



a DOZEN FOREST ENCOUNTERS

BY PHILIP REED

Perhaps second only to dungeons, the forests of many campaign worlds have been the site of countless fantasy RPG encounters over the decades. After all, it is often the forest that lies between the safety of the town and the thrill of the dungeons, so many gamemasters find it both entertaining and useful to set the occasional encounter within the forest.

As with the other entries in the *A Dozen . . .* series, there are no game statistics included with these twelve encounters. If you select a non-combat encounter, you may allow the players to attempt various skill checks to work their way through things, or simply focus on the roleplaying of the event. For the combat encounters, you will need to provide the necessary stats.

A Dozen Forest Encounters © 2020 Philip Reed,
all rights reserved.

Some artwork © Grim Press,
used with permission. All rights reserved.

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 **Time WITH
THE TREES**

The treefolk are rarely ones to engage in conversation with those not of their own kind, but for some strange reason a group of the living trees has issued an invitation to the nearby village: **2** Join us for a friendly evening of conversation. The people of the village are too afraid to attend, but they are also too afraid to refuse the invitation, so they are in search of heroes who will accept the invitation of the treefolk.

When the adventurers reach the site of the meet with the treefolk, they are welcomed by Fuchsia Caprea, a young treeman – less than three centuries in age – who explains that he and his people wish to form a bond with the village so that the two may protect each other from an advancing evil that one of the elder treefolk has foreseen in a dream.

Several dozen treefolk attend the event, each as kind and friendly as the party allows. The creatures have lived and cared for the forests surrounding the village for millenia, and it is only the threat of an approaching evil that has led them to take the drastic step of asking the villagers for this meeting. **3**

The treefolk do not know what the evil may be, but they believe it is time to live in peace with the villagers and ask only one thing: that the villagers stop chopping down the living trees of the forest. "Collecting the fallen limbs and harvesting the dead trees of the forest is acceptable," Caprea tells the party, "but there can be no more slaughter of the living wood."

Whether or not the heroes can convince the villagers to accept and honor this request will be a challenge for the PCs when they return to the village. If they succeed, the treefolk continue to keep their distance, but the villagers now have powerful allies. **4**

a DOZEN FOREST ENCOUNTERS • PAGE 4

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 have presented the gamemaster with a roleplaying encounter between the player characters and several treefolk. Within the encounter, there are several hooks that are waiting to be expanded upon to open future possible events within your campaign. For example, the encounter mentions an approaching evil . . . but just what is that evil, and how will it impact the forest and the village? Open-ended ideas such as these are intended to spark the GM's imagination and lead to greater scenes.

a DOZEN FOREST ENCOUNTERS • PAGE 2

THE ELVEN WAR-MAGE

Roren Anfalen is old, even for an elf. The war-mage has spent most of his life in the service of the elven city of Wraithcastle, a distant place that the heroes have only heard of and have never visited. On the forest road between towns, the party meets Anfalen, who carries a flaming spear and is staring into the woods when the party spots him. "Silence," he hisses when he notices them. "You'll frighten it away."

When the party first encounters the elf, all they see is an armored, elderly elf with a flaming spear who is very focused on something in the woods along the road. He is quiet, speaking no more than a whisper, and uses hand signs to try and convince the group to keep back . . . and to not disturb whatever he is doing.

The Adventurers Keep Silent

If they do as the elf wishes, and keep as quiet as possible, the elf gives them a brief nod of thanks and then leaps into the woods, striking at an unseen foe with his flaming staff. Within seconds, the elf is thrown back to the road and smashes his head as a troll thunders its way out of the forest. The monster roars in anger and smashes its heavy fists into the elf, dealing heavy damage in a single attack.

The heroes may move to aid the elf, at which point the troll screams again and turns to face the party's strongest warrior. If the group defeats the troll, Roren Anfalen introduces himself and thanks them for their service. He will reward each member with 10 gold and then set off on his way. "My work is done," the elf says if they ask where he is going. So long as they are pleasant, Anfalen welcomes their company on the journey to the nearest town.

The Adventurers Make Noise

In the event that the party disregards the wishes of the elf, the man yells at them to flee as a troll smashes its way through the trees. Grabbing a large branch, the troll strikes the elf – who is distracted by the group – and instantly kills the elf with a single blow.

If the heroes remain to fight the troll, they find it is far more powerful than they expected. The troll can take twice as much damage as a normal creature of its kind, and it will fight to the death.

The elf's body may be looted if the party survives the troll's attack.



TIME WITH THE TREES



The treefolk are rarely ones to engage in conversation with those not of their own kind, but for some strange reason a group of the living trees has issued an invitation to the nearby village: Join us for a friendly evening of conversation. The people of the village are too afraid to attend, so they are in search of heroes who will accept the invitation of the treefolk.

When the adventurers reach the site of the meet with the treefolk, they are welcomed by Fuchsia Caprea, a young treeman – less than three centuries in age – who explains that he and his people wish to form a bond with the village so that the two may protect each other from an advancing evil that one of the elder treefolk has foreseen in a dream.

Several dozen treefolk attend the event, each as kind and friendly as the party allows. The creatures have lived and cared for the forests surrounding the village for millenia, and it is only the threat of an approaching evil that has led them to take the drastic step of asking the villagers for this meeting.

The treefolk do not know what the evil may be, but they believe it is time to live in peace with the villagers and ask only one thing: that the villagers stop chopping down the living trees of the forest. *“Collecting the fallen limbs and harvesting the dead trees of the forest is acceptable,”* Caprea tells the party, *“but there can be no more slaughter of the living wood.”*

Whether or not the heroes can convince the villagers to accept and honor this request will be a challenge for the PCs when they return to the village. If they succeed, the treefolk continue to keep their distance, but the villagers now have powerful allies.

a FRIGHTENED GRIFFON

The griffon in the woods is large, even for its kind, but something is not right. Usually, these noble beasts are not ones to shy away from anything, but for some reason the creature cowers in the trees when it hears your approach.

The creature's rider has been murdered, slaughtered by scoundrels who tortured and murdered the rider for fun. To make matters worse, they bound and abused the griffon and forced it to watch the terrible scene. They had planned to kill the griffon, but it managed to escape in the night and has spent the last week hiding in the forest. The beast was traumatized by the experience and it is now scared of all humans.

If the party has the power to speak with animals, they will need to be patient with the griffon if they wish to learn what has frightened the creature. If they can form a level of trust with the griffon, it will eventually tell them of the experience and, if given the opportunity, will guide the heroes to the lair of the murderers who killed the beast's friend.

Adventurers who are unable to communicate with the noble beast may never learn the truth, but that doesn't mean that they cannot treat the griffon kindly and try to help it to return to the sky. Kind heroes with the patience to care for the scared griffon will find that, over time, the beast trusts them enough to accept their aid. It is possible that it will form a bond with one of the PCs, forging a new friendship for life.



“Once trained, a griffon is a fierce and loyal steed. It bonds with one master for life, fighting to the death to protect that rider.”

– Christopher Perkins, **D&D
Monster Manual (5e)**

THE “HOLY” WARRIOR

Elgar Bourne, paladin and follower of the God of Storms, is lost. You encounter the man on a dusty, leaf-covered trail in the forest, where he tells you that he was part of a company of warriors who were setting out to defeat the evils of a nearby dungeon. “Can you help me find my companions?”

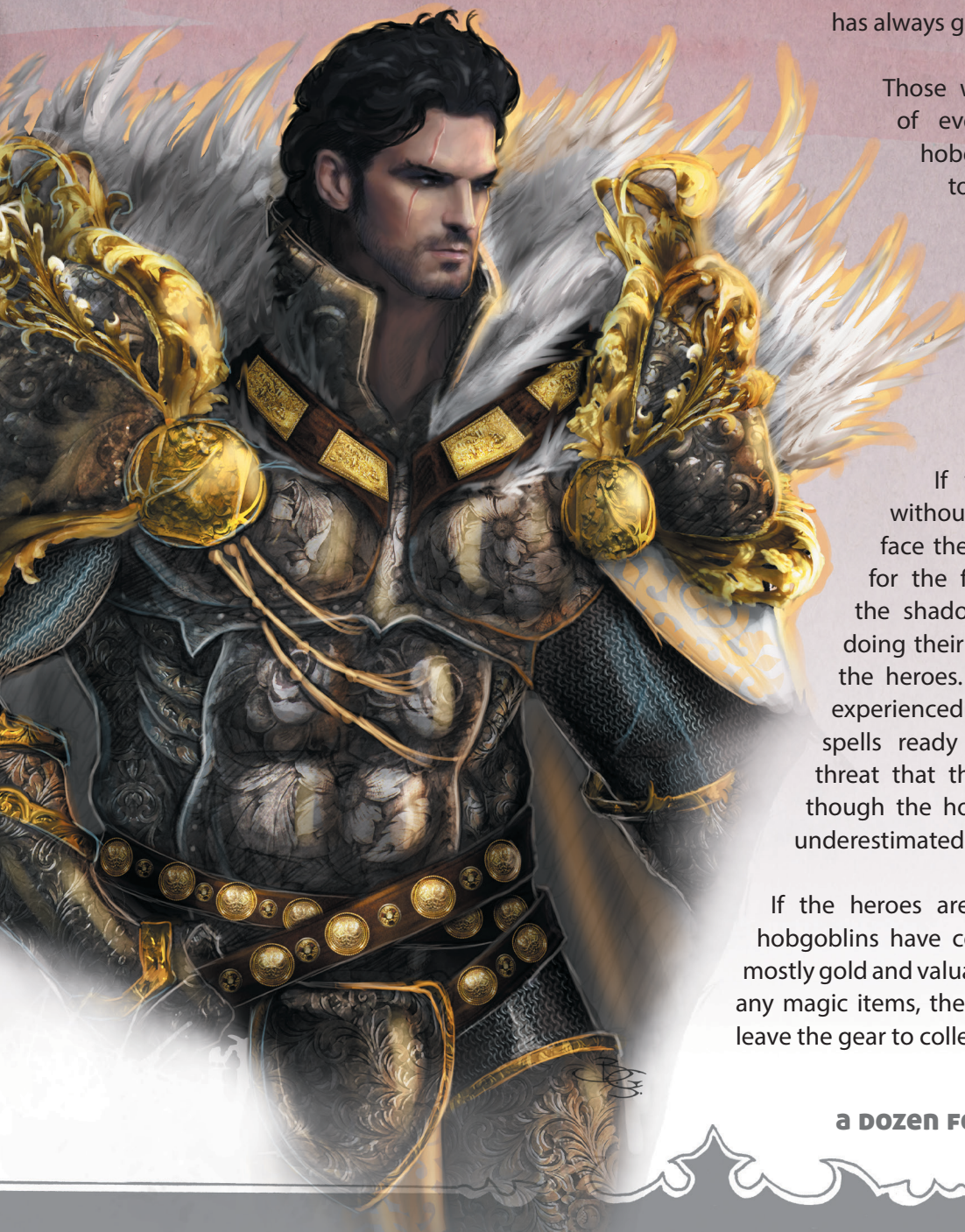
Bourne, for having been chased from a dungeon, appears in good shape and is unharmed. If the party chooses to assist him, he thanks them and tells the group that his companions are somewhere within the dungeon. He readies his sword and suggests that he lead the way.

In fact, Bourne is not a paladin . . . he is not even human! The man is a disguised hobgoblin, transformed by the magic of his tribe’s spellcaster and sent out to lure unsuspecting victims to the dungeon where the hobgoblins can kill the party and keep all of their belongings. The hobgoblins have been running the same scam for a few years now, and until today it has always gone in their favor.

Those who tend to suspect the worst of everyone may see through the hobgoblin’s ruse; the GM will have to decide how best to handle the situation depending on the PCs and their skills. If they do catch on to the scam before entering the dungeon, maybe the group can turn the tables on the hobgoblin tribe and take the creatures by surprise.

If the party enters the dungeon without suspecting a trap, they’ll have to face the hobgoblins who have prepared for the fight. The monsters attack from the shadows, using missile weapons and doing their best to avoid close-combat with the heroes. The hobgoblin spellcaster – an experienced mage with several offensive spells ready to go – may be the biggest threat that the heroes face in the dungeon, though the hobgoblin warriors should not be underestimated.

If the heroes are victorious, they find that the hobgoblins have collected several minor treasures, mostly gold and valuable gems. If the creatures do have any magic items, they use those in battle rather than leave the gear to collect dust in the treasure chamber.



THE ENSORCELLED BARBARIAN

You encounter many things when traveling through the forests of the land, but this may be the strangest creature that you and your friends have ever stumbled across. Wearing bracers and calling for your help, the large frog – it stands almost three-feet tall! – claims to be Alvi Hallkelsson, a barbarian warrior of the north, and he has a wizard to kill.

The cursed barbarian cannot be freed from this form by something as simple as a remove curse or a wish spell. Regardless of whatever the heroes may try, the magic that has transformed the barbarian into a frog persists and it soon becomes clear that the wizard responsible for this mess will have to be found.

Alvi Hallkelsson says that he has been this way for several days now; he claims that his memory isn't holding up well to due the stress and that he's unsure of how long it

has been since he was turned into a frog. He does know that the wizard's cottage is close; the barbarian has purposefully remained close to the wizard's home so that he can – he hopes – force the spellcaster to reverse the curse and return the man to his former shape.

Hopping along, Hallkelsson leads the heroes down a stone path in the forest to a small, picturesque cottage that is the wizard's home. Smoke billows from the chimney and the smell of onion suggest that the wizard is home and fixing a meal and completely unaware of the approaching frog and the PCs.

The wizard will defend himself if attacked, but if the heroes try talking to the wizard, the man invites them inside – including the frog! – and introduces himself as Serya Shaul. The wizard apologizes to the frog, explaining that he wasn't trying to curse the barbarian and only that his spell had gone sideways and that the transformation was an unfortunate side-effect.

"I searched for you off and on this last week, ever since the accident," the wizard says, "because I wanted to undo my error and to assure you that it was an accident and that I meant you no harm."

Hallkelsson is angry at first, but the adventurers may be able to calm him down so that Shaul can cast the spells necessary to undo the accident that turned the barbarian into a frog. The wizard offers each PC a small reward, and gives the barbarian a sack of gold for his troubles.



PLANTING THE STAR TREE

Adele Rotrudis has spent much of her life in a small cabin along the edge of the Gnomeheart Forest. Rotrudis raises chickens and sheep in a small clearing near the forest, and she visits a local inn each day to trade eggs for information, companionship, and what few items she may need. While at the inn, Rotrudis meets the adventurers and asks for their assistance in planting a special tree deep within the heart of the forest. The woman can pay them for their services, if they accept the task.



Adele Rotrudis was given the seeds of a star tree several weeks ago and has been entrusted to plant the seeds as near to the center of the forest as possible. She knows, though, that she is too weak to make the journey, and as soon as she saw the heroes she thought that she may have found a suitable party to take on the task.

She can pay as much as 50 gold to each of the PCs if they agree to carry the seeds into the forest and plant them. She says that she can pay half now, and the other half when they return, and if pressed, the woman will add a 100gp gemstone to the reward (though how they divide the gemstone is their problem, not hers).

If the PCs ask what proof she will need of their completing the task, she tells them not to worry. She will know as soon as the seeds have been planted.

The gamemaster will throw what obstacles between the PCs and the center of the forest as he sees fit; maybe there are bandits in the woods who assume that the party is seeking them in an effort to claim the bounty on their heads.

An Unexpected Intruder

Once the party plants the seeds near the center of the forest (which they can find through successful Knowledge checks and any Ranger talents they may possess), it is only a matter of moments before a giant tree materializes, almost as if it were teleported into place. The tree stands several hundred feet tall and even in the brightest of sunlight, the tree gives off a faint aura.

When the tree appears, a wood golem leaps from its branches, snarling and hissing as it attacks the group. The golem is the tree's protector and stops attacking if the party moves more than a few hundred feet from the base of the giant tree.

LADY OF THE FOREST



Those who have traveled these strange woods before have spoken of all manner of inhabitants. Orcs who have chosen a life of peace. Families of kobolds who choose to farm mushrooms rather than serve evil spellcasters and dragons. Wizards who wish only to study their books. And the woman known only as "The Lady of the Forest."

Though she is referred to as a lady, the entity is actually a cosmic spirit that was trapped in this forest several centuries ago. Assuming the form of a human woman, the spirit spent its first decades seeking escape from the forest and this world. Unable to discover a way to return to its distant plane of existence, the spirit then turned its attention to one thing: causing as much pain and suffering to the inhabitants of this world as it can.

The heroes are likely to hear tales of the lady before they enter the forest. She is described as a lonely creature who lives off of magic and rules the animals of the wood from her strange throne. In truth, the lady's throne is the device that first brought the spirit to this world; this planar gate was destroyed when she first arrived, and only a powerful spellcaster will recognize the throne as a gate . . . and it is unknown how great a wizard it would take to repair the gate and allow the item and spirit to teleport back to their original plane.

The spirit acts much as a siren, using its magic to call unsuspecting men and women to its location so that it may slaughter them and consume their life force. In battle, the lady acts much like a ghost or wraith, capable of striking out with horrible, spiritual claws that drain energy from the victim. The spirit cannot be easily killed on this world; if defeated, it will vanish for 3d6 days after which point it reforms. Only destroying the throne will forever kill the spirit. If defeated, the belongings of the creature's earlier prey may be claimed as treasure items by the heroes.

a DRUID'S DEMAND

He introduces himself as Herkus Ruta, druid and protector of these very woods that you are passing through. Ruta tells of how he only recently cleared the forest of a twisted evil that had plagued it for many years, and demands that you dare not harm any of the creatures or beings who live within the forest. "This includes the tribe of goblins to the east," he states very clearly before he will allow you to pass through these woods.

If the heroes try to fight the druid, he is more powerful than they are and the stronger animals of the forest quickly come to his aid. The heroes may be able to defeat the druid and his animal allies, but doing so will drain their resources and leave them weakened.

Wise adventurers will instead thank the druid for his permission to travel the woods and set off along the forest road so that they can continue on their way. Along the sides of the road, they can see places where the trees and grass have been burned and battered, as if something large and terrible had caused significant damage to the area. Ruta clearly had a tough time stopping whatever evil had taken hold of the forest.

The Merchants

Roughly halfway through the forest, the PCs meet a small band of merchants who are heading in the opposite direction. The merchants are on foot, a donkey pulling a small cart of goods, and the three men immediately take this opportunity to present their wares to the party.

The Goblins

Elsewhere on the road, as the adventurers walk through the forest, the group meets several goblins who are clearing dead and mangled trees from alongside one section of the road. The goblins call a friendly greeting to the PCs, and some of their number stop work long enough to invite the heroes to share a drink and a snack or two.

If the heroes accept the invitation, their chat with the goblins is disrupted when those who continue working chop down a tree that is swarming with giant ants. Each ant is a few feet long, and the insects immediately attack the goblins.



THE WEREWOLF

When resting at an inn on the edge of the forest, you and your fellow adventurers soon hear of the traveler Dreux Marcoul, a wandering soul known to visit this inn from time to time. "A werewolf he is," the workers of the inn whisper when the innkeep isn't around.

Later that evening, as the party enjoys another round of drinks and listens to whatever rumors and gossip the locals are willing to share, the very "werewolf" they have heard of enters the inn's common room. The man nods a greeting to the group when he notices them, and then chooses an empty table near the bar.

Approaching the Werewolf

The adventurers may choose to make the first move, approaching Marcoul and engaging him in conversation. He is kind, friendly, and explains that most of his time is spent as a lone dungeoneer. *"Easier to sneak in and out if working alone,"* he explains. If asked about the rumors, Marcoul tells the party that he is not a werewolf, though his father was one before his death.

A Request for Assistance

If the heroes go about their own business and ignore the man, they're soon told by one of the inn's staff that Marcoul has asked if they would be willing to speak with him about a possible job.

Marcoul introduces himself as a rogue and dungeoneer and tells the party that while he prefers to work alone, he has come across a job that would be much easier to pull off if he had help. He has learned of a long-forgotten tomb several days' ride away and his studies suggest that undead forces guard the treasures that are hidden within the deepest chambers of the tomb. He offers the party equal shares of any claimed treasure if they will aid him in infiltrating and looting the dungeon. If asked about the rumor that he is a werewolf, the man laughs and explains that his father was such a creature, but that he is not. He explains that his teeth have always been sharp and unusual, but that's all he inherited from his father's werewolfism.



AGENT OF DEATH

The daylight vanishes without warning, replaced by a terrible darkness that is as unnatural as the void of the deepest chasms below the earth. Suddenly, in the sky above, a winged being stares down and smiles. The thing raises its hand and points at you . . . though you know not what it could want from you.

"You are trespassers," the thing screams down at the party as it raises a weapon. "You are unwelcome in this forest, and you must pay the price for daring to set foot where you do not belong." With that, the creature's wings buffet the air, stirring up dust, leaves, and twigs and temporarily blinding the adventurers. (All PCs suffer a -4 to any die rolls for 1d3+1 turns.)

The creature is an undead monster known as an agent of death, a skeletal being that is created when an evil cleric infuses the bones of a good-aligned character with the soul of an evil warrior. This one serves Kazimir Ruslanovich, a cleric in service of the God of Spiders. Kazimir only recently created the agent of death and has ordered the monster to stop any who come close to the cleric's hidden tower in the woods.

The monster should be slightly more powerful than the heroes can handle, but not so tough that it makes short work of them. The PCs should be able to defeat the agent of death, though it may drain their resources and the battle will draw the attention of others who happen to be traveling the forest.

Once the monster is defeated, Kazimir Ruslanovich and several skeletal warriors join the battle, which is now even more difficult for the party since they used most of their strength fighting off the agent of death.

You may either have the heroes captured and thrown into the dungeons beneath the cleric's tower – which is the setup for a fairly standard adventure – or maybe friendly villagers who were attracted by the fight with the agent of death arrive in time to save the heroes. In such an instance, Kazimir escapes and the PCs now have an enemy cleric to deal with in the future.



CENTAUR DEFENDER

It is uncommon to meet a centaur so far from their distant home and yet, here on the forest road, you and your friends encounter a centaur warrior who, if the grim look on his face carries any weight, is on a serious mission of some sort or other. He comes to a stop when he sees you, raising his torch in greeting. He wishes to talk.

Dejan Rajkovic tells you and your companions that he has recently encountered bandits in the woods and needs help to bring the men to justice. "They're close," he says to you and points in the direction you're already traveling. "I counted at least a score of the men, though it is possible that there are more of them. I killed one and then set off in search of help; there's no way that I could stop all of them on my own."

If you agree to aid the centaur, he tells you that the bandits were on foot and marching toward a camp in the deep forest. "I saw their camp earlier today, but it was unguarded and I did not know who they were. Now, after meeting them on the road, I can say with certainty that they are evil and must be stopped. They have prisoners, and we must free their captives and stop the bandits before they cause more destruction in these woods."

Attack on the Road

If the heroes choose to launch an immediate attack on the bandits, they'll engage the evil force of men on the road just before the group sets off into the forest. The battle will be challenging, but not as difficult as if the bandits were defending their camp. The men feel that they have the advantage and will try to take their attackers hostage, in the hopes of adding more prisoners



to their collection. If the battle goes wrong for them – more than half of their number are killed – the bandits disengage and try to escape into the woods.

Attack the Camp

The party may choose to wait, holding off on their attack until the bandits reach their camp. Rajkovic takes the party's lead in the matter, agreeing to whatever plan the PCs devise.

The Captives

A total of 2d4+2 prisoners are being held by the bandits, all of them locals from a nearby village. The people have no money and cannot pay the heroes for the rescue, but the villagers will be appreciative and tell the party that they are welcome in the village at any time. Free food, drink, and shelter in a friendly village is reward enough for many heroes.

THE WIZARD AND THE MISSING SPELL



Wearing the robes of the Order of Chanting Mages, the man you meet on the forest road calls out a friendly greeting and waves with his orb-tipped staff. "Greetings," the man calls from a distance. "Would you kindly ones happen to have spotted a strange aura within the last hour or so?"

Introducing himself as Odger Wichmann, member of the Chanting Mages, the wizard sees the confused look on the faces of the heroes and explains that he lives nearby and is in search of a missing spell.

"You see," the man says, "I was experimenting with an improved detection spell when my focus was broken and the unformed energy slipped the wards and escaped. I don't have to tell you how dangerous it can be for untamed, raw spell energy to be loose in the wild."

The wizard explains to the group that the energy sometimes taps into the wild magic of the region, transforming what should have been a spell into an arcane being that is mischievous and potentially dangerous. If left unchecked, the being can fully materialize in the world, becoming a treacherous fairie that will cause trouble for years to come.

"By my calculations," Wichmann tells the group, "we have only an hour to capture the creature and dispell it before it becomes a permanant inhabitant of these woods."

If the heroes agree to help capture the thing, Wichmann hands them a mystic orb and explains that touching the arcane aura with the orb will entrap the creature and harmlessly dissipate it before it is fully formed. He suggests that the group search one part of the forest as he continues seeking the creature elsewhere.

If the group encounters the being, they find it is immune to attacks, but if it touches them, they suffer 1d4 points of arcane damage. It requires a successful touch attack with the orb to dispell the creature.