

Encounter Overview: The Statue in the Wilderness

Hook:

While traveling through the wilderness, the party stumbles upon a strange statue in a clearing—either by random encounter or via townsfolk seeking missing persons (a halfling in particular).

Initial Discovery

- The statue emits an overwhelming magical aura (detects as all schools of magic impossibly intertwined), but detailed analysis (e.g., *Identify*) yields only confusion.
- Around it are pools of blood, diverse tracks, and signs of a multi-creature battle. A large, headless equine corpse lies nearby—secretly a unicorn.

Investigation:

- High DC checks reveal small humanoid tracks among the carnage.
- Moderate checks detect nature creatures (wolves, bears, possibly gnolls—adjust to suit your world).

Statue Activation

When the statue is interacted with—touched, magically examined, or cleaned—the world goes dark. After a moment, a distant light appears.

Optional bait: obscure runes hidden beneath blood hinting at forgotten rituals, meant to encourage interaction.

The Tunnel

The party finds itself in a tunnel leading toward the light. As they progress, they meet a **wooden man** who speaks but cannot move. He is friendly to the PCs and can provide some minimal information regarding the surroundings:

- The place has existed for a long time but changed recently.
- "Only the little one ever spoke to me before you."

Treasure (if asked): minor healing potions, a wooden shield, a basic weapon, some gold which he will willingly provide. He won't accompany the party unless carried (passive thereafter, very politely but repeatedly asking to be returned to his resting place).

Candy-Colored Dungeon

Just past him, the tunnel opens into a surreal, blindingly bright dungeon of garish greens, pinks, and yellows.

“It’s like My Little Pony ate Hello Kitty and threw up in here.”

Encounters (stat blocks can vary by party level):

- **Floating Unicorn Head** (use Beholder or Spectator): disembodied, cartoonish, oversized single eye.
- **Animated objects and anthropomorphic creatures** (use any creatures you like that could have made home in the surrounding area) styled to match the dungeon’s cartoon theme.

Final Encounter: The Halfling

The halfling (from the earlier footprints) is found in a large chamber, stirring a cauldron with a unicorn horn and beholder eye stalk (those details are only revealed once the party gets close enough to inspect further). The room is large enough to prevent the party from reaching him in one round.

He’s cheerful and asks if they like his creation. When asked about leaving, he becomes distressed:

“No one needs to leave. Everything is nice here... or it was. You ruined it!”

Combat:

- He doesn’t attack directly, but each round summons 1d4+1 creatures from the cauldron (flavored as before).
- Damage aimed at him affects the cauldron (immune to many spell effects, treated as an object with high HP and moderately high AC).
- Clues: describe damage directed at the halfling as affecting the cauldron (cracks, tremors, glowing fluid, etc.).

Tips:

- Use lair/legendary actions for scaling difficulty (e.g., buffing summons, pushing PCs away from the cauldron).
- Ensure creatures block the party’s path to the cauldron for a couple of rounds.

Aftermath

Destroying the cauldron triggers a magical blast, knocking out the halfling and damaging the horn/eye stalk. The environment reverts to a normal, grim cave. Summoned creatures vanish into glowing ooze.

The halfling can be revived:

- Healing magic speeds recovery.
- *Lesser Restoration* restores full clarity.

He recalls:

- Being lost in the woods.
- Witnessing a unicorn vs. beholder fight that attracted wild creatures.
- Accidentally grabbing the horn and eye during the chaos.
- A magical backlash warped the area and corrupted his mind, twisting the dungeon into a “safe” illusion.

He can lead the party back out the way they came, or the party can travel back that way on their own. Either way, as they exit, the PCs see their previous encounters without the illusions now:

- The unicorn was the beholder/spectator.
- The wooden man is a skeleton (cultist from the long-forgotten temple).
- Any additional creatures now have the forms of whatever stat blocks you used.

Optional Rewards

The Horn and Eye Stalk were damaged in the fight, but still have some magic flowing through them.

Unicorn Horn:

- Twisted ivory-colored horn now displays several pronounced cracks
- Can use any wand from any treasure table you like, or you can give it 1d6 charges each of 1d6 Spells from the Illusion School of Magic

Beholder Eye Stalk:

- Has become rigid and elongated appearing as a staff or cane with an eyeball at the top
- Can use any staff from any treasure table you like, or depending on your party's level you can choose one or more of the following effects
 - +1 to Spell Attack Rolls
 - +1 to Spell Save DC
 - Once per Long Rest as a Reaction: when you fail a saving throw as a result of an Enchantment or Illusion spell that targets you, you can choose to succeed instead.