ENCOUNTER 1: THE MESSENGER

ENCOUNTER LEVEL 11 (XP 3,000)

After you’ve selected one or more hooks to get the player characters into the adventure, start the action as the adventurers travel toward the frontier town of Moonstair. Read:

As you crest a small rise, a scene of horror unfolds on the road ahead. A gang of ferocious trolls is pulling apart the carcass of a horse, squabbling over the choicer parts. The monsters are some 300 feet ahead of you, and appear to have not spotted you as yet.

SETUP

5 trolls (T)
1 oni mage (O)

Because the trolls and the oni mage are preoccupied, the adventurers can approach to a distance of 10 squares (50 feet) without fear of being spotted. If the adventurers attack from at least 10 squares away, they automatically gain surprise.

If the adventurers try to sneak closer before attacking, they must succeed on DC 21 Stealth checks. If the adventurers fail, the trolls break off their squabble and attack as soon as they become aware of the party.

The adventurers cannot initially see the oni mage through the thickets. When any PC moves to a position where he or she has a clear line of sight, read:

Nearby lies the mangled body of a human rider. A hulking blue-skinned creature paws through his gear.

TACTICS

The trolls are all too eager to add more meat to their meal, charging as soon as they spot the adventurers. They split up to take on individual targets, intent on not having to share their victims once the battle ends.

One of the trolls stands back, next to the old wall. It sees a good opportunity to charge into the thick of things. Hurling a chunk of the wall is a +13 vs. AC attack that deals 1d6 + 6 damage if the hurled stone hits.

The oni mage is more patient, employing invisibility to circle around the trolls and set up attacks with freezing blast or lightning storm (gaining combat advantage while invisible). While it waits for its offensive powers to recharge, the oni mage makes flanking greatsword attacks with any troll having trouble against its opponent. If the battle isn’t going well, the oni mage turns invisible to pretend to be the dead courier.

As long as the oni mage lives, the trolls stand their ground and fight. If the oni mage and at least two trolls are defeated, the surviving trolls flee the scene.
**Roleplaying the Oni Mage**

The oni mage is patient, confident, and very loyal to Skalmad and the return of the troll kingdom. He believes that other beings are lesser beings, and is especially dismissive of humans and dwarves. He is arrogant, boastful, and insulting. He constantly drops Skalmad’s name as he taunts the adventurers, repeating over and over how great and powerful King Skalmad is, and how he will crush the lesser races beneath his mighty heel.

If the oni mage uses deceptive veil, it takes on the appearance of the dead courier. In this form, the oni mage thanks the adventurers for coming to his aid and begs them to accompany him back to Moonstair. If the adventurers are fooled, he agrees to lead them to town by using a short cut. This short cut takes the party off the road and through the woods, leading them into hostile and dangerous territory. Use one of the Trollhaunt Wilderness encounters on page 10. Once the disguised oni mage leads the adventurers into another dangerous encounter, it turns invisible and attempts to escape. If it does escape, it drops the pouch containing the parchment sheet (see “Development”) as it pushes through the thickets.

**Development**

If the adventurers defeat the oni mage, they discover a parchment sheet in one of its pouches. Show the players the handout on the back of this booklet. This is the parchment the oni mage took from the dead courier (a young man named Perrol).

If the adventurers capture the oni mage or any of the trolls, the creatures behave in a boastful and threatening manner. They tell any interrogators that “Skalmad has great magic powers, and he will destroy you all!” They don’t hide the fact that they came out of the Trollhaunt, but they do not know the exact location of the Great Warren or how many monsters are working for Skalmad.

The adventure continues in *Adventure Book Two*. “Trouble in Moonstair” covers the adventurers’ arrival in town.

**Features of the Area**

**Illumination:** Daylight.

**Thickets:** These areas of dense undergrowth provide concealment (-2 to attack rolls) and are difficult terrain (requiring 1 extra square of movement to enter).

**Trees:** A tree’s trunk provides cover (-2 to attack rolls) to anyone standing adjacent to it.

**Wall:** This old wall of unmortared fieldstone stands 4 feet high. It provides cover against attacks originating on the other side. It costs 2 squares of movement to cross the wall.