain, rope, or stands, every 10 feet around the outside of the room, and fifteen feet in the air. The chamber, probably 50' square, has a high 20' vaulted ceiling. Unlike other areas, the floors are covered with patterned rugs dyed in rich reds, oranges, and yellows. The walls are lined with intricate paintings, depicting landscapes and portraits of what may be important places and figures. In the very centre of the room sits a low 1' tall stone plinth, upon which a large life-sized statue of a golden horse appears to stand mid-prance. The statue's plinth bears a small brass placard on the base of the plinth facing the door.

The lamps are suspended by magic, and are lit with a magical light. This magical light will remain for as long as the Golem is "alive". If the players wish to try and dispel this magical light, or force the lanterns to fall, it will require only a DC: 12 to break the levitation, but the lights will not extinguish until the Golem is dead or the lanterns are removed from the room.

For those interested in the resident artwork, there are a total of eight paintings. Each painting is large (at least 2'x3' for portraits or 3'x2' for landscapes (DM's choice). Should a player character wish to discern the nature or origin of each painting, this is an excellent opportunity for any DM to add some history into the encounter. Should a DM wish to reveal some background in their campaign, and wishes to use this encounter, perhaps an Intelligence (History) check of at least DC:15 can divulge details on important regional figures, castles or landmarks that play into the history of this region. Never overlook an opportunity to tie campaign or adventure information into an encounter. Another equally important Intelligence (History or Investigation) check, DC: 15 will further reveal that these paintings are valuable works of art. To the right collector, they might garner a tidy sum of 1000 gold pieces each.

The four patterned rugs are also valuable (a further Intelligence/History or Investigation check, DC:15), having been woven by master craftsmen in distant foreign lands. There are four rugs, each 5' wide and 10' long. Each rug is quite cumbersome, weighting a full 40 pounds when rolled, and difficult to transport without either two adult, or a cart, or some other magical means. Each carpet is another 250 gold pieces each to the right buyer.

The placard below the "golden horse" reads "Concorde - Brave steed and trustworthy companion." It is up to the individual DM as to whether or not they wish to insert a legend about Concorde. This could be a further opportunity to insert campaign lore, or it may just be a red herring. In any regard, this room will remain a simple art gallery unless anyone removes a painting or rug from their place, or harms the statue.

For the purposes of “harming the statue”, that also includes trying to steal the gold plating from it or vandalizing it in any manner. Just in case that becomes a reality, the gold plating on the outside of the Stone Golem is worth another 2000 gold pieces if removed carefully. The value drops by 100 for every point of damage inflicted by magical fire or magical acid, as the gold will either melt or chemically alter.

Should any member of the group attempt any of the above, the Stone Golem will activate and will attack the vandals and thieves. For those not wishing to deal with a charging gold horse, dropping the treasures and running away is their only chance. The Golem will pursue them for as long as they possess any such treasures, or until destroyed.

Monsters: **Stone Golem** - As per Monster Manual, page 170.

Treasure: Plenty, depending on the greed or skill of the player characters.
Paintings (8) - 1000gp each
Rugs (4) - 500 gp each
Gold plating - 2000 gp, unless damaged by fire or acid (see above)

Complications: Golems of all kinds are challenging monsters to combat, but would be the first of any and all problems associated with stealing these treasures. Golems are guardians created by powerful figures. Powerful figures who have a Golem made in the form of a prized stallion might take offense to having the prized tribute defaced or destroyed, and would certainly look unfavourably upon having family portraits and other heirlooms taken. This may create another villain for the player characters, if they haven't already earned the antipathy of such a figure or figures. Player characters who flee from this encounter with any treasure they could steal will have this Golem in pursuit of them until they return them. That itself may create a series of problems or encounters that the players did not count on.