



a DOZEN CITY ENCOUNTERS

BY PHILIP REED

When exploring the largest cities of the land, it is always useful for the gamemaster to have a handful of encounter ideas ready to go. The city is a big place, full of excitement and adventure, and it wouldn't do for the player characters to miss out on the hustle and bustle of city adventure. These encounters are intended as inspiration and it is up to your imagination and skill as a GM to expand each into a full-blown scene. Use these when the PCs set off on unexpected directions in the city.

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anatomy of an encounter

1. A title, to help set the mood.
2. An opening block of text that may be used as read aloud text when using the encounter during your game session. Or, if you prefer, text that you will rework to better suit your personal style.
3. The encounter description, which is freeform and very open to interpretation. My goal with each and every encounter described within these pages is to provide you, the GM, with a fanciful and unusual encounter to toss at the party when you wish to shake up their world. Most of these encounters are useful only a single time and should not be repeated.
4. Each encounter includes a single illustration to help set the mood.

1 THE RANGER, THE GOBLIN, AND THE MAGIC RING

In the dark of night, as they search for a place to rest, the party hears voices in one of the city's main alleyways. An argument between two, maybe three voices, catches their attention. When the group investigates, they find a human male engaged in heated conversation with a well-dressed goblin. What is happening?

Danniell Jauric, an experienced woodsman and hunter who has devoted his life to defending the rights of the good and weak, asks that you and your friends stay out of the argument. "This is between me and he," the ranger says in a low voice when you step foot in the alley.

The goblin, dressed as if he were a fine gentleman and not the beast that you are sure that he is, holds something in his left fist; between the darkness and the distance, you can only see that his hand is clenched tight around something.

The two had an agreement; Jauric let a magic ring and the goblin has found it. Since Jauric suspects no foul play, he set out to reward the goblin for finding the ring, but the goblin insisted that the only reward that he would accept would be if the ranger cleared the goblin's sewer home of giant rats. Jauric hired a rat catcher and an apprentice wizard, and the three unlikely adventurers slaughtered the rats and cleared the goblin's home as negotiated.

Jauric has since paid his hired help and has been trying to get the goblin to hold up his end of the deal for two days. The goblin was in the middle of promising to hand over the ring if the ranger completed another task . . . and that is where our party of adventurers joins the encounter.

The goblin feigns shock and claims the ranger is lying as Jauric, if convinced by the party, tells the tale. The goblin begs for the adventurers to believe him, even going so far as to offer them a reward – a ruby as big as his fist, he claims – if they will protect him from this madman.

Jauric is an honest man and telling the truth. Whether or not the party believes him will depend entirely on how well the goblin lies, and whether or not they are deceived.



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USING THE ENCOUNTERS

The important thing to remember about all of the encounters that follow is that they are not fleshed out, complete adventure locations and events. Every single encounter includes just enough information to trigger your own imagination; it is my wish that as you read through these encounters, you find yourself overwhelmed with ideas of your own. Each one is a snapshot stolen from my own imagination . . . and now we need for you to take these fragments and transform them into scenes that your players will never forget.

For additional inspiration when taking the encounter ideas that follow and making them your own, I highly recommend grabbing a scrap of paper or a journal and writing down every idea that comes to mind as you read the words I've provided.

Then, once you've got all of your thoughts in place, grab a 3 x 5 index card – or open a note file on your phone or tablet – and string concepts together one piece at a time to form a sequence of events that take my ideas and, with work, make them your own.

For example, in the encounter shown above, I've presented a conflict between a ranger and a goblin and a way in which the party may become involved in the scene. When preparing this encounter for your own group, you may find that it is best to change the goblin to a different race; perhaps goblins are terribly evil in your campaign and one would never be allowed in a city. In such an instance, you may find that a gnome or halfling works just as well. The important thing is to make each encounter your own.

THE LADY AND THE WISH FOR REVENGE



If the adventurers rush to confront the woman who is threatening one of the city's many merchants, they're taken by surprise as the woman lashes out with her sword. "Keep out of this," the woman tells the adventurers as she swings her sword in an attempt to keep them back (though she doesn't try to harm any of them). "This worm knows what he has done, and he knows that he will pay for his black heart."

The merchant begs the party for their help, promising to pay them if they'll protect him from the woman. If they force their way into the issue, the merchant will claim ignorance of the woman and state that he knows not of what she wants from him. If they engage the woman in conversation, and if they convince her that they wish only that justice be served, she'll agree to lower her weapon in exchange for their promise that they'll stand aside once she has shared her tale with them.

Margareta Ronzurgo starts to talk, telling that the merchant – Brayden Cliffsorrow – masterminded the theft of her horse yesterday and she intends to recover her horse . . . or the man's hide. As she talks, Ronzurgo keeps one eye on the merchant at all times and insists that the man wronged her. Cliffsorrow, if pressed, denies again and again that he has done anything to the woman or her horse. If the PCs make successful skill checks (as decided by the GM), they soon determine that both are telling the truth. The woman's horse was stolen, yes, but not by the merchant.

Whether or not the adventurers can convince Ronzurgo to leave the man in peace is the immediate challenge. They cannot allow the woman to punish an innocent man, but they are also unlikely to wish to harm a woman who is only in search of the truth.

The fire in her eyes tells the tale. Whoever she is, the woman in blue is clearly angry and ready for a fight. Pushing her way through the crowded market of the city, the people around her part swiftly and silently, unwilling to cross her or in any way block her from her purpose. Soon, she stops at a stall and begins yelling, her sword drawn and at the ready.

Throughout the exchange, one of Cliffsorrow's hirelings keeps a close eye on the situation and is ready to run if necessary. The hireling is the one who stole the horse and witnesses confused him for Cliffsorrow because the hireling was wearing Cliffsorrow's long coat when he stole the horse. The man is nervous and scared, and there's a chance that one of the PCs will notice his strange behavior as they talk to the gathered crowd.

CONGREGATION AT THE STATUE OF THE DEFENDER

Shouting, loud screams, and a number of clashing voices draw your attention to one of the city's central crossroads where the solemn Statue of the Defender has become the site of a large gathering of citizens. You cannot see who they're focused on, but you can make out that someone is being threatened by the angry mob.

If the party pushes their way through the crowd to investigate the situation, they find a woman at the center of the action. She is brandishing a loaf of bread as if it were a sword, and the people closest to her keep reaching to slap and punch her. Despite her best efforts, the woman cannot fight off the crowd on her own.

If the PCs wish to help the woman, their display of force – even if it is little as drawing their own weapons – is enough to disperse the crowd; none of the assailants possess the bravery necessary to stand against an experienced party of adventurers.

The woman introduces herself as Anina Miahana, the half-elven wife of Eldrin Miahana. Her husband, she explains, was murdered three weeks ago and she made the mistake of claiming that a popular lord was his killer.

When asked about the crowd, Miahana tells the PCs that the lord who killed her husband has promised to reward any who bring her to the man, though most of the people are too afraid to confront her directly. This is the second time in as many days, she says, that a mob had built up enough courage to assault her. And the town watch will do nothing to help her.

If asked how she knows that the lord killed her husband, Miahana pulls from her pouch a scrap of parchment upon which is written the promise of payment of 50 gold for the murder of Eldrin Miahana. The paper is signed by Var Voidstride, a name the party recognizes as one of the wealthier citizens of the city.

Miahana begs the adventurers for assistance in proving that Voidstride had her husband killed. She says that

she tried to show the parchment to the watch, but they ignored her and threatened her with a beating if she continued to spread her wicked lies.

Voidstride has a clerk in the town council in his pay and has been instructing the hired servant to erase all records of a financial transaction between the lord and the dead man. The two had bought a mine outside of the city, and when gold was discovered the lord decided the best way to claim all of the riches for himself was to kill his business partner.



SUMMER FESTIVAL

The city buzzes with activity as people from miles away attend the annual summer festival. Jesters, acrobats, bards, and others entertain the crowd as merchants pocket coin after coin, selling pies and other sweets to the festival attendees.

The PCs enter the city on a day of celebration as the citizens join in on the summer festival activities that are taking place across the land. Most shops are closed, many commoners are free from the routine of work, and the people are happy and engaged in a day of excessive fun.

Everyone is dressed in their finest clothing, whether that means rich gowns and outfits crafted from the finest of silks for the wealthy or semi-clean garments for the poor. Regardless of their place in the city, all are welcome to join in the many activities such as pie contests, acrobatic displays of skill, jugglers, storytellers, and bards performing for the many, many people who are packing the city streets. The summer festival is the largest party of the year, and everyone is invited.

If any of the PCs possess skills such as singing, dancing, or playing a musical instrument, this is their chance to show off their talent and win the hearts and applause of many of the city's inhabitants. And for those without such talents, this is the perfect day to spend with friends . . . and maybe a great opportunity to collect information from those who have had a little too much to drink.

The town watch are particularly attentive during the celebration, reacting swiftly to any reports of violence or crime that threaten to ruin the day (or days; some town's run the event for more than a single day). Do not cross the guard during the festival.

Of course, with so many people on the streets, there are those who do not fear the town watch and see the day as the perfect chance for burglary; with so many out of their homes for the festival, is there a better time to smash in and steal as many possessions as this very day?

Convincing a shopkeep to open up during the summer festival will require intimidation or the promise of extra pay; few merchants wish to be seen by the others as caring more about the profit than the joy of the city.

Taverns, of course, are very much open during the festival and they're as packed as the city streets. On some streets, there are so many people that the taverns place stools outside so that they can serve even more people than will fit inside the tavern.



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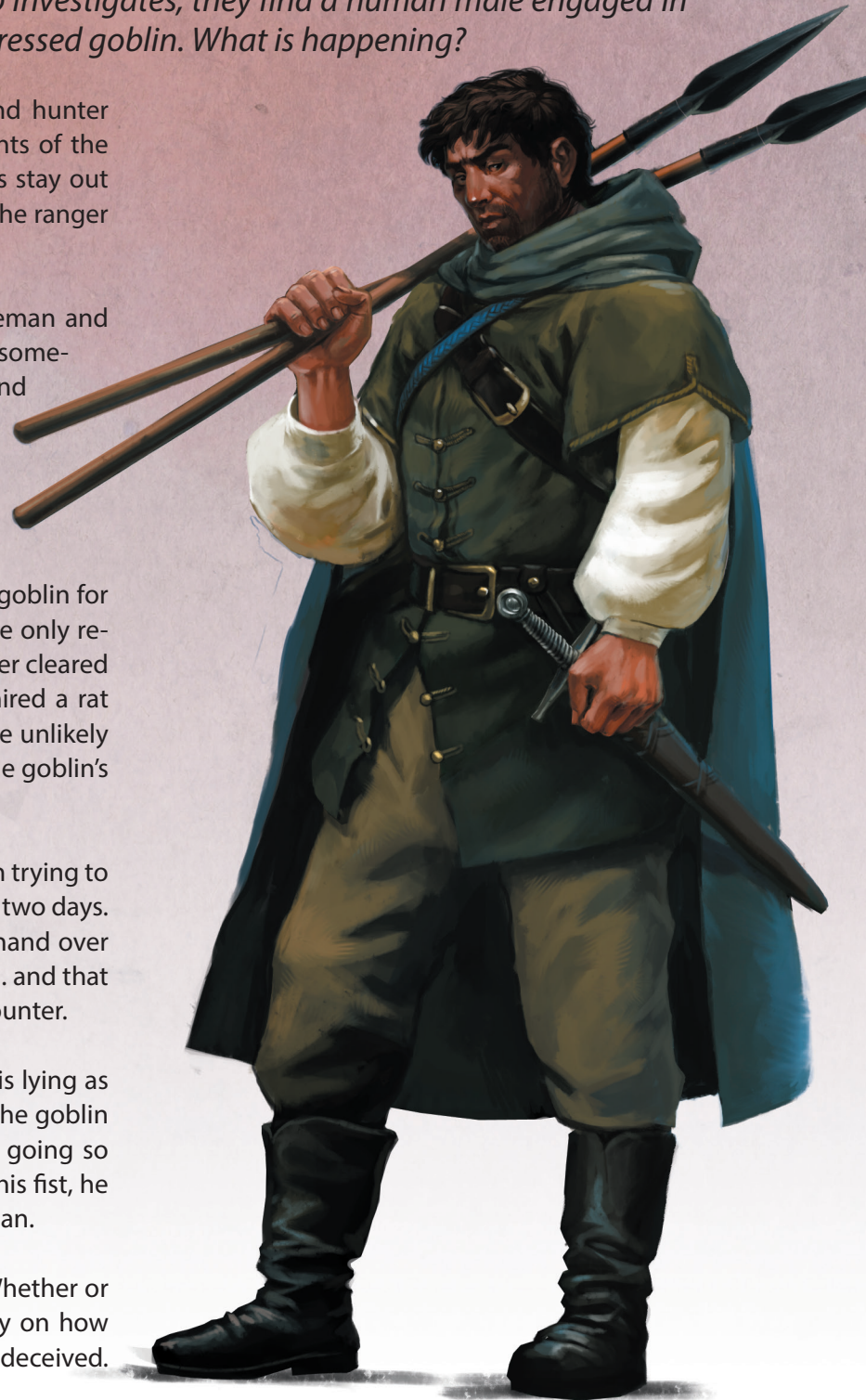
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an ominous FOG

In the early morning, shortly after the first cries of dawn, the fog rolls in heavy and settles, blanketing the city in a pea soup that makes it impossible for anyone to see more than a few feet in front of them. Then, without warning, the fog thins and a terrible beast made of clouds is spotted flying high above the city.

Many citizens of the city mistake the unusual clouds in the sky for a dragon, thinking that one of the terrible monsters is attacking their homes and shops. It is actually thick and heavy clouds, hanging low and rolling gently overhead.

The dragon-like appearance of the clouds could be for a number of different reasons, including:

Work of a Wizard

An evil wizard has cast a weather control spell of her own creation and is using her magic to terrorize the people. She has sent messages to the town's council demanding that they pay her 1,000 gold or she will summon a swarm of dragons to attack the city. This illusion is one step in her plan to secure the coin.

A Natural Event

The clouds naturally form this wicked shape in the sky over the city, dissipating only a few moments later. Of course, to hear the citizens tell the tale, the clouds hovered over the city as a dragon for near an hour; a sign if there ever was one.

An Arcane Event

Created by the power of magic, unguided by any intelligence, the ominous clouds are a portent of danger to come to the city . . . or one of its inhabitants. Each player must roll a single six-sided die; any who roll a six suffer from bad luck for the remainder of the game session. How this plays out is the GM's call; I suggest making the misfortune a minor irritant and not a danger to the survival of the player's character.

a magical secret and an arcane lie



Your contacts within the city tell you of a human mage who recently arrived and is seeking warriors to aid her in an undisclosed adventure. She has hired seven so far, and word is she will be leaving town very soon.

Zerlina Bacrem is a friend of the hermit druid Dermont from the village of Woodfall.* She has been hired by the druid to find him a small army to assist in fighting off parasitic invaders who are harming one of the trees near his home. The tree, close to death, is one of the druid's oldest friends and only by defeating the parasites will the tree have a chance at surviving.

Bacrem, if approached, tells the party of her mission and is eager for their assistance in assisting Dermont in saving the tree. She does not need their help in the actual battle against the parasites, but she does ask that they track down and recover a scroll of reduction (a magical spell that the druid needs to shrink the warriors she has hired).

Bacrem knows that a scroll of reduction was lost in the sewers beneath the city a few weeks ago. Another band of adventurers were searching for the entrance to a rumored dungeon when they were attacked by ratmen and their wizard friend was murdered. Bacrem learned from the survivors that the wizard had the very scroll she needs and she will pay the player characters 100 gold coins if they find the scroll and deliver it to her.

The ratmen living in the sewers have grown in number over the years; there are now somewhere between 40 and 80 of the beasts below the city streets and they sometimes come to the surface in search of food and supplies. While it would be near-impossible for the adventurers to kill all of the ratmen, they should be able to track down the corpse of the wizard and recovered whatever gear is left on the body.

Bacrem tells them that she cannot join them in the journey, but if the adventurers ask for more, she gives them a healing potion to aid the cause.

* To learn more about the village of Woodfall, please see the "Dark Fantasy Mini Setting" described in the **Woodfall** sourcebook by Lazy Litch.



WOODSMAN'S HOME

The small cottage looks peaceful enough, even if the giant of a man at the well towers over all of you as you approach his home. The man raises an arm in greeting and smiles, clearly happy to see the unexpected visitors.

When outside of the city, the party comes across the home of Colborn Heartcreek, a half-giant who is doing all that he can to enjoy a peaceful life. Heartcreek was once a warrior, a guard in service of the town's watch, where he served for over a decade. Eventually, after witnessing far more corruption and dishonesty than he could handle, Heartcreek chose to quit the watch and retire to this small cottage.

When they encounter the half-giant, Heartcreek is open and friendly, inviting them in for a drink (or meal, if the time is appropriate) and asks them for word of the city. The half-giant has not been back in the city for well over three years; he gets most of his news from travelers who happen upon his home and enjoy his hospitality.

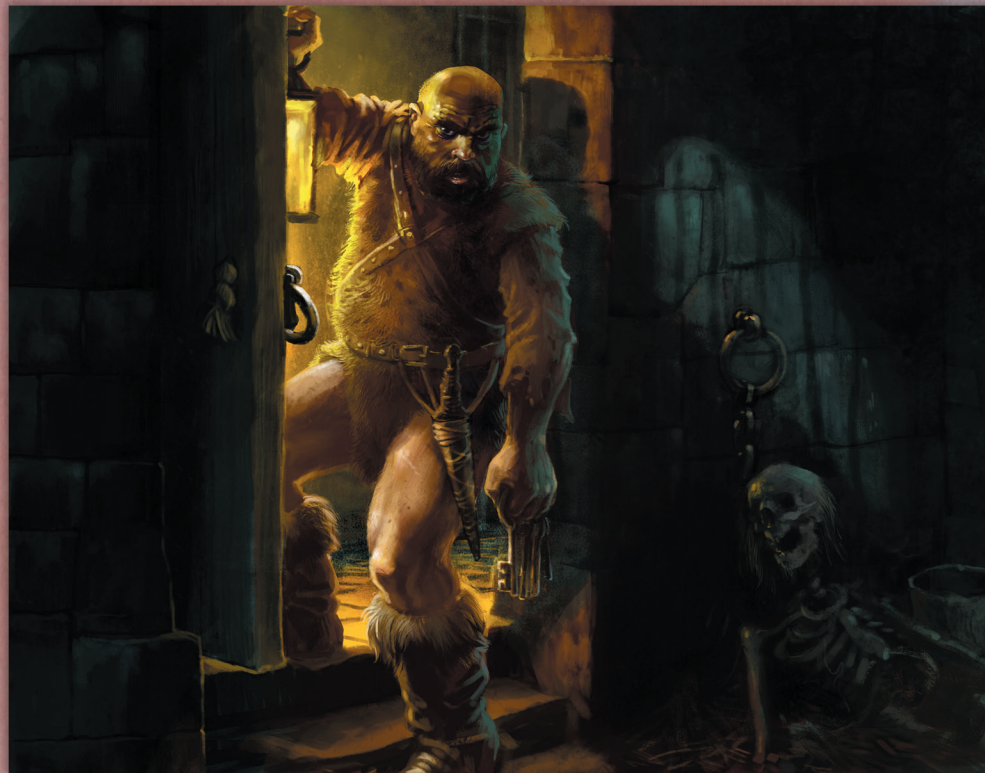
Heartcreek is a talented leatherworker and armorer, skills he learned in his years before joining the watch, and if he spots any damaged or worn gear that he can repair, he offers to trade his services for whatever supplies the party can afford to spare. He takes gold only as a last resort and has no use of gems, jewels, or trinkets.

If the party is friendly with Colborn Heartcreek and show the man only honesty and warmth, they'll make a friend who – though he has no desire to go more than a mile or so from his home – will always welcome them and offer shelter and sustenance if they visit him.

Having a friend who lives so very close to the city could prove to be very useful in the future.

THE TOWN WATCH Has a SECRET

Rumors abound of strange, evil doings by the watch. Those guardians of the city, the rumors claim, are corrupt and looking to form their own guild to go up against the local thieves' guild.



The watch has taken up arms against the thieves' guild in a shadow war between the two factions. Things have grown heated and as the watch seeks to replace all guild thieves with their own band of criminals, the watch steps up their attempts to locate and capture thieves who are operating in – or passing through – the city.

For as long as the PCs are in the city, use the following every evening to determine whether or not the party encounters the town watch.

The party includes a thief. For the next 1d6+3 nights that the adventurers are in the city, there is a 4 in 6 chance each night that the city watch will stop and question the PCs (see below).

The party does not include a thief. For the next 1d6+3 nights that they are in the city, there is a 2 in 6 chance each night that the city watch will stop the party and question them (see below).

They are questioned. Roll 1d6 on the table. If they successfully get through the encounter, the PCs are free to continue on their way. If they fail, the city watch arrests the entire party. They may choose to go peacefully and attempt to talk their way out of the trouble, or they may elect to fight the city watch. Choose wisely.

1. *"Where are you headed tonight, thief?"* They must roll a 6 on 1d6 or be arrested. If one of the group has a silver tongue, avoid arrest on a 5 or 6.
2. *"Where were you last night at midnight?"* They look similar to a thief who was almost caught last night. The group must produce a witness or be arrested on the spot.
3. *"How long have you owned that weapon?"* A weapon near-identical to one of the PC's was stolen last night at a local tavern. Prove the weapon is not stolen or be arrested.
4. *"Stop! Thieves!"* The watch skips the questions and moves directly to the arrest. Unfortunately for the guards, they cry out too early. Do the PCs try to escape?
5. *"How do you know the thief-master?"* If they admit to knowing any thief, the group is instantly arrested. Otherwise, they must roll a 6 on 1d6 to talk their way out of this.
6. *"Do you know who stole the gems last night?"* The watch is aggressive and determined to arrest someone. Avoid arrest by rolling 10+ on 2d6.

THE THIEF IN THE DARK

Long after the watch have extinguished the city lanterns, after the drunks have stumbled from the taverns and found a resting place for the night, the party hears a soft, scratching sound at the window of their rented room. If they investigate, they catch a thief in the act of breaking into their chambers, her daggers drawn and at the ready.

Suzette Damastan is young, not yet twenty winters of age, but she is quite skilled. Damastan has been working the streets and alleys of the city as a pick-pocket these last ten years, and has been a member of the thieves' guild for a little over a year. She singled out the party when she noticed them and their gear.

It is unlikely that the adventurers set a watch when they're resting at an inn or rented room, but if they do then at least one of the group becomes aware of the thief before she enters their room.

Otherwise, have each party member roll a single d6 or make a Listen check. On a roll of 5 or 6, or on a successful skill check, the character awakens before Damastan enters their room.

Aware of Damastan Before She Enters

If the party is alert and knows that the woman is coming, they may prepare for battle as they hear her opening their window. This gives them the element of surprise and allows the adventurers to most likely catch the thief. If they capture her, she begs for her life and promises to introduce them to a man with a map if she is allowed to live and is set free. She promises that the map leads to riches. How the party deals with the thief at that time is, of course, up to them . . . but what adventurer can turn down the promise of a treasure map?

Damastan Enters Before They Wake

In this instance, the thief makes it inside the room before any of the PCs wake. She likely has only a few moments to search for valuables before at least one member of the party wakes and spots her. At the first sign of movement by any of the PCs, Damastan makes a run for it, going out through the window.

She is not violent, but she will fight if cornered and forced. At every chance, Damastan will prefer to try and talk her way out of trouble rather than fight . . . especially with a group of adventurers who have clearly seen far more battle than she ever has.





a RELENTLESS WARRIORESS

She will not be stopped. Throughout the city, the people are talking of the warrior Bethany Mourndreamer and her battle with the thieves of the city. Mourndreamer, they say, was robbed by thieves her first night in the city. The local guild has offered a reward for her capture . . . and the party knows this when they encounter the woman at one of the many taverns in the city.

After a long day of adventure, the last thing the party is in search of at the tavern is more conflict. Soon after they grab a table and order the first round, one of them notices that a warrior woman in a darkened corner looks a lot like Bethany Mourndreamer, the warriorress that the thieves' guild is searching for.

How the event plays out depends on the PCs' actions. They can try to befriend the woman to learn more of her story, they may try to trick her and capture her, or they may attack her without warning. Each choice plays out very differently.

Befriend Her

Mourndreamer is cautious and skeptical of everyone, especially with the price on her head, but she is a good judge of character and soon decides that the party means

her no harm. She soon asks for their help in infiltrating the guild and dealing with the bounty on her head by murdering as many thieves as possible.

Trick Her

Mourndreamer isn't one to be easily fooled. She plays along, pretending to trust the group, but she will attack them at the first possible chance.

Attack Her

Mourndreamer is a powerful warriorress and, unknown to the party, she has friends in the tavern who come to her aid. She will not be taken alive.



THE STORYTELLER'S PLAN

You see him in the city park, surrounded by children as he weaves a tale of mystery and adventure that has clearly captured the imagination of those around him. This storyteller, they say, arrived last week and continues to spend his days in the park where he can be found telling stories to any who will listen.

While it would be a simple matter to adapt the classic tale, *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, to this encounter, let us instead aim for a different take on the concept of a storyteller seeking to harm a town.

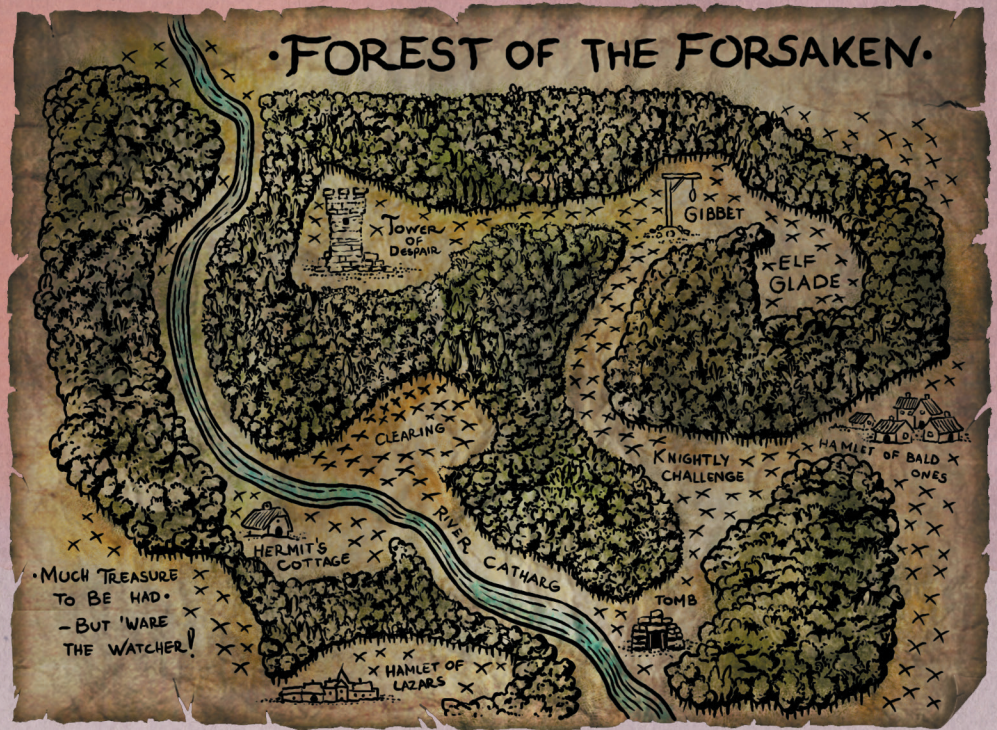
Nobral Mask, the young storyteller who has become so popular with the children of the city, is in search of treasures to rob from the city's inhabitants. Mask is an inexperienced thief, without the network of contacts or the skills to undertake the traditional method of stealing from the richer homes, so he has instead chosen to use his gift of gab to enchant the children with his tales . . . and then ask them of their parents' possible riches.

If Mask is left alone and allowed to continue to entertain the children, he slowly learns which homes have the best possible treasures. The man needs only another day or two after which point he will feel that he has collected as much information as is necessary.

Perhaps one of the parents of a child who has been enjoying Mask's stories contacts the PCs and asks them to investigate the storyteller. Or, maybe, the party overhears a child speaking with his friends and bragging about how the storyteller grew more and more interested as the child spoke of his mother's jewels. Mask will strike soon; will the PCs stop him?

a map TO THE TOWER

The man promises that the map leads to treasure, an item just waiting for a soul brave enough to claim it and bring it into the light of day. He asks only two gold for the map, so it cannot be worth much, but any lead is worth checking out.



Whether by chance meeting or an introduction, the party soon sits down with Trevin Hiemdale at a local tavern to both hear his tale and decide whether or not to pay the aged book dealer for his treasure map. Hiemdale tells of how a ranger, named Gavin Gorvenal, traded the map for a blank journal only two weeks ago. Gorvenal, the party is told, acquired the map during a battle with hobgoblins. The ranger reported that a magical sword is being held in the crumbling tower that is said to be unoccupied.

Hiemdale had considered setting off to explore the forest on his own, but the man was forced to admit that he is far too old – and much too inexperienced – for such an adventure. Instead, he hopes to sell the map for a few coins and the promise that if any books are located, the adventurers will bring the titles to him and give him the first chance to purchase any discovered books.

The book dealer has no specific knowledge of either the veracity of the map or whether or not the rumors of a magic sword are true, but he swears that the ranger seemed like a trustworthy sort of man. It is possible that the adventurers have heard of Gavin Gorvenal before (and they may have even met the ranger; see *Delayed Blast Gamemaster #1*); any words they have heard of the ranger's personality and background support Hiemdale's conclusion that the ranger is honest and that his word can be trusted.

Tower of the Forsaken

The map is almost accurate, being slightly wrong in a few places that slow the adventurers' journey by roughly one day. Still, despite the map's errors, they do eventually find the tower . . . and it is in a far worse state of disrepair and decay than they had suspected.

The tower is collapsed, with the only surviving parts of the complex all buried below ground. Rubble blocks the way into the tower's lower levels and navigating across the rocky, debris-covered area surrounding the tower forces all to move at one-half speed. Those who move faster than that must make a successful Dexterity check or stumble and fall.

Worse still, the collapse of the tower has shattered much of the tower's lower levels; consider every hall and room in the surviving parts of the tower to be rough terrain that forces the adventurers to move more slowly than they would like.

Inside the tower's surviving levels, of which there are no more than $1d4+1$, the party finds a dungeon complex that has been cleared by those who discovered the tower before them. All that remains are oozes and slimes, as well as rats, spiders, and other creatures that may or may not be dangerous to the party.

Any treasure that was here is long gone.