

Encounter Table Mechanics for Wandering Monsters and Random Events in D&D 5th edition

Frequency of checking

In an urban space : once per change of precinct.

In the wilderness : once per watch.

In a dungeon or tactically detailed location : once per 10 turns or once per 6 turns in "busy" areas.

Making the Check

Roll D20 on table 1, then if needed D10 on table 2, and whatever dice are needed for the next table referenced by table 2 , or to consult the weather tables if a weather event is called for.

Table 1: D20 - Determine if there is an encounter.

D20	Meaning
1	Determine an encounter with the Hard Combat Difficulty if needed – do not use Random Encounter.
2	Determine an encounter, with the Medium Combat Difficulty if needed - may select harder difficulty if desired
3 to 4	Determine an encounter with the Easy Combat Difficulty if needed
5 to 7	Weather event
8 or more	No random encounter

Table 2: D10 - Determine which encounter table to consult

D10	Meaning
1	Keyed encounter- even hidden ones
2	Non Hidden keyed encounter
3	Projection from nearby key
4 to 5	Random Encounter - if busy area
6	Projection from nearby key
7	Event
8 to 10	Random Encounter

For Table 2 If a result doesn't apply in the current circumstances then move down the table toward 10 until a valid entry is found.

Keyed is for when a keyed item takes up only a small part of the space and the players don't know where it is already. If a keyed encounter fills the entire space then there is no need for a random encounter, the item is just encountered and any keyed encounter items should govern. If the players know where a keyed item is then they can just

encounter it or avoid it. A keyed encounter result is skipped if there is no keyed item in the space or the item does not take up the whole space and the players know where it is.

Random Encounter - if busy area. This is the same as the Random Encounter entry but is skipped if the current location is not marked as a "busy area".

Projection - find a nearby keyed item that can have projections into this area, including a local keyed item that projects out from its keyed area. Choose randomly if there are multiple possibilities. Consider combining possibilities if it would be interesting. If there are none then skip the projection and move down the D10 table. Projections may have a fixed strength of encounter or could work with the Combat Encounter Difficulty mechanism on page 82 of the Dungeon Masters Guide with easy, medium, hard and deadly thresholds.

Event. Consult the event table for the area. Includes random treasure or location discoveries. There may be no event table or an empty position is selected in the table (perhaps an event that can only happen once, and that has been used up) in which case skip the event and move down the D10 table.

Random Encounter. Consult the random encounter table keyed for the area. This should not have empty slots as it does not ever get skipped. Determine the number of creatures using the Combat Encounter Difficulty mechanism on page 82 of the Dungeon Masters Guide and the difficulty given previously by table 1.

Generally hard and deadly encounters only happen with explicit keyed encounters. However you can ramp difficulty up or play it down if you feel that that is warranted at the time.

Weather events are not applicable in a dungeon and produce a 'no encounter' result, otherwise consult the weather event system for the location.

Random Encounter Tables

You can use the encounter table spreadsheet to create these. Allow some tables to cover large areas for completeness. More specific tables can override these for different regions and even more specific ones can override those if desired.

The monster lists in appendix B of the Dungeon Masters Guide are very helpful here.

Example Encounter Tables

Encounters on the High Road Near Polemar

D100		Encounter Item
1	6	Bandits (human) CN 5d6cp or 4d6sp
7	12	Bandits (human) and Thug(human) CN 4d6sp
13	40	Roll on appropriate off road table
41	67	Commoners – farmers
68	73	Merchant Wagon
74	79	Knight and Patrol
80	84	Dwarves – to or from a work site
85	89	Elves – to or from friends and family
90	94	Halflings – tramping, visiting
95	100	Travelling Noble or Great Merchant

Encounters in the Forests Near Polemar

D100		Encounter Item
1	9	Bandits (human) CN 5d6cp or 4d6sp
10	18	Bandits (human) and Thug(human) CN 4d6sp
19	28	Eagle, goat, raven or vulture
29	32	Blood Hawk
33	36	Giant Weasel
37	38	Mastiff
39	47	Poisonous Snake
48	52	Axe Beak
53	61	Boar or Elk
62	63	Giant Wolf Spider
64	65	Panther (cougar)
66	69	Swarm of bats/ravens
70	79	Wolf
80	83	Giant Goat
84	87	Swarm of insects
88	89	Worg (speaks common)
90	94	Brown Bear
95	96	Dire Wolf
97	98	Giant Eagle
99	100	Lion

Weather Events

At any given time the weather is in a particular state. It could be sunny, cloudy, raining, snowing, undergoing a storm, a tornado and so on. For any state a weather event can result in it changing to a different state or producing some event as a result of the current weather, such as a flash flood, an avalanche or a lightning strike.

Each season has a default state. When the weather changes from the default it will be for some specified amount of time after which it will return to the default. If another state change happens during that time, say cloudy weather becomes a rainstorm, then that sub state also has a duration after which it reverts back to the state it came from. Durations interrupt each other so if it was going to be cloudy for two days and at the start of the second day a rainstorm occurs for 4 hours then the cloudy weather will last for another full day from the end of the rainstorm.

However, sunrise and sunset are special. If the current weather state is due to end within 2 hours of sunrise or sunset, it will end right on sunrise or sunset.

The aim of the system is not to create a complete weather simulation but the bare bones to give weather a presence in the game. Game masters should riff off the results as improvisational cues.

Example Tables

This is not a complete system, just some examples to indicate how it works.

Winter

Default Weather

light cloud, cold air, constant light breeze coming from the north.

Default Winter Table

D8	Event
1	Cold Snap for 2d6 hours
2	Heavy Cloud till next sunrise or sunset.
3	Misty for d6 hours
4	Small snow avalanche such as off a roof or tree
5	Tree limb snaps off and falls
6	Encounter a location with thin ice (DMG 111)
7	Encounter a location with thin slippery ice (DMG 110)
8	Encounter a location with heavy snow drifts (difficult terrain, allows hiding, may obscure 5 to 10 foot drop)

Cold Snap

As default except: Wind from the north becomes strong. Exposed characters experience extreme cold (DMG p110).

Cold Snap Table

D8	Event
1	Misty for d6 hours
2	Tree collapses
3	Wind gust knocks icicles and snow drifts loose
4	Snow in the wind
5	Tree limb snaps off and falls
6	Encounter a location with thin ice (DMG 111)
7	Encounter a location with thin slippery ice (DMG 110)
8	Encounter a location with heavy snow drifts (difficult terrain, allows hiding, may obscure 5 to 10 foot drop)

Heavy Cloud

As default except: Clouds are thick and lighting conditions are one level dimmer than normal.

Heavy Cloud Table

D8	Event
1	Cold Snap for d6 hours
2	Heavy Rain for d6 hours
3	Snow for 2d6 hours
4	Small snow avalanche such as off a roof or tree
5	Tree limb snaps off and falls
6	Encounter a location with thin ice (DMG 111)
7	Encounter a location with thin slippery ice (DMG 110)
8	Encounter a location with heavy snow drifts (difficult terrain, allows hiding, may obscure 5 to 10 foot drop)

Heavy Rain

As heavy cloud except: Heavy Precipitation (DMG 110)

Heavy Rain Table

D6	Event
1	A flash flood occurs in d6 x 5 minutes
2	Small snow avalanche such as off a roof or tree
3	Tree limb snaps off and falls
4	Encounter a location with thin ice (DMG 111)
5	Encounter a location with thin slippery ice (DMG 110)
6	Encounter a swollen pond or creek

Heavy Snow

As heavy cloud except: Heavy Precipitation (DMG 110)

Heavy Snow Table

D6	Event
1	Encounter a snow drift that is 6 + d6 feet tall and soft enough to sink in, and potentially drown. Cutting through it may cause a smothering collapse.
2	Small snow avalanche such as off a roof or tree
3	Tree limb snaps off and falls
4	Encounter a location with thin ice (DMG 111)
5	Encounter a location with thin slippery ice (DMG 110)
6	Encounter a location with heavy snow drifts (difficult terrain, allows hiding, may obscure 5 to 10 foot drop)

Misty

As the current weather (default or cold snap) except that visibility is reduced to 60 feet.

Misty Table

D6	Event
1	Strange sounds in the mist
2	Small snow avalanche such as off a roof or tree
3	Tree limb snaps off and falls
4	Encounter a location with thin ice (DMG 111)
5	Encounter a location with thin slippery ice (DMG 110)
6	Encounter a location with heavy snow drifts (difficult terrain, allows hiding, may obscure 5 to 10 foot drop)

Notes

Watches of the Day

The wee hours	3am to 6am
Morn	7am to 10am Dawn is 7am
Mid day	11am to 2pm
Afternoon	3pm to 6pm
Eve	7pm to 10pm Dusk is 7pm
Dead of night	11pm to 2am

Watches are the main unit of time for wilderness adventuring. Random encounter rolls will occur for each watch except at night when adventurers are encamped. In that case one encounter roll is made for the entire night from eve through to the wee hours.

Projections

Projections are not necessarily direct encounters. They may be a sighting of the creatures, rumours or clues about them, tracks and trails, old nests or encampments, or some other indication of their presence nearby. This is an excellent opportunity for foreshadowing.

Internal Projections

Consider a goblin camp in a 10 mile wide wilderness hex. It can project not only into adjacent hexes but into its own hex as well. The camp is tiny compared to the whole hex.