

a DOZEN FORTUITOUS ENCOUNTERS

BY PHILIP REED

“Without encounters, without the opportunity to meet and deal with others, your campaign world is just going nowhere.”

*– David “Zeb” Cook, **Dungeon Master’s Guide** (Second Edition)*

Fantasy roleplaying games are dominated by encounters, with each different encounter moving the story forward in some way. Whether random or planned, encounters are the backbone of every campaign. String enough encounters together and you’ve constructed an adventure.

Random encounter tables can be a lot of fun, yes, but they’re often hollow collections of scraps that the GM must then assemble into a meaningful experience. To give you, the gamemaster, a bit of assistance when it comes to random encounters, the dozen concepts that follow include much more than just a fragment of an idea.

As always, these encounters are loose by design. My goal is to give you something between a single sentence of an idea and a detailed encounter. Select any one of these and, with a little time, make it your own.



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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 HOBGOBLIN THREATENED

"I mean you no harm," the hobgoblin promises, though his weapon and shield are held at the ready. It is shortly after sunset when the hobgoblin steps within sight of your camp. "There's something out there," the hobgoblin hisses. "I suggest that we work together this night for all our safety."

If the party chooses to turn the hobgoblin away from their camp, he wishes them luck and swears to them that whatever is out there is no friend of his. The adventurers will not see the hobgoblin again that night, but they will find his remains a mile from their camp when they wake up the next morning. Something ripped the creature in half from its body and wicked bites have torn the flesh from its bone.

If the adventurers invite the hobgoblin into their camp, he introduces himself as Kags Starg and tells them that all he knows is an unnatural beast is loose in the woods. He has not seen it, but the trail he encountered suggests that the beast is twice the height of most men and it must be very, very strong.

The Attack

The exact creature is left to the gamemaster to decide, though I suggest using an over-sized flesh golem that was crafted from the remains of orcs, trolls, hobgoblins, and giants. The monster's maker is dead and now it is seeking out revenge on . . . the monster isn't sure exactly who killed its master so revenge on everything.

If the party allows the hobgoblin to join them, they soon learn that he is a healer and capable of casting clerical spells. While he will never be a trusted friend of the group, there may exist a mutual respect after the encounter and the adventurers may have found themselves a contact to the hobgoblin tribes of the land.



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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, the adventurers meet a hobgoblin who wishes to join them for the night. If they grant his request, perhaps the monster he is worried about doesn't attack that first night. At that point, do the adventurers allow the hobgoblin to travel with them, or do they part ways in the morning? And if they do turn him away, and he happens to survive, have they now made an enemy who will never forgive them? Even the most casual of encounters can be a source of future conflict.

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THE TORCHLIT DISCOVERY

The dungeon is unnaturally dark, even near the main gate that opens outside to the world. The aura of evil sorcery hangs thick in the air, its presence unmistakable and chilling. Even those unskilled in the art of arcane magic sense the work of an evil spell.

The adventurers ready for the worst, drawing weapons and taking defensive positions as they peer through the darkness of the dungeon. The air is unnaturally still, spooky, unnerving. As they advance cautiously into the dungeon, their torches reveal an unexpected surprise that brings the party to a halt.

A corpse blocks their path. A fellow adventurer who was unlucky and unsuccessful at life. Once a male elf, the body has been assaulted by whatever vermin calls the dungeon home and it is little more than scraps of flesh, armor, and broken bones. Studying the remains quickly confirms that most of the valuables have already been claimed . . . but there is a ring on one of the body's battered fingers. The ring's exact nature is yours to decide; two ideas:

A Magic Ring

The ring is a magic item, a powerful object that any adventurer would be happy to own. The exact powers of the ring are left to the GM's judgment, though I suggest a low-level item . . . unless there happens to be someone searching for the ring. Basically, the more powerful the ring is, the more likely that it will cause the adventurers trouble.

A Ring Lost

An elven object of cultural and historic significance, only those who have studied the elvish people will recognize the ring for what it is: The Ring of Elven Memory grants the wearer access to the knowledge of the elves. Once per day, at will, the ring's wearer may tap into the deepest knowledge of the elves and instantly possess information that would have otherwise been unknown.



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ONCE A HERO

A chance meeting in the city. You and your fellow adventurers greet the stranger with a peaceful, friendly wave in the hopes that he is agreeable to sharing information and that he does not wish you harm.

Karl Igorevich was once a known and respected hero of the city. He spent five years as a member of the town watch, ten years as a dungeoneer, and many throughout the city and the surrounding lands knew of him and his reputation as an honest and brave warrior.

All of that went south the day that Igorevich was accused of theft, murder, and working with necromancers. The claims of his evil and terrible deeds were never proven, but the damage was done and Igorevich lost his reputation as a hero . . . and gained the reputation of a ruffian and a harsh, brutal thug who cared not for the people.

The party recognizes Igorevich immediately when he waves them down in the city street, and how they respond to him greatly influences the man's next actions.

Greeted as a Fellow Hero

If the group waves back and engages Igorevich in conversation, the man is quite friendly and ready to discuss news of the area. "The dragons are on the move," Igorevich tells the party, keeping his voice a whisper in the city street so that none may overhear his words of warning. We have two weeks, maybe three, before the dragons attack. Will you aid me in warning the town watch? They'll not believe me these days, but your reputation is clean and they may well believe your word."

Shunned as an Outcast

He frowns, shakes his head in sadness, and tries once again to engage the party in discussion. "I have important news from the west," he tells them. "I know that others will not believe me, but I had hoped that fellow dungeoneers who know how cruel the world can be would be at least willing to listen to what I have to say. It is vital to the survival of the city."

Are There Dragons?

There may very well be, yes, in which case I direct your attention to ***A Dozen Ancient Dragons*** for ideas. It is also possible that Igorevich is lying, though, at which points the PCs are being used by the man to spread the lies . . . but for what reason? Igorevich hopes that he can rob the city during the chaos of preparation for a battle that will never happen. Do the PCs uncover his lies and stop him, or are they fooled by the man?



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an ELVEN RANGER

You are weakened – returning from a dangerous adventure and in need of healing, rest, and supplies – when you encounter an elf on the trail. The stranger is armed and armored and looks determined.

The elf is a ranger, Daylor Larmaris, who is has been on the trail of a group of gnolls for three days. He is happy to see fellow adventurers and offers to aid the PCs as best he can. The ranger has food, water, and 2d4+1 healing potions that he will give to the adventurers if they are kind and treat him with respect.

In addition to healing the PCs as best he can, Larmaris also provides them with information on the road between their current location and the nearest town. He warns of bandits who have set up a tollbooth a few miles outside of the town. "I'll deal with them once I've handled these gnolls," the ranger tells the adventurers. "If you stick to the woods and avoid the road, you'll bypass their traps completely."

If any members of the party are in truly terrible shape, Larmaris will pull a potion of greater healing from his pack and offer it to the wounded hero. "This is the last one," Larmaris says sadly as he hands it to the PC. "I hope that it is enough to save you."

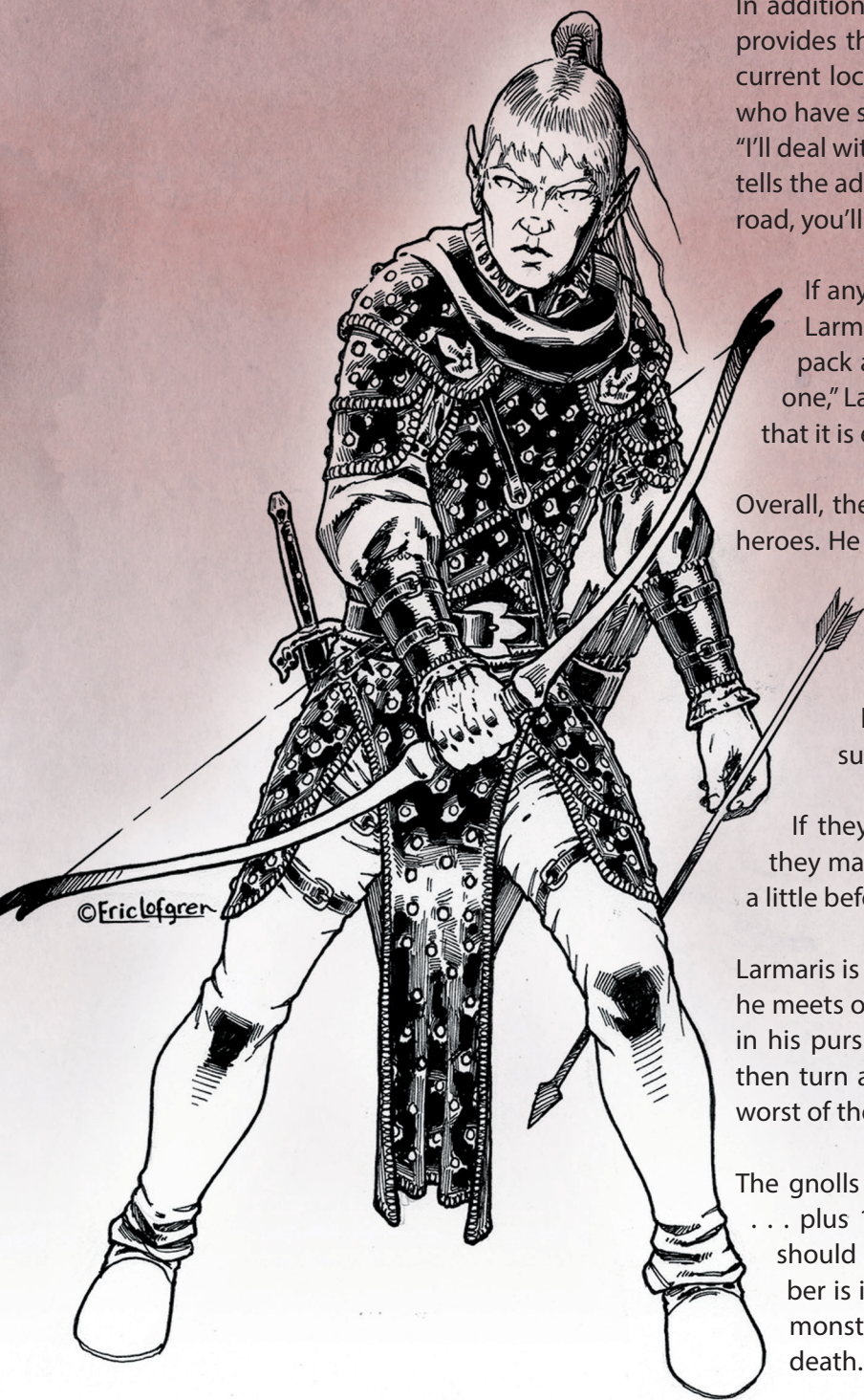
Overall, the elven ranger will do anything he can to aid the heroes. He is a strong warrior, excellent tracker, and he is always ready to aid others who fight evil.

If the adventurers volunteer to assist Larmaris, he at first refuses their aid. "You lot have clearly seen better days," the elf says, "and I would rather you survive than die because you joined my mission."

If they insist, Larmaris thanks them and suggests that they make camp for the night so that all of them may rest a little before setting off in search of the gnolls.

Larmaris is a brave and loyal companion and trusts all heroes he meets on the trail. If betrayed, though, the elf is relentless in his pursuit of revenge. One who would take his aid and then turn against him must, the elf thinks, be as evil as the worst of the demons and death to evil is the only solution.

The gnolls number as many as the GM feels is appropriate . . . plus 1d6 more just to make it interesting. The beasts should be a true challenge for the party, and if any member is in danger of dying during the encounter with the monsters, Larmaris steps between the PC and a certain death. The ranger will die if he has to.



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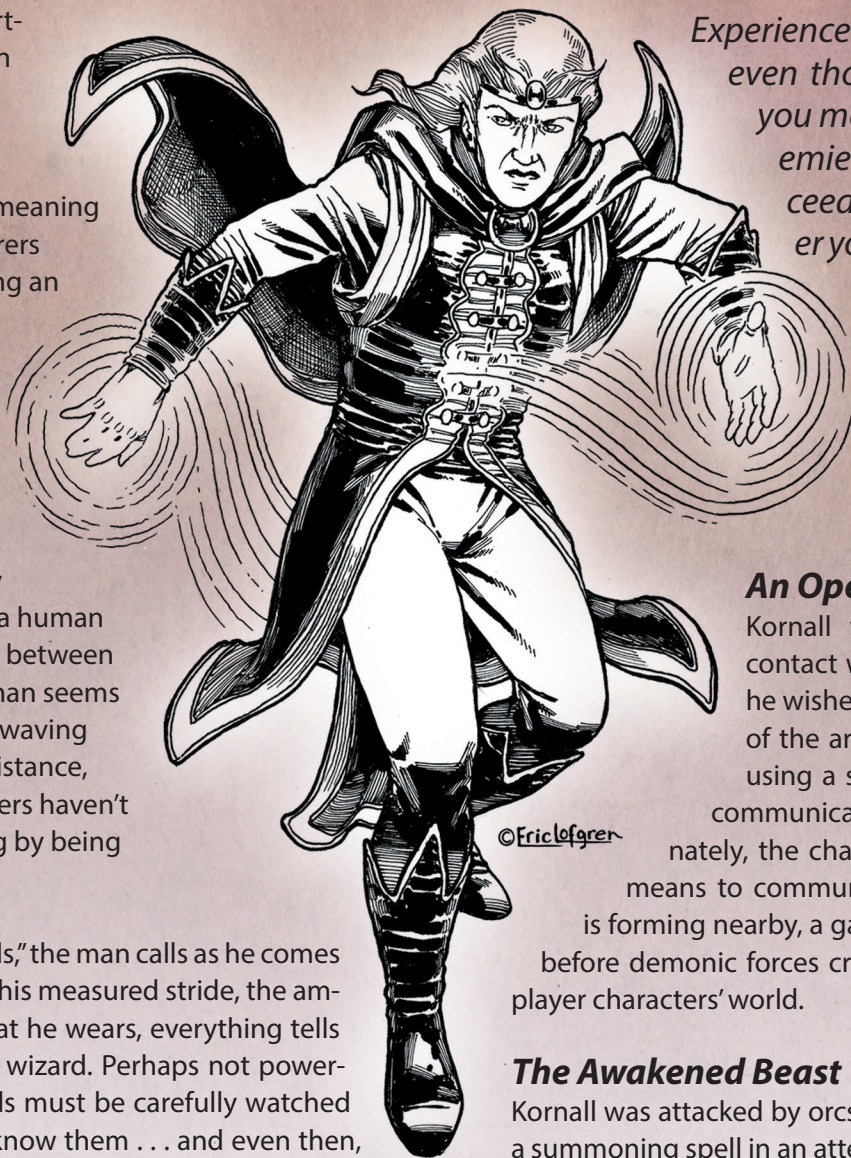
THE ARCAINE INCIDENT

There are no shortage of dangers on the many roads and paths that connect the people of the lands, meaning that the adventurers are always keeping an eye open. Alert and ready for anything, even when in the safest of cities or on the most traveled of roads, the party is ready when they meet a human mage on the trail between two towns. The man seems friendly enough, waving to them from a distance, but the adventurers haven't survived this long by being careless.

"Greetings, friends," the man calls as he comes closer. His robes, his measured stride, the amulet and rings that he wears, everything tells you that this is a wizard. Perhaps not powerful, but all wizards must be carefully watched until you get to know them . . . and even then, wizards cannot be trusted.

"I am Orban Richard Kornall," the man says when you come within ten or twelve feet of each other. His hands held outward, in the universal greeting of friendship, Kornall carries a light pack and is – as far as you can tell – unarmed. Not even a dagger!

"I must beg your help," Kornall immediately tells the adventurers. "There has been a terrible accident – my fault, I must admit – and we must seal the passage before the worst is unleashed and all of our lives are put in danger." Kornall tells the party of his mistake, which could be anything the GM imagines. Including:



Experience has taught you that even though not all strangers you meet on the road are enemies, you should still proceed with caution whenever you encounter someone new. Electing to treat every stranger with caution has served you well on your journeys.

An Open Gate

Kornall was attempting to make contact with an otherworldly being; he wished to gain secret knowledge of the arcane and magical and was using a scroll to open a channel to communicate with a demon. Unfortunately, the channel was more than just a means to communicate and now a gateway is forming nearby, a gateway that must be closed before demonic forces crash through and enter the player characters' world.

The Awakened Beast

Kornall was attacked by orcs and during the battle cast a summoning spell in an attempt to bring aid to defend himself. Unfortunately, the wizard was unable to control the summoned beast and as soon as it destroyed the orcs, the monster escaped Kornall's arcane bonds and now the creature is loose somewhere in the forest. The wizard needs the party's help to find and defeat the monster before it causes terrible damage.

The Magic Sickness

Kornall is hiding a horrible secret; in his attempt to brew new potions, the wizard accidentally created an arcane disease that is even now spreading through the creatures of the forest. The illness is immune to all but the most powerful of healing magics, and Kornall needs help to kill the carriers and eradicate the sickness.

THE LOST CHILD

"Missing, perhaps kidnapped," the woman whispers as she looks around to be certain that none are eavesdropping. "There's a reward for the safe return of the child, and as much as I would like to claim the coin for myself, I know I have not the skills to find and rescue the missing child." She looks to your group, slowly studying each of you. "You lot," she soon says in a hushed voice, "look to be exactly the sort who can profit from this terrible situation."

Margrete Drage, inexperienced adventurer looking to make a name for herself and to learn from others, has been watching for dungeoneers for a few days now. She reasons that those who have survived the wicked dungeons of the land will have the skills and temperament necessary to seek out and rescue the lost child . . . and she plans to be there every step of the way. Learning all that she can and, if all goes as she has planned, freeing her child from the ratmen beneath the city.

Drage is willing to help the party in any way that she can. She immediately recommends different courses of action:

- She will take the PCs to meet the in-between who is working on behalf of the family. Bronislav Zima is an ancient man of eighty winters and has worked as a fence, a forger, and a moneylender. He is a family friend and has been entrusted with the reward money.
- If asked, Drage will admit that she has a guess about where the child may have gone. She suggests that the infant may have been snatched up by the ratmen who live in the city sewers. She knows of two openings into the sewer that are large enough for the adventurers to enter the tunnels below the city.
- Drage knows of an aging ratcatcher who may be able to help the PCs. Sero Hakobyan spent twenty years as a city employee during which time he often went below ground to deal with the infestation of rats and, at times, combat the evil ratmen.

Regardless of which action the PCs take, Drage will do everything that she can to keep her identity as the child's mother hidden from the party. Her emotions are a wreck as she is personally torn between her desire to become a dungeoneer and her sense of responsibility as a mother. Ultimately, when it comes down to it, Drage will choose the life of a mother and will reveal her secret to the group if they rescue her child.



a DRUNKEN WARRIOR

While enjoying a drink with your companions at a tavern, you overhear a whispered argument at a nearby table. Turning back to your friends, attempting to ignore the strangers, your evening is suddenly disrupted when the nearby argument turns into a drunken fight.

The party may try to avoid the fight, but it's an easy enough matter to thrust them into the situation by having one of the drunken combatants take a swing at one of the PCs. So long as the battle remains friendly – no weapons, just fists – the tavern keeper is happy to let things play out. His brother is a carpenter, so he gets repairs at a decent price, and the tavern keeper is a little proud of the fact that his tavern is known for its occasional brawl.

Things only start to go bad if one of the combatants draws a weapon; at that point, the tavern keeper sends one of his staff to find the town watch and he and those not in the fight try to find cover and avoid getting entangled in the mess.

The night in question, when the PCs are at the tavern, the fight turns ugly when a warrior pulls two axes and starts slaughtering patrons. If the party moves to stop the drunken warrior, the tavern keeper and his staff notice their actions; the town watch may move to arrest the adventurers, but they change their mind when the tavern keeper tells of how the PCs fought to stop the madman.

A Loyal Friend

The tavern keeper introduces himself as Fazel Bayet and thanks the party for their help in the fight. He pays for their drinks and meal that night, insisting that they stay for the rest of the evening and enjoy his hospitality.

The party has earned itself a loyal friend and a new contact in the city. Bayet is well connected in the city and has several merchant friends; if they need any equipment at all, Bayet tells them, see him first and he'll do what he can to secure a discount for them. For so long as they show him kindness, Bayet remains their



friend and does what he can to aid their cause. Over time, if they maintain the relationship, Bayet's wealth grows and he may, after several years of campaign time, become a patron who chooses to finance some of the PCs' expeditions into the unknown.

GUARDED PASSAGE

After days of travel, you reach your destination. The dungeon is before you, its treasures yours to claim . . . if you can get through the unexpected guardian who stands before the entrance. "Turn back," he commands. "Too many have been claimed by the evils of this ancient tomb." He raises his weapon threateningly, moving a step closer to your party. "Turn back."

For centuries, Borbely Noel, the undying guardian, has stood at the gates of this very dungeon and warned those about to enter to abandon their plans and to save their own lives. Once a living man, Noel is now an arcane being who has become so entrapped by his mission that nothing will remove him from his place in the world. He is not undead, but he is also not living, so no attack or magic will prevent him from standing at this place.

Noel does not attack those who choose to enter the dungeon. Instead, he simply continues to insist that the adventurers turn back. If attacked, he fades from existence only to return 2d6 rounds later.

If the PCs choose to engage Noel in conversation, they learn that he died deep within this dungeon centuries ago and has since stood here to warn others. His memories of the dungeon's details are fuzzy, but he does remember well that the dungeon was heavily trapped and very dangerous.

If the party chooses to ignore the warnings and enter the dungeon, there is a 5% chance during any conflict that Noel will appear and aid them in their fight against whatever monsters they have encountered. Only in such battles can the arcane being be harmed; if Noel dies in such a fight, he returns to the gate and will not again join the PCs in the dungeon.

If Noel and the PCs defeat the monsters in whatever encounter he has joined, the arcane curse is lifted and Noel is released from whatever magic has kept him trapped at the dungeon's gateway these last few centuries.



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THE LOST SPELLBOOK

A reward! You and your companions learn of a rich reward being offered to anyone who can locate and return a lost spellbook. The mage, Vira Vathat, is offering 500 gold coins for the safe return of her spellbook. She has taken a room at a local inn, The Arcane Night, and can only remember that she last saw it one week ago when fleeing a goblin attack at a nearby village. She must have left it behind in her rush to escape the horde of beasts.

The 500 gold reward for the spellbook is, of course, only a suggested value. As the gamemaster, it is your responsibility to adjust that number (and any other details) to better fit the needs of your own campaign.

Vira Vathat is almost defenseless without her spellbook and will not leave the room at the inn until the book is once again in her hands, or a friend she trusts arrives to escort her to safety. The mage has paid a trio of local thugs to guard her until the book is returned; anyone seeking an audience with Vathat will have to get through her guards or convince the guards that they mean the wizard no harm. The thugs should be tough, but not stronger than the PCs.

Exactly where is the lost spellbook? Here are three ideas:

The Goblins Have it

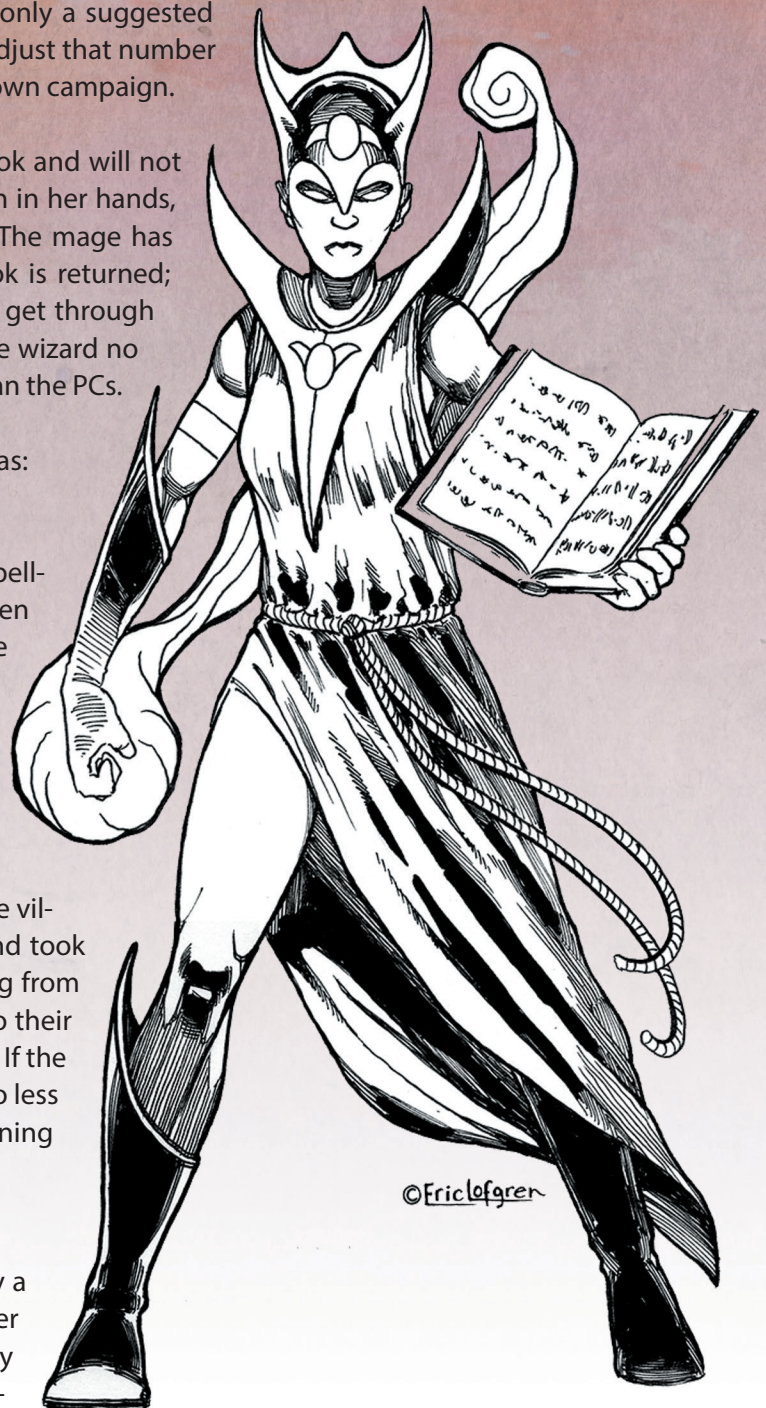
In this scenario, the raiding goblins recognized the spellbook as a valuable object and took it with them when they left the village. Perhaps a goblin wizard of the tribe now has the spellbook and is studying it in an attempt to learn new spells. The goblin may also be transcribing the spells to scrolls; beware of a goblin force armed with magic scrolls!

The Villagers Have It

The goblins didn't notice the spellbook as they fled the village, but the villagers absolutely noticed the book and took it. They may not have a spellcaster capable of learning from the book, but they know that it is valuable and will do their best to sell the book to any who come searching for it. If the villagers learn of the 500 gold reward, they will take no less than 500 gold pieces for the book. No amount of reasoning will change their mind.

A Wandering Spellcaster Has It

Under this scenario, the book was found yesterday by a young mage who knows only a handful of low-power spells. He recognizes that many of the spells are very powerful and wishes to learn them. He could be convinced to sell the book.



MERCENARY FOR HIRE



He eyes your party as you enter the noisy, crowded tavern, keeping your group under watch as if trying to decide whether or not you are a threat. His manner makes you think that he must be a wanted man, a thought that is instantly erased when he stands up from his table and walks to yours. Is he a danger? Is he a possible patron? Does he possess information that he wishes to sell to adventurers? You brace yourself for the unknown...

"Bertel Ebbesen," the man says as he holds out a hand in greeting. "Mercenary by profession, though I've not had work for well over three weeks now and it is time I got out of this tavern and returned to the field."

Ebbesen explains that there is a merc company camped four days' ride from the tavern and he would like to join the party until he can meet up with the mercs and join their outfit. He asks only for a few copper each day – in advance – so that he can buy rations for the journey. The man explains that he spent the last of his money earlier today and it is time that he move on.

Ebbesen also offers to trade knowledge for their company until he meets with the mercs. The man tells of a dungeon not far from the mercenary camp, and will both take them there and join them in exploring the subterranean complex for a share of whatever treasures they may find.

If the adventurers accept his offer, Ebbesen then tells them he has not a horse and will need one of them to allow him to ride. (If the party has no horses, this is not an issue at all.)

The dungeon that the merc leads them to is small and mostly empty of treasure. Years ago, maybe, there were riches to be found, but the location has been explored so many times that anything of real value was taken long ago.

Still, even without treasure it could be useful for the group to know a mercenary and for them to meet the merc company. It always helps to have dangerous friends.

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THE DWARVEN COMPANION

Deep underground, exploring some long-forgotten dungeon complex, you and your friends encounter a dwarven warrior who is without company. "Thazzur Bronzebeard," he introduces himself to you. "Of Clan Bronzebeard and son of Haggark Bronzebeard, champion of Guildhome and master of the great axe of Hommelson." He looks back over his shoulder. "I was separated from my party and would greatly appreciate your assistance in finding them. I fear they've found trouble."

Obviously, the party must choose to assist the dwarf in his search for his companions, yes? If the party elects to ignore the dwarf, he sets off alone into the dungeon.



Heroic PCs, of course, join Thazzur Bronzebeard and descend deeper into the dungeon in search of the missing adventurers. After some time, they start to find signs of battle; broken arrows, scuffs and footsteps in the dust, blood splatters. Bronzebeard mutters to himself each time they encounter signs of a struggle, going to every body to see if it is his friends. Fortunately, though, all the PCs find are the corpses of bandits and scoundrels who should most certainly not be in this dungeon.

All Are Dead

If the GM wishes, he may rule that the missing party of adventurers are found slain, all of them defeated in battle against the bandits. Under this scenario, the bandits have taken all of the items of value and the PCs must now aid the dwarf in taking revenge on the bandits. If the group is successful in finding and defeating the bandits, the dwarf insists that the adventurers take a few magic items (of the gamemaster's choice, obviously) as thanks for their help in dealing with the evil scoundrels.

Still Alive

Under this scenario, the party locates the missing adventurers who have been taken captive by the bandits. The dwarf's friends are alive, and he needs the PCs to help him rescue his companions. If they succeed in freeing the captives, the player characters will have made powerful new allies; it never hurts to befriend a competing band of adventurers.

Monsters, Not Men

Instead of bandits, the others were taken by monsters. This may make the situation a little more challenging – a band of hobgoblins will be much harder to defeat than bandits – but the GM knows what threats best suit his players.

a SWORD FOR YOUR COIN

After a rough, dangerous adventure in which some members of the party came close to death, the group finds themselves in a quiet tavern where they meet Karagur Hanark, a half-orc mercenary and sword-for-hire. Either by accident or a short conversation with the party, Hanark tells the PCs that he will join them on their next dungeon expedition . . . for a price. Hanark is known to some in the town and what little information the party may learn of the warrior suggests that he is skilled and trustworthy.

If the adventurers are used to bringing hirelings into their group, they'll find that Hanark is nothing like the usual man-at-arms that they may have hired in the past. Whereas many hirelings may be content to follow orders, they soon learn that the half-orc is an experienced warrior and will question their orders if he feels that they may be mistaken in their plans.

If the adventurers listen to Hanark, they will soon find that he has a lot to teach them and can be a big help in battle. The half-orc is more experienced than any of the PCs and he has joined them because he is trying to determine whether or not they are worthy of joining a secretive organization. An underground guild for adventurers, known as Defenders' Shield, has taken notice of the party and is planning to invite them to join.

Hanark will give the adventurers one week. At the end of the week, if they haven't proven worthy to join the guild, the half-orc will leave the party without explanation.

If they earn Hanark's trust, the half-orc tells the group of the guild and teaches them the secret handshake and makes them members. Membership is free and grants the PCs access to safehouses in some of the largest cities of the land. The group will, on occasion, be asked to perform tasks for the guild; usually to help other members with challenging missions and/or to recover specific treasure items that the guild will then sell to fund the safehouses.

Often, a group of adventurers is given a single chance to join the guild; members of the Defenders' Shield aren't known for changing their minds. They won't actively work against the party if the invitation is rejected, but the guild also won't be of any help if the group finds themselves in trouble.

