

*“Even in an adventure driven by events, an encounter unrelated to the flow of the events can serve to emphasize (or distract from) the ongoing plot.”*

– Monte Cook,  
*Dungeon Master’s  
Guide (3.5 Edition)*

# a DOZEN TREACHEROUS ENCOUNTERS

**BY PHILIP REED**

The number of possible encounters that you may access – either to expand into a larger scene or to use as inspiration for an encounter of your own design – grows by twelve with this latest release in the **A Dozen . . .** series of PDFs. This time around, I’ve provided twelve encounters you can draw from that each include combat and non-combat options.

As always, it is my hope that the twelve encounters described on the following pages spark your own creativity and lead to enjoyable game sessions that are unlike what any other GM could imagine. As a storyteller, it is your job during the session to entertain the players, and only you know best how to adapt published game concepts to fit the tastes of your group.

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**a DOZEN TREACHEROUS ENCOUNTERS • Page 1**

# 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. Each encounter includes a single illustration to help set the mood.
4. 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 an idea that you can expand to suit your campaign. Each includes a combat and a non-combat option.

## 1 the skeleton's shield

2 Within the dungeon, you and your companions bash through one door that splinters inward in a shower of wood. The room is empty, other than a skeleton that stands tall and proud. It speaks.

"Hold your weapons, gentlefolk, for I mean you no ill and wish only to beg you for help."

The skeleton takes a step back, waiting to see how you will respond to its request for assistance.

### Combat Encounter

4 If you rush to attack, the skeleton raises its sword and shield to defend itself. The skeleton continues to talk to you, doing its best to deflect blows while not counterattacking. If you continue attacking, and do not pause, the skeleton engages in combat after three rounds and will do all it can to defeat you without killing you and your companions.

In battle, the skeleton is as powerful as the party's most experienced warrior. Its sword inflicts double damage and its shield glows bright blue each time that it is hit. If the skeleton is reduced to half hit points, it unleashes its full prowess and fights to win.

The skeleton's shield reduces all physical and magical damage that hits the creature by half, regardless of if the attract struck the shield or not.

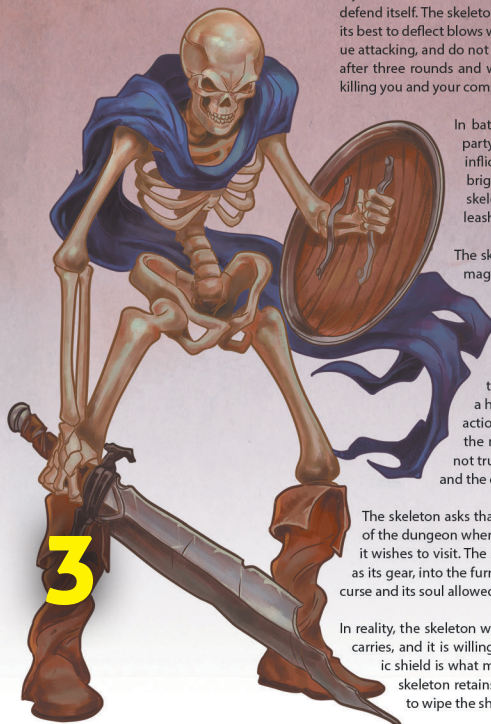
### Non-Combat Encounter

If you stop to listen to the skeleton, it thanks you and tells of how it was once a human soldier, Andrej Hornicky, and the actions of a wicked wizard changed him into the monster you see today. The skeleton is not truly an undead, but is an arcane creation and the curse cannot be undone.

3 The skeleton asks that you help it to travel to a deeper level of the dungeon where, the thing says, there is a furnace that it wishes to visit. The skeleton's goal is to throw itself, as well as its gear, into the furnace so that it can be released from the curse and its soul allowed to travel to the afterlife.

In reality, the skeleton wishes most to destroy the shield that it carries, and it is willing to sacrifice itself to do this. The magic shield is what made the thing what it is today, and the skeleton retains enough of its past memories to want to wipe the shield from existence.

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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 all 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, the encounter shown above describes a skeleton that isn't your usual undead monster. This particular skeleton isn't what it appears, and only during the course of the encounter will the player characters learn that something is different about this creature.

Each encounter is only useful once, though coming back and reading any of these long after you have used them may trigger new ideas of your own.



# ENCOUNTER WITH EVIL

*The drow warrior blocks your path and raises his arm, pointing directly at your party. "For what reason do you enter this forest?" The drow takes one step toward you and raises his weapon menacingly. "Tell me why you are here."*

Armored and ready for battle, the dark elf introduces himself as Crardon Khilirir and says that he is the defender of this path. Only those with permission to be on the path, the drow states, are allowed to pass. If pressed, the drow says that permission must be granted by his queen, the dark elf leader of the city that lies deep beneath this very spot.

## **Combat Encounter**

If you refuse to turn back, and you do not have the permission of the drow queen, the warrior uses every skill, spell, and weapon he possesses to prevent you from continuing down the pathway. The drow is a skilled fighter/mage and uses an unusual scythe when attacking. The elf may cast a handful of offensive spells, as selected by the gamemaster.

The drow will fight to the death, but it will not fight alone. The warrior only has to last  $2d4+2$  combat rounds, after which point  $1d4+2$  drow soldiers are teleported into the battle; Khilirir notifies the city of the intruders using a magic ring as soon as the PCs attack.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If you hold back, and do not attack, and if you do not try to walk down the path, the drow warrior will discuss local news, share what gossip he may have heard, and generally be as friendly as you can expect any dark elf to ever be. The drow will not help the adventurers, but he will direct them to a nearby town where they can find shelter, food, and assistance. The drow city and nearby human settlement have a truce and the two do all they can to not come into conflict with each other.

*"Drow trust no one, and nothing, and most are incapable of compassion, kindness, or love. Many drow are actively murderous and delight in the giving of pain."*

– Bruce R. Cordell, Gwendolyn F. M. Kestrel, and Jeff Quick, **Underdark**



# a TWISTED CREATION

*Blood drips from the thing's arm, a sickening pool of blood at its feet as it rises from a crouching position to stand upright. It is short, no taller than a dwarf, except for the odd skull that is secured to its mangy hair. All at once, the mass of skulls on its back start chattering and speaking in strange, ancient tongues.*

Whatever this thing is, it's grotesque and disgusting. The skull floating above its head speaks, as do those on its back, but the words make no sense to any of your group *and* it appears that each of the skulls is speaking in a different language. The thing's eyes stare blankly at you, as if there is no life within its body.

## **Combat Encounter**

If you attack the monster, it slashes at you with clawed hands. The monster is as strong as an orc and tries to bite any who get too close to it. The skulls don't stop speaking . . . unless they see a chance to bite down on an opponent. Do not get too close to this thing.

After a few rounds of combat, if the thing still lives, then the skulls start chanting in unison. Their strange chant unleashes a spell that heals the monster to maximum health and doubles its strength for 2d6 rounds.

Whatever this thing is, it isn't afraid to fight and will continue to slash and bite at you and your companions until you are all dead or you defeat it. If killed, the thing collapses in a mass of meat and lies unmoving. The skulls die with it.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If you do not attack the monster, it stops its advance when it is within five or so feet of you at which point it sits on the ground. After a few moments, the skulls on its back quiet down – they continue to speak in different languages, but in a whisper – and the skull on the monster's head speaks in a louder voice, in a common tongue that you can all understand.

*"We are Nadan, eater of the dead and conduit to the Great God Tepeth Metus. Do you wish to speak to Tepeth Metus and swear your loyalty to Him and all that He holds dear?"*

If you choose to speak to Tepeth Metus, an ancient god of death and disease, there is a 1% chance that you are not driven insane from the direct contact with a god. Any PCs who possess knowledge of religion and the arcane will warn others in the party to not ask to speak with the god.

If you refuse the chance to speak with Tepeth Metus, the monster turns on you and attacks until it is dead. The thing will not run from the fight.

# THE SKELETON'S SHIELD

*Within the dungeon, you and your companions bash through one door that splinters inward in a shower of wood. The room is empty, other than a skeleton that stands tall and proud. It speaks.*

*"Hold your weapons, gentlefolk, for I mean you no ill and wish only to beg you for help."*

The skeleton takes a step back, waiting to see how you will respond to its request for assistance.

## **Combat Encounter**

If you rush to attack, the skeleton raises its sword and shield to defend itself. The skeleton continues to talk as you attack, doing its best to deflect blows while not counter-striking. If you continue attacking, and do not pause, the skeleton engages in combat after three rounds and will do all it can to defeat you without killing you and your companions.

In battle, the skeleton is as powerful as the party's most experienced warrior. Its sword inflicts double damage and its shield glows bright blue each time that it is hit. If the skeleton is reduced to half hit points, it unleashes its full prowess and fights to win.

The skeleton's shield reduces all physical and magical damage that hits the creature by half, regardless of if the attack struck the shield or not.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If you stop to listen to the skeleton, it thanks you and tells of how it was once a human soldier, Andrej Hornicky, and the actions of a wicked wizard changed him into the monster you see today. The skeleton is not truly an undead, but is an arcane creation and the curse cannot be undone.

The skeleton asks that you help it to travel to a deeper level of the dungeon where, the thing says, there is a furnace that it wishes to visit. The skeleton's goal is to throw itself, as well as its gear, into the furnace so that it can be released from the curse and its soul allowed to travel to the afterlife.

In reality, the skeleton wishes most to destroy the shield that it carries, and it is willing to sacrifice itself to do this. The magic shield is what made the thing what it is today, and the skeleton retains enough of its past memories to want to wipe the shield from existence.





# THE DRAGON AND THE STORM

*In the dark of night, you and your companions are forced from your makeshift camp as the waters rise, flooding your chosen site. You decide to press on, the flashes of lightning illuminating your path as you seek shelter from the storm. As the thunder crashes and lightning flashes, you spot an ominous silhouette on the rocky peaks.*

The dragon's lair was raided recently and it is now furious, unleashing its magic as a storm that is tearing up the landscape and terrifying many of the animals in the affected area. The dragon has no idea who took its treasures, so it is simply inflicting as much damage as possible in an effort to punish anything within range of its magical attack.

## **Combat Encounter**

If you choose to attack the dragon, the storm suddenly comes to an end and it turns its attention to you and your companions. The dragon is every bit as powerful and destructive as the gamemaster decides is appropriate to the situation; against lower-level PCs, maybe the dragon has already exhausted much of its power when it summoned the storm that chased the party from their camp site.

The dragon doesn't know who stole its treasures, but it instantly decides that the PCs are the thieves who committed the sin of infiltrating its lair. The dragon will fight to the death.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

The PCs may choose to hide from the dragon when they spot it, making the decision that avoiding the fury of a dragon is the smart course of action.

When searching for a place to hide, the party comes across the dragon's lair. Despite what may have already been stolen from the dragon, there are still several valuable treasures just waiting to be taken. Unfortunately for the group, the dragon has set a magic alarm and if a single item is touched, the alarm triggers and the dragon races back to confront the intruders.

# GOBLIN WARRIOR

*Suicidal is the only word that could possibly describe the single goblin that stands before you and your fellow adventurers. Charging from the woods alongside the road, the creature raises its mace and yells out a challenge, accusing you of killing its friends. You've not seen goblins in days, so what does this creature mean?*



The goblin races toward you and your companions, murder in its eyes and promises of death on its lips. You've truly not encountered goblins for quite some time now, so you're unsure of what the goblin could be talking about as it screams about you killing its friends.

## **Combat Encounter**

If you choose to engage the goblin, the encounter quickly devolves into a violent -- and one-sided -- event. The goblin is no match for your party and it will not stop fighting until it is dead. In addition to its mace, the goblin is also carrying a few smoke bombs and a small coin purse with a few copper and silver pieces.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If you do not fight the goblin, instead finding a way to restrain it without killing it, you may be able to talk with the goblin and find out what foul, terrible actions it thinks you have performed.

It takes several moments for the goblin to calm down enough to talk, at which point it looks closer at each of you and then shakes its head. *"It wasn't you,"* the goblin says as soon as it gets a good look at your party.

The goblin tells how it and its people were in their village a few days ago when adventurers rode in and attacked. The goblin, his name is Geerd Dralb, only survived because he was knocked unconscious during the battle and left for dead. When he came to, the village was burning and everyone was dead.

The goblin is now seeking those who wiped out his village and he will not rest until he has killed the murderers -- or he is dead.

If the party wishes to help Dralb find those who attacked the village, the goblin thanks them and promises that they may keep any riches that the others are carrying. He only wants their deaths.

The attackers were a band of evil adventurers who learned of the village and thought it would be fun to kill a bunch of goblins. They had no reason for their attack other than the desire to be as cruel as possible.



# CHAOS ON HORSEBACK

*The knight at first looks the part of a noble paladin, those holy warriors who defend the good and innocent of the land against evil. As the rider comes closer, though, you are filled with an unexplainable sense of dread, as if an aura of evil surrounds him.*

The warrior shows no signs of slowing or of turning to miss you. You and your friends may either leap to the side, to avoid being trampled, or you may hold your ground and fight the evil knight.

## **Combat Encounter**

The knight is all too willing to fight you, doing his best to charge and trample one or more of you and then, when possible, turning back and leaping from his horse to engage you in hand-to-hand combat. The knight is equipped with magic armor and weapons and is more skilled and powerful than any member of your group.

If the knight is reduced to half his hit points, he raises his weapon in salute and then he and his horse vanish. This extra-planar warrior only comes to this plane of existence for sport, and he returns to his home world once he is wounded.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

Leaping to the side, the knight and rider thunder off and are soon gone. All that remains of their charge is a cloud of dust and a scrap of parchment on which is written: *"It is unfortunate that you are cowards. Perhaps we will meet again when you are worthy of my sword."*



# a mummy and treasure

*As experienced adventurers, you and your friends know that no dungeon is without some danger. And where there is danger, there is certain to be treasure.*



Every dungeon has treasure, and often guardians, but this time you come across a treasure that is being watched by a monster with only a single purpose: to prevent anyone from taking a particular item of treasure from its resting place.

## **Combat Encounter**

The instant you touch the treasure item (which can be anything the GM wishes), the mummy protecting the item is magically notified and the beast starts walking toward the treasure. The arcane bond between the item and the monster allows the mummy to track the item no matter where it is, and the undead monster will not rest until the treasure item is returned to its proper resting place.

Combat with the mummy is inevitable if the treasure is touched or taken. And if the treasure is sold or handed to another, the mummy shifts its attention to continue following the item. Any who come into contact with the treasure are marked by the magic of the curse; the mummy will attack those who have touched the treasure even if they no longer possess the item. This arcane mark lasts for 3d6 days after the item was touched.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

Only those with permission from the monster's master – usually a cleric or spellcaster who created the mummy – may touch the treasure item and not be forced into battle with the monster. Unfortunately for the party, a mummy often lasts much longer than its creator and it is unlikely that they will get permission to touch the affected treasure.

The party may also try to trap the monster before grabbing the treasure. If they're aware that a particular item is guarded by a mummy, and know the monster's location, they can try to deal with the beast before going after the treasure.

*“Mummies defend tombs and other sacred places against intrusion, striking down foes with a deadly rotting disease.”*

*– Mike Mearls, Stephen Schubert, and James Wyatt, **Monster Manual** (4th Edition)*



# THE WARRIOR ELF

*The blackness of the armor hides the elf well, and he would have been impossible to spot if not for the paleness of his flesh and the flash of his swords. The drow stands in defense of the cavern mouth, protecting his people from vile intruders.*

Cuvnai Okzi is a drow champion, one of their greatest warriors, who has been tasked with protecting this minor entrance to the drow city. The cave is a rarely used passage and it has been years since Okzi last defended his people from unwanted invaders.

## **Combat Encounter**

Okzi is impatient and eager to prove that he is still capable of protecting his people. He is well aware that his skills have withered with age and that many in the city no longer feel he has what it takes to serve as a guard. This is his chance to show them all that he is still to be feared and that none will get past him. Okzi is not up to the task of fighting the party, though, and he will be defeated if they choose to push their way into the cave.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If the party notices that the drow is unable to keep up with the fight, they may elect to hold back and try to talk to him. If questioned, Okzi continues to try and fight them, calling them cowards and insisting that they face him and his swords. It is only when he is wounded that the drow shows any hesitation, at which point the party may again try to talk to him. Will the drow warrior admit his fear of inadequacy to the group, or will he refuse to face the truth and force the party to kill him?

What is worse is that the drow have stationed more guards deeper in the cave; they expect Okzi to be killed if anyone tries to enter the city through this direction.

# a SINGLE GNOLL

*The hyena-like beast is crouched at the stream, filling a waterskin when you spot it several hundred feet from your position. It raises its head, nose sniffing, and reaches for its spear as it notices you and your fellow dungeoneers.*



The gnoll, Jaalos, was separated from his pack several weeks ago and has been surviving as best he can in the forest. The gnoll does not know where his pack has gone, and he now fears the worst.

The creature doesn't trust strangers and is especially wary of adventurers, who are usually quick to attack members of his race. He will not move to engage in battle, but he will defend himself if attacked.

## **Combat Encounter**

The gnoll defends himself with his spear and will do all that he can to escape from the group. The creature, if wounded, changes from making a defensive retreat to a panicked run. If reduced below half his hit points, there is a 25% chance that the creature will grow more angry than frightened; if this happens, the gnoll gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls and he will fight to the death.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

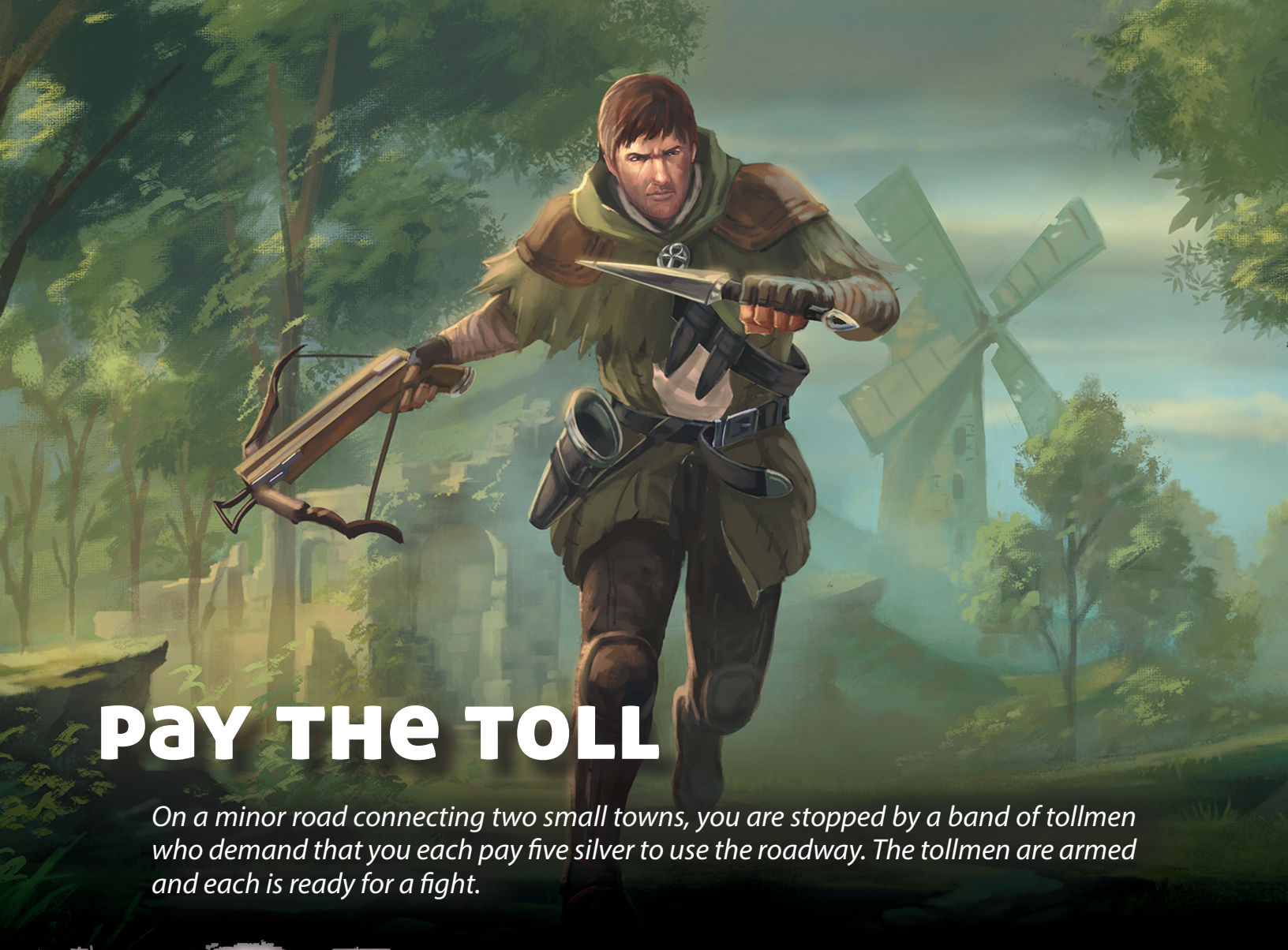
The gnoll tells of how he was separated from his pack: they came into conflict with a tribe of orcs and in the battle, he was forced to flee into the forest and hasn't seen his people since.

The gnoll asks for help locating his pack. Jaalos will take the party back to where he last saw his people, and an experienced tracker may be able to pick up the trail (though it will be very difficult to track the pack of gnolls; time has erased most of their tracks).

The gnoll will remain with the group until they find his pack.

*"A lone gnoll is a survivor of some calamity inevitably looking for a new band to join or an exile trying to find some other group of humanoids to join."*

**– Pathfinder Chronicles:  
Classic Monsters Revisited**



# PAY THE TOLL

*On a minor road connecting two small towns, you are stopped by a band of tollmen who demand that you each pay five silver to use the roadway. The tollmen are armed and each is ready for a fight.*

There are twice as many tollmen as there are members in your party, making you think hard about the situation. Each man looks hardened and experienced, and a few of them have scars that show they've been in fights before. Will you pay their toll, or will you choose to put an end to this particular band of ruffians and their scheme to take money from travelers?

## **Combat Encounter**

If you fight, you'll find that the thugs are indeed experienced and looking for some fun. The men are not masterful warriors, but they are capable of working together against a common foe. One of them, the leader, shows that he has some knowledge of squad tactics, but his followers are incapable of following more than a command or two. The situation quickly becomes a brawl, with the tollmen acting more like barroom fighters than skilled warriors.

The group is unwilling to back down, though, because they know that allowing anyone to pass without paying the price will mark the end of their tollway days.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If you choose to pay the tollmen, they laugh and clap each other on the back and thank you for your business. The men are rude, shouting insults at each of you; the feel of silver in their hands makes them feel braver and stronger than they should.

At one of the nearby towns, you learn that the town watch is offering a bounty of three gold for each tollman brought in and delivered to the local jail.

If no one deals with the tollmen soon, the town watch will send a patrol out to break the gang and either chase them off or kill them all.

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# THE DRAGONFOLK KNIGHT

You encounter the creature deep in the dungeon, when you are several hours from the nearest exit. It is seated on a stone throne, shield and spear sitting at its side. "Welcome, adventurers," it says as it motions for you to sit.

You enter a large dungeon chamber, several dozen feet across with high ceilings that makes the room look almost like a cathedral. The stone throne at the head of the room, as well as several dozen benches arranged in front of the throne, make it clear that this was once an important room in this subterranean complex.

The dragonfolk seated on the throne again motions for you to take seats on the benches. The creature is tall, even for one of its kind, and the heavy armor does little to mask the warrior's obvious strength.

## **Combat Encounter**

If you refuse to sit, the dragonfolk warrior is offended by your rudeness and demands that you sit. If you refuse again, it rises and moves to attack you. The monster uses its strength, flaming breath, and magic spear and shield in an attempt to force you and your companions to submit to its will. The monster will fight to the death.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

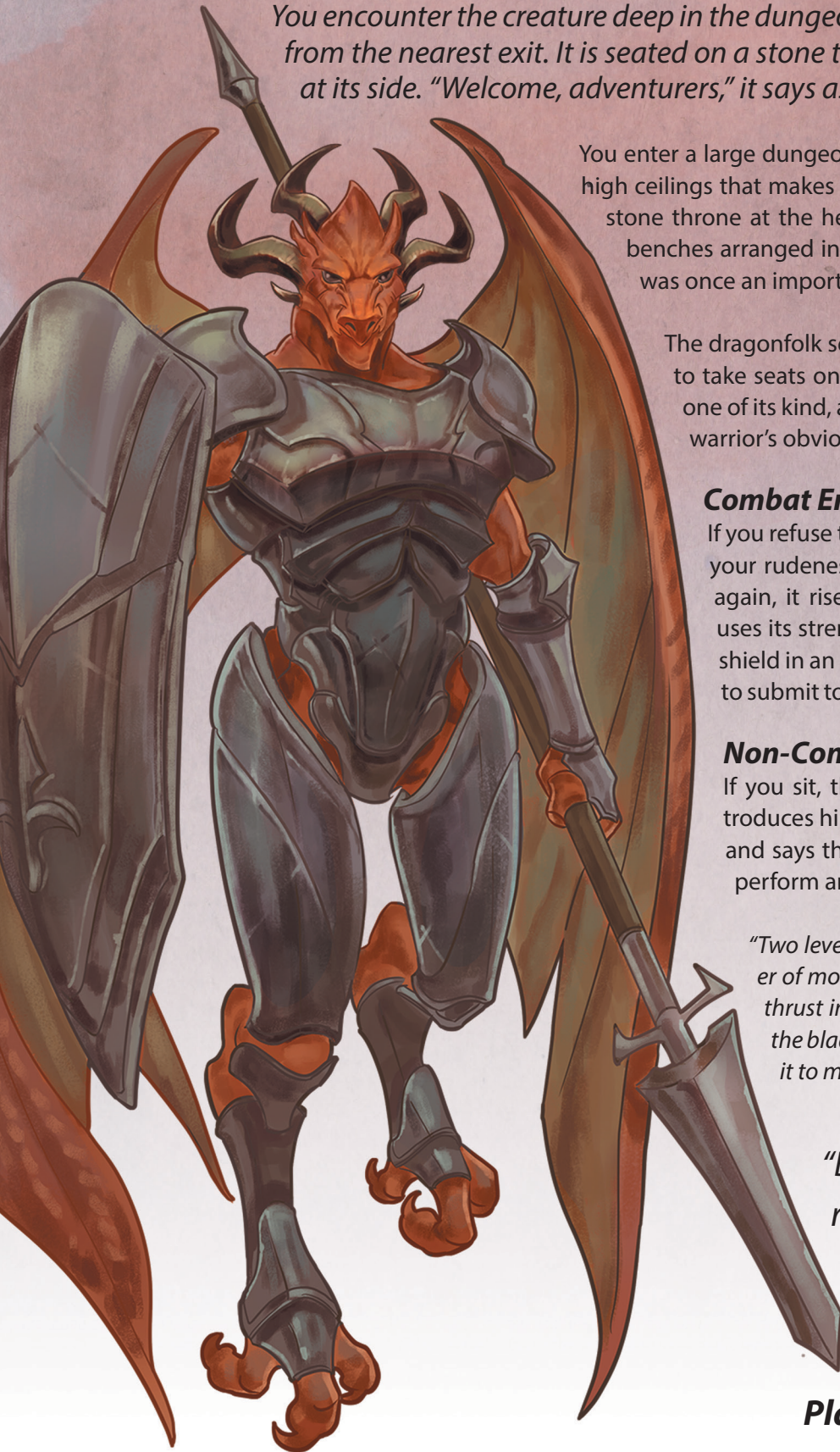
If you sit, the dragonfolk warrior thanks you and introduces himself as Sir Immeir, Champion Of Dragons, and says that he has been waiting for adventurers to perform an important task for him.

*"Two levels below us is the River of Gold, a boiling river of molten gold that can enchant a weapon that is thrust into the bubbling metal. Take this spear, hold the blade in the gold for one minute, and then return it to me. Do this and I will reward you."*

*"Born to fight, dragonborn are a race of wandering mercenaries, soldiers, and adventurers."*

*– Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins,  
and James Wyatt,*

***Player's Handbook (4th Edition)***





# DROW SCOUNDREL

*Face concealed as the dark of night cloaks him in mystery, the drow takes the surprising act of calling out to you, startling you in your camp. "I mean not to threaten you," the man says after he is certain that you have noticed his presence.*

The drow says that he only wants to share your fire and to find safety in numbers. He is heavily armed and armored, and those who cast detection spells find that the drow is very, very evil.

If asked, the drow tells you that his name is Shudrosh Rhince and that he is currently traveling to the southern coast to meet a friend. *"The woods are dangerous at night, even to those such as myself,"* he says. *"I was wounded recently and have not the strength for battle, so I only wish to rest in peace."*

## **Combat Encounter**

Despite the wishes of the drow, you may choose to attack the dark elf and put an end to his evil ways when you have the chance. The drow is wounded – at roughly one-half his usual hit points – and he will attempt to escape if attacked.

The drow tries to keep distance between the party and himself, so that he may use his light crossbow, but he will draw a long sword if pressed into melee conflict.

The drow will do all that he can to escape, including the use of darkness and shadow spells to mask his flight from the group.

## **Non-Combat Encounter**

If you allow the drow to join you for the night, he thanks you and offers to pay each of you a few gold for your promise to allow him a restful sleep.

Only a fool trusts a drow, though, and the man will move to murder a party member or two if he thinks that he can get away with it. He'll also try to steal any magic potions, scrolls, or spellbooks from the group if he is given the chance to do so and slip away in the darkness.

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