

Relevant Encounters

Random encounters should not feel random. In a video game where it only takes a minute to resolve an encounter, it's no issue. But for a TTRPG session that took a month of WhatsApp messages to get five adults in the same room, nobody wants a bad roll on a random encounter table to chew up a half-hour of precious game time.

To respect every player's time, a mindful TTRPG session should be a purposeful, curated experience, even when the Game Master decides to roll on a seemingly random table.

For most encounter tables, the possibilities reflect the environment — zombies in the swamp, bears in the cave, yetis in the snow — but even that doesn't feel curated enough. Because when the players defeat the random bears in the cave, we haven't really advanced the story, we've just survived the story. That's not drama.

Instead, this system advocates for relevant encounters rather than random encounters. Regardless of whether the players are faced with a wandering monster or a roleplaying challenge, every option on your encounter table should be specifically curated for the adventure and always geared towards exposition.



FOLLOW THESE RULES!

This system DOES NOT use your standard D20 or D100 table... we're using a D6, baby!



1. EVERY MAJOR QUEST GETS A TABLE

Start by listing six unique points of exposition, then expand each point into an encounter. List them from least important to most important.

2. AN ENCOUNTER HAPPENS EVERY TIME

Because we're populating our table with relevant encounters which provide exposition, **we want our players to have an encounter**. So let's say whenever the players travel between two locations on the world map, they are guaranteed to have a single relevant encounter; no more, no less.

3. CROSS OFF RESOLVED ENCOUNTERS

Because each encounter is hand-picked to fulfill a specific expository purpose, each encounter only needs to be run once. After a result on the table has been resolved, cross it off.

4. DUPLICATE ROLLS, NEXT RESULT

Whenever a duplicate number is rolled for an encounter that has already been resolved, the players should instead encounter the next highest encounter. For example, if the players roll a 4, but they've already resolved that result, they'll instead face encounter number 5.

This mechanic skews the table so that higher results are more likely to appear over time.

5. USE THIS TEMPLATE

Lifting the curtain on game mechanics makes players complicit in the drama. For transparency, you should stick to a similar structure for all your encounter tables, so once your players get used to Relevant Encounter Tables, they have context for how to engage with each number on the table.

D6	RELEVANT ENCOUNTER TYPE
1	Combat
2	Trap
3	Challenge
4	Spectacle
5	Learn about the villain
6	Advance the main quest

The last two options are special. [5] **Learn about the villain** and [6] **Advance the main quest** could be any kind of encounter, depending on how you choose to structure your exposition. In general, a roleplaying encounter is the best way to disseminate information, because it lets players directly ask questions.

Encounter types

These five options provide variety for your table in a way that shouldn't eat too much game time — only combat should take more than 10 minutes to resolve.

COMBAT

Relevant combat encounters are **always detrimental** to the party. This is a violent situation that inflicts itself on the party — **the combat is unavoidable**, except in extraordinary circumstances at the Game Master's discretion. Relevant combat encounters should be **foreshadowed** somehow; you should never drop your party into a combat which they have zero context for. Relevant combat encounters should be **difficult, but not deadly** — nobody wants to lose a character to an encounter from a random table.

TRAP

Relevant trap encounters are **always detrimental** to the party, but the party is tested to determine how badly they are affected. This is an event that surprises the party — **the trap is unavoidable**, except in extraordinary circumstances at the Game Master's discretion.

CHALLENGE

Relevant challenge encounters are **sometimes detrimental** to the party, but the party is tested to determine whether they can avoid or mitigate any negative effects. This is an obstacle that blocks the party's progress — **the challenge is unavoidable**. This could be a puzzle, a custom mini-game, or a series of checks.

ROLEPLAYING

Relevant roleplaying encounters are your most direct avenue for disseminating information. This is a scene that demands the party's attention — **the roleplaying is unavoidable**. This should be a direct conversation with an important character or a conversation about important information.

SPECTACLE

A spectacle is an event the party has the **option of either engaging with or circumventing**. The party might see a dragon circling up above, or a forest fire in the distance, or walk past a pair of merchants bickering about the king's unfair taxes. The **exposition happens by viewing the spectacle**, and the players can voluntarily engage to gain more context, but the event doesn't grab the players and drag them into an interaction. When engaging with a spectacle, it might resolve into a combat, trap, challenge or roleplaying encounter.

Credits

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