

Paragon
15

LOVE IN A BOTTLE

5 Difficulty
5 Complexity

A standalone encounter for five adventurers

By Corwin Riddle

Love in a Bottle is a standalone encounter designed for five characters around the levels of 14 to 16. In the streets of Velant, the romantic Veil of Flowers has begun, and love is in the air—for most people. Always forgotten, Bruhelga, a homely dwarven alchemist, has finally brewed up a solution to her loneliness: a powerful love potion. However, thinking the potion to be ale, a gang of bandits drank the lot and have all fallen in love with the dwarf. Fueled by their obsession, these brigands plan to return on the last day of the celebration and take Bruhelga as their own, whether she's willing or not.

BACKGROUND

As winter's bite begins to fade and the snow begins to melt, the city of Velant eagerly prepares for the upcoming Veil of Flowers, an annual celebration of spring, new beginnings, and romance. For one marvelous week, each emerging flower is plucked from the ground to transform the usually drab town into a gorgeous tapestry of flowing colors; roads become a collection of bright daisies, rose petals float down from the rooftops, and the residents show off their most dashing outfits. Romantics parade through the streets, showering the objects of their affection with anonymous gifts, poems, and promises of everlasting love and commitment, waiting for the final hours of the Veil to reveal themselves and propose marriage.

However, not all ladies find true love during the Veil, some going the entire holiday without receiving a single card, gift, or poem. Each year, peering from the window of her shop, Bruhelga, a homely dwarven alchemist, watches with disdain and jealousy as the handsome young men chase, compliment, and flirt with the prettiest girls in town; her own turn for such revelries has never come... until now. This spring, Bruhelga has finally perfected her lifelong pursuit: a decoction of seduction; a libation of admiration; a potion of devotion; a perfectly safe and potent love elixir. Anyone that imbibes even a sip of Bruhelga's Love-Me-Now potion will be at her doorstep in no time, showering her with presents, love, and the marriage proposal she has long-desired.

Heading into town with a cart loaded full of Love-Me-Now potions, disguised as bottles of a brand new, tasty ale, Bruhelga would simply find the most handsome man, offer him a drink, and then sit back and wait for the romance to begin. Unfortunately, a passing gang of bandits saw the dwarf and her cart, and feeling a bit parched, chased her off and stole all of her delicious ale for themselves. The next day, Bruhelga's shop was bombarded with love letters, gifts of knives and swords, and crude poems, each promising that the author will arrive at noon of the Veil's last day to claim her as his own. With only a few hours left until midday, Bruhelga finds herself in the new and awkward position of fighting off a group of obsessed suitors—and something tells her they won't be taking "no" for an answer.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

Love in a Bottle can be used as a standalone encounter, or as the basis of a longer adventure. The characters can discover Bruhelga and her shop as happenstance, be sent there from another adventure in search of a special potion, or arrive through one of the following hooks:

HOOK 1: UNHAND IT, BANDIT

Bruhelga's bandit admirers have had a long-standing penchant for stealing, and some of their endearing gifts to the dwarf once belonged to other owners in town. A strikingly handsome elf named Aspir has been courting a woman generally considered to be the most beautiful in town—a dainty and well-dressed elven damsel named Nhele. Although he sent many gifts and poems throughout the week, Aspir was waiting for the final day to present her with a gorgeous bracelet, which was recently stolen by the bandits. Certain that one of Bruhelga's suitors carries it and intends to present it to the dwarf sometime today,

Aspir begs the PCs to head out to Bruhelga's shop and recover the bracelet before it's delivered to the unworthy alchemist. It's sure to be in the possession of one of the bandits

there, he says, reminding you that dead bodies are easiest to search.

Quest XP: 1000 XP for returning the bracelet.

HOOK 2: HE'S GONNA GIVE ME UP

Love isn't always a blessing. Sometimes it can be an annoying, overzealous, unattractive human following a busy woman from place to place, offering up worthless gifts and badly-constructed poems. His name is Phoreus, and he has been following one of the local maidens around from place to place, day after day, irritating her to no end. The maiden, a pretty girl named Dreyuri, is running out of patience—her employer at the local tavern is on the verge of firing her for the distractions her admirer brings, and she needs a solution while she still has a job.

She has heard that Bruhelga makes all sorts of unique potions, and she asks the PCs to visit the dwarf and bring back a potion that can make a man fall out of love. The PCs need to then give the potion to Phoreus, even if it means forcing it down his cliché-filled, off-key-singing throat.

Quest XP: 750 XP for getting the potion and making Phoreus drink it.

HOOK 3: WASTE NOT, WANT BEST

Bruhelga knows that she can't possibly fight off an entire gang of bandits by herself, and asks the PCs to defend her shop against the thugs and kill the intruders—well, most of them, anyway. The homely dwarf knows that having so many men fight over her is not a common occurrence, and she isn't one to pass up a perfectly good opportunity to get hitched. Although a whole slew of bandits is too much to handle, a single remaining bandit would be a completely different situation. However, some of the bandits are bound to be a bit more pleasing to the eye than others, and there's no point in settling on an ugly husband when there's plenty of handsome ones to choose from.

Bruhelga wants the PCs to show up at her shop before midday, and defend it against the intruding bandits, killing the majority of them and keeping the most attractive one alive for her to marry when the fight concludes. She also offers some potions to the PCs to help them in the battle.

Quest XP: The rewards for this quest depend on the Handsomeness of the last living bandit:

- If the Handsomeness is 1: the PCs receive no XP.
- If the Handsomeness is between 2 and 19: the PCs receive XP equal to the Handsomeness multiplied by 100.
- If the Handsomeness is 20: the PCs receive 2,500 XP.

SPECIAL FEATURES

This encounter has a couple unique features to add to the difficulty and complexity.

BRUHELGA'S POTIONS

Before the battle begins, Bruhelga will give the PCs some potions: each PC will receive one *Bruhelga's Bruhealing Brew* and one random special potion. *All of these potions are listed on the last page of this encounter so you can print them off; hand them out randomly or let the PCs decide themselves who will get what potion.*

Bruhelga's Bruhealing Brew

Level 10

With her history, you're not quite sure you should drink anything made by Bruhelga, but she swears it'll help when you're feeling weak.

Potion

Power (Consumable ♦ Healing): Minor Action. Drink the potion and spend a healing surge. Instead of the hit points you would normally regain, you regain twice that amount.

HANDSOMENESS

When each bandit appears, roll **1d20** to determine their Handsomeness. This rating will determine the PCs rewards, as they want to leave the most attractive bandit alive at the end of the encounter. Each PC can use the following power during the encounter to detect a bandit's Handsomeness:

A Good Once-over

Special Feature

You spare a few seconds to objectively judge the features and proportions of your target, gauging his attractiveness on a scale of 1 to 20.

At-Will ♦ Martial

Minor Action **Ranged 3**

Special: You can use this power an unlimited number of times per encounter, but only once per round.

Target: Any Love-Struck Thug or Love-Struck Bruiser

Effect: Discover the Handsomeness of your target.

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of why the PCs decide to defend Bruhelga's shop, read these when they first arrive:

The shop is expertly constructed and filled with a variety of custom potions and tonics, organized on imposing shelves that stretch to the ceiling. It's clear that whoever owns this place has a lot of time on their hands—not the kind of time one has if they have a significant other to worry about.

Near the back of the shop, above all the winding shelves of bottles, books, and cauldrons is a ladder leading up to a small balcony. Resting on top, eyes-wide with anticipation, is Bruhelga. "I've left some potions below for you to make use of during the battle - just try not to disfigure any of the attractive ones!"

AREA: BRUHELGA'S SHOP

Read this after the PCs when the bandits arrive:

You hear the sound of a large number of horses coming to rest just outside the shop doors. Bruhelga locks the front door and returns to her balcony, pulling the ladder up with her. "Now watch out, lads," she says, "there's bound to be a bunch of them, but they'll have to crawl through those windows one by one - mind the pretty ones, now!"

Outside, you can make out low voices, which seem to be arguing about something, followed by a loud yell and the clash of weapons. A few seconds later, one of the bandits begins yelling over the rest:

"Stop fighting! We have been torn apart by our devotion to the one and only Bruhelga, a goddess among us, and there can be no replacement for those of us unable to win her heart. So let us agree upon this: the only resolution to our desire is to end her life, letting her timeless presence rest forever in each of our memories!"

As the speech concludes, the bandit gang begins to cheer with agreement. Within seconds, the shop is filled with sounds of intruders trying to break open the doors or climb up to the nearest window.

"Well," Bruhelga says, grimly, "this is worse than expected, but it changes nothing! Remember to save me one, and keep an eye out for any handsome lads—the more attractive he is, the more I'll compensate your services!"

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Height: The ceiling is approximately 20' tall.

Broken Bottles: Marked as white glass shards. These squares count as either difficult terrain, or as normal terrain and the creature entering the square takes **1d4** physical damage; the creature entering the square decides.

Windows: Marked as blue windows. Love-Struck Thugs, Goons, and Bruisers appear in front of these squares.

Bruhelga: Safely hidden on her balcony, she will point shout out opinions on the attractiveness of some of the bandits when the PCs use *A Good Once-over*.

- **Handsome of 1:** "Even I'm not that desperate! Do away with that one quickly, I can't stand to look at him!"
- **Handsome of 2-9:** "I know I shouldn't be too picky, but I don't want to stare at that for the rest of my life."
- **Handsome of 10-13:** "I've seen worse, but I've seen better... much better."
- **Handsome of 14-16:** "Not bad, but there's bound to be a better one in the lot!"
- **Handsome of 17-19:** "Now we're talking, lads! That is one good-looking fellow!"
- **Handsome of 20:** "That one, right there! He's so beautiful... I must have him!"



SETUP

7 Love-struck Thugs

6 Love-struck Bruisers

Read this when the battle begins:

The bandits, upon seeing defenders between them and Bruhelga, look somewhat surprised, but quickly gather themselves with looks of furious jealousy. "Others have already arrived," one bandit says. "How dare they think themselves worthy of such a singular lady," another yells, "dispatch these unworthy suitors first, we must not disappoint Her Grace the dwarf!"

TACTICS

- When the battle begins, have five random Love-Struck bandits appear on five random window squares. Whenever there is only one bandit left, add four random bandits to window squares and insert them into the turn order; continue until 12 bandits have been defeated and one remains. When there is only one remaining bandit, the encounter ends.
- The bandits will not attack Bruhelga while a PC is still alive.
- All of the bandits will switch between using their *Dagger* and *Mace* attacks, depending on range, and each will utilize their encounter power of *For True Love* when they are bloodied, increasing their damage and allowing them to try and push the PCs onto glass shards or into potion traps.
- The bandits themselves are too blinded by love to notice and walk right into any potion traps or glass.

Love-Struck Thug		Level 15 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (human)		XP 1,200
Initiative +15	Senses Perception +10	
HP 147; Bloodied 73		
AC 29; Fortitude 26, Reflex 27, Will 25		
Speed 6		
⊕ Mace (standard; at-will) • Weapon +17 vs AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the Love-Struck Thug shifts 1 square		
⊕ Dagger (standard; at-will) • Weapon Ranged 5/10; +19 vs AC; 1d6 + 6 damage		
⊕ Dazing Blow (standard; encounter) • Weapon Requires mace; +17 vs AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the Love-Struck Thug's next turn.		
For True Love (standard; encounter) Only usable when bloodied. The Love-Struck Thug deals an additional 1d4 damage with each attack, and each successful attack pushes their target 1 square.		
Combat Advantage The Love-Struck Thug deals an extra 1d6 on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.		
Alignment Evil		Languages Common
Skills Stealth +18, Streetwise +16, Thievery +18		
Str 18 (+11)	Dex 23 (+13)	Wis 17 (+10)
Con 19 (+11)	Int 16 (+10)	Cha 18 (+11)
Equipment Leather Armor, Mace, Dagger x4		

PLAYER STRATEGY

- This encounter is straight-forward, but deals with three waves of mobs, so the players will need to be somewhat careful in blowing their encounter and daily powers.
- The PCs should use *A Good Once-over* as soon as possible on every bandit that appears so they know which one to keep alive, and which ones to kill. When a bandit appears with a higher Handsomeness than the one the PCs are currently saving, they should kill that one and leave the new, higher one alive.
- The potion traps last the entire encounter, and should be thrown down as soon as possible for maximum efficacy.
- Bruhelga's Bruhealing Brew* heals for a large amount, and should probably be saved for when absolutely necessary so as not to waste its hit points.
- If possible, the PCs should avoid giving up combat advantage often, as the bandits will do extra damage.
- The PCs can, to some extent, control where the bandits enter by blocking off a couple of the windows with a wall from a *Isoltristure Mixture*.

COMBAT FLAVOR

If you dislike reading full powers, stats, and effects to players, use these instead to give them hints:

After the first wave of bandits are defeated (four out of the five), Bruhelga says:

"It's a shame, really. I thought I'd have a few more to choose from. Wait a minute... more admirers!"

Love-Struck Bruiser		Level 15 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (human)		XP 1,200
Initiative +10	Senses Perception +10	
HP 185; Bloodied 92		
AC 27; Fortitude 26, Reflex 25, Will 25		
Speed 6		
⊕ Mace (standard; at-will) • Weapon +15 vs AC; 1d10 + 6 damage		
⊕ Dagger (standard; at-will) • Weapon Ranged 5/10; +17 vs AC; 1d6 + 6 damage		
⊕ Shoving Blow (standard; encounter) • Weapon Requires mace; +15 vs AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, the target is pushed 1 square.		
For True Love (standard; encounter) Only usable when bloodied. The Love-Struck Bruiser deals an additional 1d4 damage with each attack, and each successful attack pushes their target 1 square.		
Combat Advantage The Love-Struck Bruiser deals an extra 1d6 on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.		
Alignment Evil		Languages Common
Skills Stealth +15, Streetwise +16, Thievery +15		
Str 18 (+11)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 17 (+10)
Con 25 (+14)	Int 16 (+10)	Cha 18 (+11)
Equipment Leather Armor, Mace, Dagger x4		

After the second wave of bandits is defeated (four out of the five), Bruhelga says:

“Is that all of them? I could have sworn there were more... oh, here they are!”

After the final wave of bandits is defeated (four out of the five), Bruhelga says:

“Stop, don’t kill him! He’s the last of them, it seems. I hope you little matchmakers picked out a winner, because I’m going to have to wake up to that face for the rest of my life!”

Read this if the PCs left a bandit alive at the end:

As Bruhelga yells from above and the fighting stops, the remaining bandit looks around the room and notices that all of his friends are dead. For a brief second, he appears slightly-saddened, but his eyes light up as Bruhelga descends from the balcony. “My love,” the bandit says, “I come to you on the last day of the Veil to humbly ask your hand in marriage—fate alone has chosen me to survive to carry you into a new future!” The bandit rushes to Bruhelga and embraces her, trying to lift her but clearly unable to bear her hefty weight. “Perhaps fate would prefer me to walk with you into a new future instead,” the bandit suggests, merrily.

If the PCs did not leave a single bandit alive, they messed up the entire encounter and clearly have no love in their cold, soulless hearts. I have not prepared a contingency for such wretched, loveless beings.

CONCLUSION

Bruhelga sets her future husband about cleaning up the shop, and approaches the PCs, saying: *“You’ve turned an awful nightmare into a dream come true! Well, until the love potion wears off next week, but that’s why we’re rushing straight into a legally-binding marriage with no room for divorce—he’ll come to appreciate me, I’m sure. And if not, I suppose I can always slip him another potion!”* Upon checking the bandit bodies, the PCs will find Aspir’s bracelet. If the PCs chose a bandit with a Handsomeness of at least 15, then Bruhelga gladly gives them a Love-Me-Not potion to use on Phoreus. Bruhelga also gives the PCs an amount of gp equal to the bandit’s Handsomeness rating multiplied by 100.

If they return to town, read this to the PCs:

Walking down the petal-laden streets of Velant, you notice piles and piles of unwanted gifts, cards, and bouquets, left in heaps near other mounds of garbage. Leaning against a nearby building, a somewhat melancholy elf thinks aloud to himself, saying:

“There’s always next year, I suppose. Maybe that Dwarven lady has something I could use—she’s always making strange stuff like that—one drink and the ladies will be all over me. After all, it’s only love... what could go wrong?”

ADJUSTMENTS

If you like this encounter but aren’t sure you can fit it into your current campaign, you can adjust and scale it to accommodate your adventure. Here are some suggestions:

We don’t have five players:

If you have less than 5 players, have fewer bandits or smaller waves.

We’re not the right level:

All of the bandits are based off the Human Thug, so use the Monster Builder and scale them appropriately.

It’s too hard for my PCs, they keep wiping:

This encounter was designed as a test of endurance (like love itself), and the PCs will need to make efficient use of their abilities, healing surges, and the potion traps. If it seems to be too much, decrease the number of bandits or give the PCs more of Bruhelga’s potions to use.

It’s too easy for my PCs, they’re breezing through:

If the bandits aren’t providing much of a challenge for your PCs and you see the encounter coming to a quick and boring end, add in another wave or two of bandits or don’t wait for one to be left before the next wave shows up: try having a new bandit appear when one dies. You could keep going on and on until they’re bleeding, broken, and begging for an end.

One of my PCs wants to marry Bruhelga:

This never would have occurred to be until a friend suggested it might happen, which goes to show how unpredictable some players are. If they want to marry an ugly, homely dwarf, they are more than welcome to do so; turn the fight into that PC leading a defense to protect their future wife. If they only wanted to marry her for the useful potions, it’s a shame, because once hitched, Bruhelga has no need to waste her time with such petty pursuits!

We don’t like the theme/characters/combat hook:

If you don’t like some of the adventure, but enjoy even one of the ideas - steal it and dump the rest.

We’d rather play a full adventure than a one encounter:

This encounter is a little more difficult to turn into a full adventure, since you’re not deep within an ancient tomb or fighting through a forest filled with monsters. However, anything can be done in D&D, so here are a couple ideas to get you started if you want to grow this side trek into something with a few more stories:

- *A group of mischievous gnomes are using the holiday as an opportunity to trick gullible young men into thinking they represent a beautiful maiden, tricking the men into giving them valuable gifts. Track the gnomes back to their lodging, kill them, and find the gifts.*
- *A large troll has recently lost its mate, and the flowers and love of other people makes it sad and furious. It comes to Velant to wreak havoc and put an end to the Veil and its reminders.*



BRUHELGA'S POTIONS

Print this and cut out the potions for your PCs.

Bruhelga's Bruhealing Brew

Level 10

With her record, you're not quite sure you should drink anything given to you by Bruhelga, but she swears it'll help out if you're feeling weak.

Potion

Power (Consumable ♦ Healing): Minor Action. Drink the potion and spend a healing surge. Instead of the hit points you would normally regain, you regain twice that amount.

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Janrochester Elixir

Level 10

The potion erupts into a dense cloud of burning ash, blinding foes and slowing their movement.

Potion Ranged 5

Power (Trap ♦ Fire): Standard Action. Throw the potion at the ground, covering a 2x2 area with its effect. Any creature that enters the square takes 1d4 fire damage and is blinded (save ends).

Romajula Juice

Level 10

As the potion hits the ground, a cloud of magic daggers, dripping with poison, appears above the area.

Potion Ranged 5

Power (Trap ♦ Poison): Standard Action. Throw the potion at the ground, covering a 2x2 area with its effect. Any creature that starts its turn in or enters the square takes 1d8 poison damage and gains an ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Antocleonic Tonic

Level 10

As the bottle shatters and the potion spills, the liquid slowly turns into tendrils and becomes a pile of magical snakes, ready to strike.

Potion Ranged 5

Power (Trap ♦ Poison): Standard Action. Throw the potion at the ground, covering a 2x2 area with its effect. Any creature that enters the square takes 1d4 poison damage and is immobilized (save ends).

Isoltristure Mixture

Level 10

An enormous black and white cloth, hard as stone, flows into the air and creates a nearly indestructible barrier.

Potion Ranged 5

Special: This potion can be used twice, but only once per round.

Power (Trap ♦ Arcane): Standard Action. Throw the potion at the ground, covering a single square with the cloth. That square is now impassable. If placed in front of a window, creatures can no longer enter or exit through that window.

Languivedy Remedy

Level 10

Breaking the bottle brings forth a magical sword, which bursts into flames and attacks anything within reach.

Potion Ranged 5

Power (Trap ♦ Fire): Standard Action. Throw the potion at the ground, covering a single square with the flaming sword. Any creature that enters a square adjacent to the sword takes 2d6 fire damage.