Mag of Holding

Issue #1

Frozen Wastelands

PENNY DRAGON GAMES

5E

Art by Alifka, @KibblesTasty

Kibbles' Camp Actions

Camp Actions are things you can do during a Long Rest that make the most of your time - while adventurers need their beauty sleep (well, most of them), there's always a few spare hours during a Long Rest you can spend in one of the following ways to better prepare yourself for the harrowing times to come. A long rest is 8 hours long, and most adventurers need 6 hours of sleep. This leaves 2 hours of light activity in which to take a camp action from the following list.

Elves, Constructs, and More

Some 5e races have unique sleep requirements. They consequently spend less of their time sleeping or sleep in unique ways. They can take the "Take a Watch" action as many times as they have available time for after taking care of whatever resting needs they have, but may take only one other Camp Action while gaining the benefits of a long rest.

Take a Watch

Adventuring is dangerous, and adventurers often decide to long rest in strange places - sometimes it's best to set a watch.

Craft

An adventurer that takes this action can make 2 hours of progress toward Crafting during a long rest. This progress is made at the end of the long rest. In order to take this action, the adventurer must have the related crafting tools on hand. Requires a campfire, and any Wisdom Perception checks during this time are made with disadvantage.

Cook

A special form of the crafting Camp Action that can be taken with Cooking Utensils. A hearty meal sits better than any trail rations... even when it is cooked from the simplest of ingredients. You and all willing creatures (willing to eat your cooking) regain an additional hit die from the long rest when complete. If you have proficiency with Cooking Utensils, creatures regain additional hit dice equal to your Proficiency bonus. Requires a campfire, and any Wisdom (Perception) checks during this time are made with disadvantage.

Prepare

The life of an adventure has many challenges and it is only natural a cautious adventurer would want to prepare for them. Select one ability score to prepare for the upcoming day and perform 2 hours of an activity that hones it for the challenges ahead (you could prepare Strength or Dexterity through stretches or exercises, Intelligence through studying, Wisdom through meditation, etc). After you complete the long rest, you gain a Preparation die, starting at a d6. Each time you make an ability check related to your chosen ability score, roll the Preparation die and add it to the result. The Preparation die decreases by one step each time it is rolled until depleted (d6, d4, d2, depleted). May require a campfire, and any Wisdom (Perception) checks during this time are made with disadvantage.

Slumber

Sometimes a hard day of adventuring deserves a little extra shut eye. Taking this Camp Action is more akin to a camp inaction, and you get the full recommended 8 hours of sleep. During this deep slumber, you automatically fail Wisdom (Perception) checks and your passive Perception is 0, however you reduce any levels of Exhaustion by 2 and awake with 1 inspiration. Requires a campfire, and any Wisdom (Perception) checks during this time are made with disadvantage.

Task

Sometimes you will have a task that requires your time, but does not fit into the above options. For example, copying spells to your spell book as a Wizard. When engaging in such a task, you can replace your Camp Action with making two hours of progress toward that task. May require a campfire, and any Wisdom (Perception) checks during this time are made with disadvantage.

KibblesTasty Homebrew

KibblesTasty is a content creator for 5e that makes classes additional player content and DM systems, most known for classes such as the Inventor, Warlord, and Psion. More content from KibblesTasty can be found at **www.kthomebrew.com**, such as a fully featured crafting system for Blacksmithing, Alchemy, and more or a Heroic Inspiration system to take your player's heroics to the next level, both made to integrate with these camp actions!

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Virtual Game Assets by Devin Night

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Draconick is a tabletop writer and blogger creating content for some of your favorite roleplaying games. His blog covers topics ranging from game design, to lore deep dives, reviews, opinions, and more. Apart from the blogging, he has written and published several adventures for a variety of games, as well as various rules supplements and indie TTRPGs of his own, most of which can be found at itch.io. He has several DrivethruRPG bestsellers under his belt, as well as an ENnie award to his name. Draconick is also available for writing and editing commissions, and has contributed to a number of exciting projects for several well-known clients including: Chaosium, Swordsfall, Arcanum Worlds, Steamforged Games, and Lasers and Liches. If you're interested in hiring Draconick for work, he'd be happy to hear from you, so feel free to reach out!

When he's not busy with his work on games, Draconick is active on Twitter and Discord, and you're more than welcome to get in touch with him better there. He also does regular Twitch streams, many of which focus on TTRPGs and game design, so you'd probably be interested in swinging by there too. Last but not least, Draconick currently maintains a Patreon where you can get a look behind the curtain at his creative process and stay up to date on his projects, and it's a great way to get some cool rewards for yourself and support this independent creator and ensure he can continue to do what he does.

DRACONICK

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Make sure you don't miss new issues of Mag of Holding, new fifth edition books, and our monthly DM Toolbox: A newsletter featuring new DM tools with original artwork that drops on the last Tuesday of every month.

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A tome packed with magic items with a twist, adventure, lore, and more!

Order of Elemental Chaos

A series of adventures set in the elemental planes. Introduce your players to NPCs like Djinni Henjrix and Efreeti Merkury.

Mag of Holding Issue #2

Get your 'Pirate and Seafaring' fix! Yaaaargh!

Mag of Holding Issue #3

Prepare for Halloween with 'Gothic Horror and Classic Monsters'

Aizendore's Vault of Tragic Treasure and **Order of Elemental Chaos** go live on Kickstarter on **April 8th**.

All backers will receive 7 FREE monster STL files + 2 bonus monsters for the encounters in Chapter 1 of Order of Elemental Chaos.

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Mag of Holding Issue #4 Theme to be decided by the community.

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Special Thanks

Thanks to our Kickstarter backers, Mag of Holding Issue #1 has become a reality.

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To the amazing playtesters who helped improve the content. **Thank you!**

Frozen Wastelands

We warmly welcome you to the Mag of Holding! It's difficult to convey just how excited we are that you're reading this. Issue 1 is very special because...well...it's the first ever issue! It's packed with DM tools, player options, lore, story, and more. We're very lucky to work with an incredible team of designers, developers, writers, and artists. We thank you, dear reader, for picking up a new magazine published by a little known publisher. We hope you enjoy these pages as much as we enjoyed creating them.

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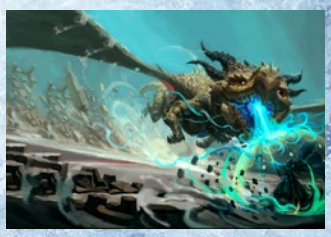


Cover art by Henrique DLD

When asked about naming the magazine, the community came out in droves and offered so many amazing suggestions, **Riccardo Ball's** offering won us over. Thank you Riccardo!

Letter From The Editor

Welcome to the Mag of Holding Issue #1. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined getting the opportunity to work on a project like this. I am so grateful to you for reading Mag of Holding and for supporting our projects. Our goals are ambitious, but most importantly, they aim to provide Dungeon Masters and Players alike with great magazines and books packed with exciting new opportunities for roleplaying. Our first Kickstarter performed better than we could have hoped thanks to our epic backers and legendary team. The next campaign will take things to a whole new level for our little indie company.

Lately, I've given a lot of thought to what makes an amazing campaign. Is it incredible classes with crazy abilities? Is it well planned, in-depth backstories? Is it the rule of cool? Is it that clutch moment that ruins your DM's plans so thoroughly they require multiple bleeps to keep things PG? The formula for an amazing campaign can be tricky and takes time to figure out, but the most important ingredient is, and always will be, imagination. Legends are built by those who dare to attempt the impossible, and attempting the impossible takes imagination. Players and DMs who push forward with imagination create richer worlds filled with outstanding stories that will spill into the real world as they are retold, not only by the minstrels and bards of those respective worlds, but by you and your gaming friends as you sit down for a drink at the pub and laugh at those epic memories. Memories like dimension dooring into the belly of a dragon with an immovable rod. Or stuffing a goblin scout you caught with Hold Person into a bag of holding before he can raise the alarm.

So, be brave adventurers and ride out into the wild places of the world and build tales of wonder.

Before I leave you to enjoy the magazine, I'd love to share a piece of advice I've found useful over the years:

"You are not entering this world in the usual manner, for you are setting forth to be a Dungeon Master. Certainly, there are stout fighters, mighty magic-users, wily thieves, and courageous clerics who will make their mark in the magical lands of D&D adventure. You, however, are above even the greatest of these, for as DM you are to become the Shaper of the Cosmos. It is you who will give form and content to all the universe. You will breathe life into the stillness, giving meaning and purpose to all the actions which are to follow." - Gary Gygax

May your stories forever be filled with greatness!

Kyle Gray

Managing Editor

Stalking in a Winter Wonderland

In Mag of Holding, we do our best to expand on existing rules and avoid regurgitating content from other publications. Why re-invent the wheel?

In this issue, we provide an array of tools for your frozen wasteland adventures. Want to add a little spice to an existing campaign set in the ice and snow? We've got you covered. Looking for something a little extra for your arctic home-brew setting? You've come to the right place.

Lost in The Snow

When running adventures that take place, in whole or in part in a frozen environment, ask what player characters should bear in mind when trudging through an icy dungeon. How might such surroundings affect a magic user's abilities? What if a player character is wearing a suit of full plate? How would they transport their equipment or loot across distances?

Snow, wind, and ice are important elements for DMs to consider when building or running a frozen wasteland campaign. This article peers a little deeper into those and other dangers.

Consider it food for thought.

We wouldn't want you getting lost in the snow and starving, now, would we?

Terrain

When discussing frozen wastelands, we usually imagine arctic terrain. Such terrain presents unique challenges, and as every good DM knows, challenges mean opportunities for fun. Whether running your game in a prescribed setting or a world you've built yourself, consider ways to entertain your players using glaciers, vast white plains, ice-capped peaks, frozen tunnels and caverns...not to mention the cold-adapted creatures that call these hostile locations home. That's before we touch on avalanches, blizzards, chilling winds, sudden drops in temperature, and other deadly elements.

How will player characters interact with such terrain and its many challenges? Perhaps the party will need to purchase climbing equipment to scale a sheer cliff of ice. What if their passing through the bowels of the land disturbs icicles dangling from a cavern ceiling? What if an ice bridge across a bottomless void begins to crack under their feet?

Those considering a setting of their own design will have to decide how the frozen wasteland came to be. Did it occur naturally at one of the poles? Did someone accidentally tear a hole in the weave, causing cold to flood in from the elemental planes or the ninth level of hell? Or did something more sinister lead to such extreme conditions?

Perhaps a powerful Lich Queen cast an augmented version of "Control Weather." Maybe she plans on spreading her frozen domain across the globe. Why would she want the world to freeze? How would she accomplish such a mighty feat? And more importantly, for our adventurers, how might her work be undone?

Asking such questions will keep your creative juices thawed and flowing and add flavor and texture to your frozen wasteland setting.

If running a prewritten setting or campaign, pondering on such matters can help a DM put their own spin on encounters. Your players will thank you.

Monsters

From yetis, frozen phantoms, winter wolves, and crag cats, to ice elementals, white dragons, and frost giants; cold-themed creatures abound.

If you prefer to create monsters of your own, reskinning a creature in the Monster Manual, or one of the many other bestiaries (new and old), can be a good place to start. How would your players fair against a frosty beholder or a white-furred displacer beast?

Get creative and be sure to consult the DMG for the proper challenge ratings for your homebrew monsters or your player characters might end up stone cold.

Exhaustion and Extreme Cold

We don't want to beat this frozen horse carcass any further. Suffice it to say that DMG p.110 and supplements like RotF provide decent guidelines for dealing with extreme cold. You can find even more options in the article Cold Weather Rules Expanded on p.36 of this magazine.

Cold and Fire Magic

Any frozen wasteland campaign worth its salt (and salt should be worth a lot) will dig that little bit deeper. It is up to you as a DM to decide how magical fire might behave, for example. Does such fire automatically negate the effects of the cold or does the cold negatively impact fire?

Is cold magic empowered in this setting? If so, re-rolling 1s and 2s on damage dice might be an interesting mechanic, adding even more seasoning. Perhaps the cold causes an inverse effect when someone casts a fire-based spell, forcing them to re-roll when they roll maximum damage on a die.

Alternatively, maybe a player could harness the natural cold in their surroundings so as to expend fewer resources when casting cold spells. Perhaps fire magic requires more resources than normal. How would this look mechanically? You could house-rule that fire spells automatically require an additional spell slot. You could ask for an arcana check. You could implement a small -2 penalty on rolls for fire damage. As the DM, how you balance your game is entirely up to you, but remember that your job is to run a game that is fun for you and your players.

Magic in General

If your frozen wasteland was created by magic, what other effects might such powerful magic have on spellcasters? Would there be a wild element to the world not only effecting sorcerers and barbarians? Might healing or resurrection magic go awry? Could there exist pockets of particularly cold magic in certain areas where no fire, no matter how hot, might burn? The possibilities are endless.

Equipment Considerations

A wise DM would at some point give player characters access to the equipment they need in the stores they include in their campaign.

General equipment such as warm clothing, fishing tackle, climber's kits, hunter's traps, and tents are the basics your player characters will need to survive. How much the cold weather environment impacts player characters and how much players need to keep track of supplies is up to you. Keeping a tally can be a pain, but it can also augment a sense of survival horror.

No book could realistically cover all varying degrees of cold. You could have cold effects behave differently depending on whether the player characters find themselves in a narrow mountain pass or exposed on the open planes.

Instead of allowing player characters equipped with cold winter gear to automatically succeed on saving throws, you could rule that they can add their proficiency bonus or roll with advantage.

Early on, ask your players to describe how they would like to prepare for the weather before they embark on their adventure.

It is also worth considering if your player characters have access to transportation and how much that would cost.

Breathe Life into the Cold

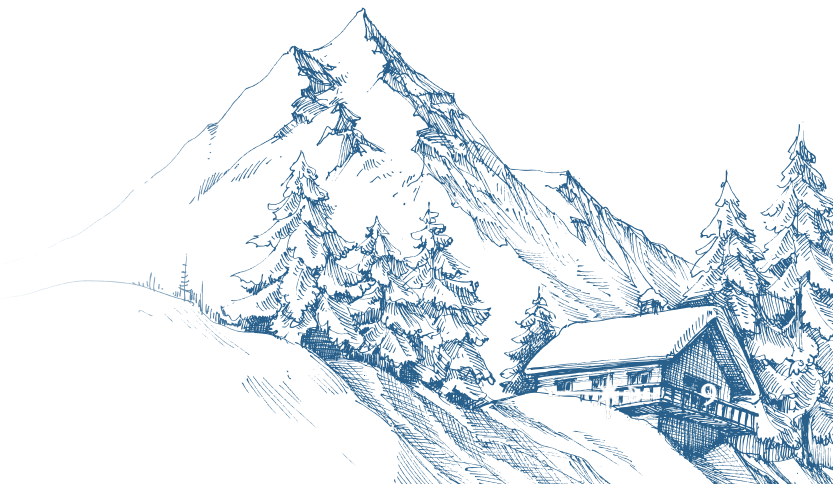
Venturing into a frozen wasteland is not for the faint of heart or the ill-prepared. DMs and players have much to consider when running a frozen wasteland campaign.

Get creative with the surroundings, creatures, and NPCs to provide your player characters with an unforgettable gaming experience. A DM elaborating on the hardships of winter, darkness, and cold will make a world of a difference in bringing the setting to life for their players. You can find more information regarding rules and weather conditions to enhance your campaign in this issue of Mag of Holding and in the many core rule books and supplements published by companies.

Keep fed. Keep watered. Keep warm.

But above all, keep rollin'.

Now, for Encounters of the Cold Kind...



Contents

Encounters of the Cold Kind

In the vast nothingness of the frozen wasteland, someone might hear you scream, but there might be nothing they can do about it. Who knows what dangers lurk in a void so deep and white? Blizzards, avalanches, and plummeting temperatures should concern brave and foolish folk who dare tread upon winter's white cloak, but the cold is by no means her only wile.

Yeti, Steady, Crow!

In the frozen wastes, danger hides in every cold crevice, lurks under every dead tree, and awaits on the other side of every snowy bank. In one of the world's harshest environments, even a simple road could spell death for unwary travellers. When the end is in sight. When the struggle is almost over. When victory is finally at hand. That is when the primal yeti strikes and when the frostwing ravens dine in its wake.

Encounter type: Deadly

Nothing creates tension and heightens the sense of danger better than a combination of good pacing and contrasting humour. This encounter is best used to that effect. It highlights threat and horror in session one if that's the style you're going for. But it can also be an effective way to remind foolhardy players, that have perhaps climbed a few pegs too high, how threatening the frozen wastelands truly are.

Plot Hooks

1. PCs will have their own reasons for initially traveling to the frozen wastes. Show them just how dangerous this frozen environment is.
2. A reward has been posted for the head of a particularly vicious yeti roaming the wastes that is attacking wary travellers with abandon.
3. A commotion at the city gates draws the party's attention. A dishevelled and seemingly deranged woman screams about a yeti taking her children just moments before. The city guard ignore her, believing her a mad woman. She approaches the party and begs for help.

A primal yeti also makes a great random encounter when the party loses their way between settlements.

Using this Encounter in Session One

At the beginning of the session, describe the players journeying to their first settlement in the frozen wastes of the North (or wherever your icy snowscape happens to be). Perhaps some PCs began the adventure already in the north and the party has yet to meet, with some making the long and perilous track from the south while others return or arrive from a nearby settlement. Either way, all are relieved by the sight of the settlement. Those traveling from the south should be led by a couple of guides, Jen and Berry Haagen Daz. The guides were paid half of their fee before the journey northward began with the promise of the balance (10gp) upon arrival at the town.

Working Jen and Berry into a character's backstory is not necessary, but it can be an effective way to get a player invested in the NPCs, and therefore the story, early on.

Read the following:

> The going has been tough. Those of you traveling a long distance have lost a few people along the way, their frozen bodies now twisted decorations among the icy hills. Your guides misjudged the weather, and you ran out of food and water the previous day. You long for sustenance and even just a little warmth. Your heart leaps as the settlement of <use any settlement in your setting> appears over the crest of a hill. The buildings look sturdy, designed to shelter people from the cold elements. Faint lines of smoke promise warmth. You're less than a mile away and can almost smell the burning firewood.

Ask the players how they wish to approach the settlement, and encourage them to describe their actions.

Increased Sense of Relief

The shock and horror of a yeti will only be as good as the sense of ease and relief the players feel before it strikes. Following are several suggestions for how you can accomplish this:

- Have the players make a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success a player will detect the subtle hints of baking bread on the breeze blowing down from the settlement.
- An elven PC might even hear the faint sound of joyful children laughing and playing inside the settlement, something that strikes them as homely yet almost otherworldly given the road they've travelled.
- Have the players encounter a very friendly NPC on their approach to the settlement. If he notices the PCs are low on provisions, he might offer some food, water, or a piece of helpful advice, such as the cheapest place to stay or the areas of town to avoid.
- Describe the weather as being clearer than it has been in days. It's hardly warm but at least the icy winds have subsided. There is an eerie calm and refreshing crispness to the air.

When about 300ft. from the settlement, Jen and Berry will stop by a row of snow-laden trees and tell the PCs that this is the furthest they can go. They will kindly ask for the remaining 10gp they are owed.

A player that decides to investigate the trees should roll a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. On a success they will discover that one of the trees is in fact a creature, whereupon you will call for an initiative roll with everyone but that player being surprised by the primal yeti.

Following the transaction with Jen and Berry, read the following:

> A violent wind whips up out of nowhere. Jen and Berry's eyes widen as they point back the way you came. You turn as a blizzard strikes, the cold tearing at exposed flesh like icy claws. Everyone around you has disappeared... replaced by blinding white. What do you do?

Resolve an action or two if the players wish to take any. Then read the following:

> As quickly as it appeared, the blizzard subsides. The snow settles, leaving you a little disoriented.

Call for Wisdom (Perception) checks.

With a roll of 14 or below, a PC is snowblinded for a moment or otherwise distracted.

With a roll of 15, a PC notices blood trailed all over the snow and dismembered body parts by the stand of white trees.

With a roll of 18, a PC can tell the body parts belong to Jen and Berry.

If anyone moves in the direction of the trees, call for initiative. The party is surprised by the primal yeti.

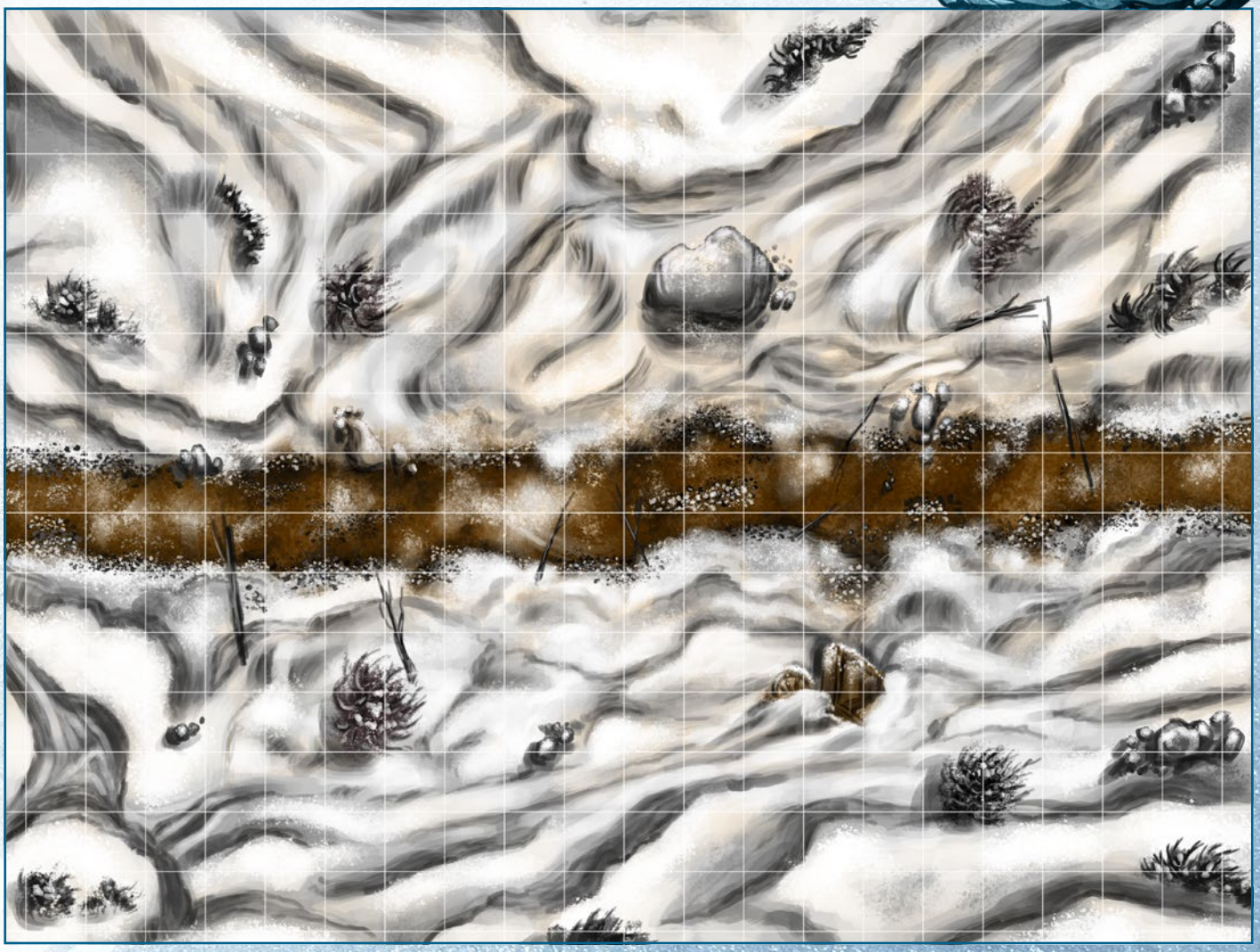
Snow explodes from the trees. But instead of falling as you'd expect, it flies into the air in a violent flurry of white. You realize that it isn't snow, but a swarm of white birds. They caw wildly as though angered by your presence. A white blur streaks across your vision. You catch a brief glimpse of bloody claws

Roll for Initiative!

Map

A snowy road outside of town. Despite having been cleared of some, ice makes the road difficult terrain.

See Full Art



Primal Yeti

A primal yeti's speed in beyond impressive. It is a creature ancient even among other yeti. It is also much more savage than the usual yeti. When the smell of flesh is near, they enter a primal rage, slashing and attacking until they taste death or blood. Usually, the latter.

Myth among Myths

Some writings describe it as a distant ancestor of men before their line diverged from other beasts. Some scholars claim it an aberration created by some spell gone horribly wrong. Others say such creatures came into existence by darker means. Either way, these are the rarest of all yeti and feared by its own kin with the exception of abominable yetis.

Swift and Swallow

The primal yeti is lithe and much faster than its bulkier cousin. It can strike and vanish with incredible speed and perform acrobatic feats beyond the ability of other creature's of similar size and build. Rather than a frontal attack, a primal yeti prefers to strike swiftly, eat, and retreat. Even when in a blind rage it will eventually retreat if it senses it is in danger.

Raven's Cry

Should one spot a primal yeti, they can be assured that a swarm of frostwing ravens waits nearby. When sensing it is in trouble, the primal yeti will call upon these ravens for help. Both creatures have learned to hunt together, ensuring each other's survival in even the harshest conditions. Frostwing ravens help a primal yeti hide amidst ice and snow and blind enemies like a relentless blizzard while benefiting from the bloody spoils left in the wake of the yeti's primal rage. Those who encounter these creatures would be wise to flee.

Levels Table

If you fear that a primal yeti will be too much for your players, consult the following table:

Levels 1 – 3	Yeti (MM p.305)
Levels 4 – 5	Primal Yeti
Levels 5 – 7	Abominable Yeti (MM p.306)

Primal Yeti
Large Monstrosity, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class: 18 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points: 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed: 50 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws: Dex +7, Con +6

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +8

Damage Immunities: Cold

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 13

Languages: Yeti

Challenge: 5 (1,800 XP)

False Appearance. While in the company of frostwing ravens and while it remains motionless, the primal yeti is indistinguishable from icy and snowy terrain.

Fear of Fire. If the primal yeti takes fire damage, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.

Keen Smell. The primal yeti has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Snow Camouflage. The primal yeti has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in snowy terrain.

Primal Rage. Once per day a primal yeti can use its bonus action to enter a primal rage. While in a primal rage, the primal yeti adds 1d6 cold damage to its claw attacks. Each time the primal yeti takes damage the cold damage increases by 1d6.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The primal yeti can make two claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Raven Call. With an unearthly howl, the primal yeti can summon 1d4 swarms of frostwing ravens. While in snow, and while at least one swarm of frostwing ravens is within 5ft, the primal yeti can use its reaction when attacked to vanish into a flurry of white, imposing -4 on the triggering attack roll. If the attack misses, the primal yeti can make a single claw attack. At the beginning of its turn, if in snow and within 5ft of a swarm of frostwing ravens, the primal yeti can hide, disengage, or dash as a bonus action.

See Full Art

Yeti Attack

"Most people watch the Ravenbird's flight. I watch where it lands...

'Twas dead of winter and we were off ranging through the eastern mountain pass, when I spotted a frostwing raven circling overhead. So common a sight that I thought nothing of it, truth be told.

That was 'til it landed in the distance and instantly vanished.

Impossible, says I. So, I approach the snowdrift where it disappeared. What d'ya know but the whole bloody thing erupts into a swarm of ravens unveiling some howling primal yeti that'd been hidin' 'neath their wings.

Later, when we returned for our fallen, the damned ravens had picked their bones clean."

Swarm of Frostwing Ravens

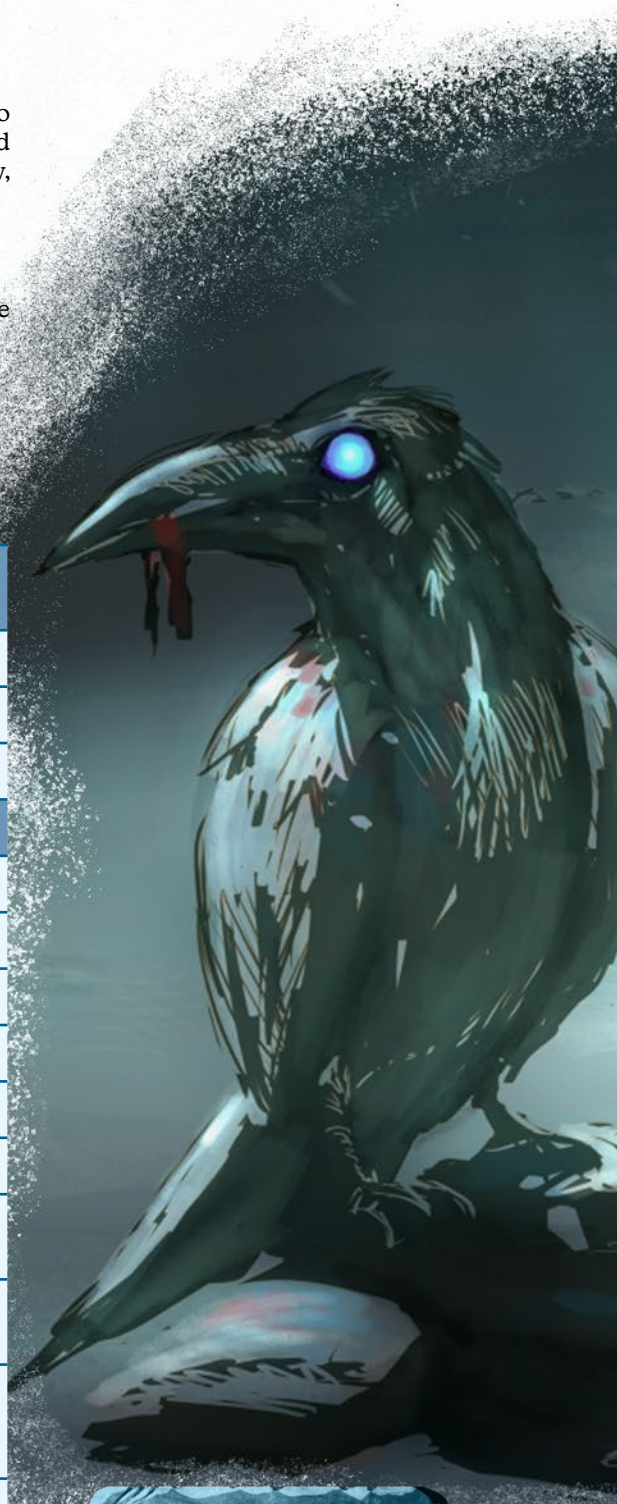
Frostwing Ravens swarm in hundreds or thousands. Folks have been known to mistaken such a swarm for an incoming blizzard. The main swarm will harry and confuse a creature while smaller swarms break off and attack with their frosty, serrated beaks.

Beaks of Ice

Some frostwing ravens dip their beaks in streams, rivers, or lakes and allow the dripping water to freeze, forming sharp icicles that resemble teeth.

In Plain Sight

Frostwing ravens often nest in dead trees and sit eerily still. What a traveller thinks is a snow-laden tree could in fact be a tree full of resting frostwing ravens.



See Full Art

Swarm of Frostwing Ravens
Large swarm of tiny beasts, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class: 12 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points: 22 (5d8)

Speed: 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	3 (-3)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)

Saving Throws: Dex +4, Wis +3

Skills: Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Immunities: Cold

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 13

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Sight. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Snow Camouflage. The swarm has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in snowy terrain.

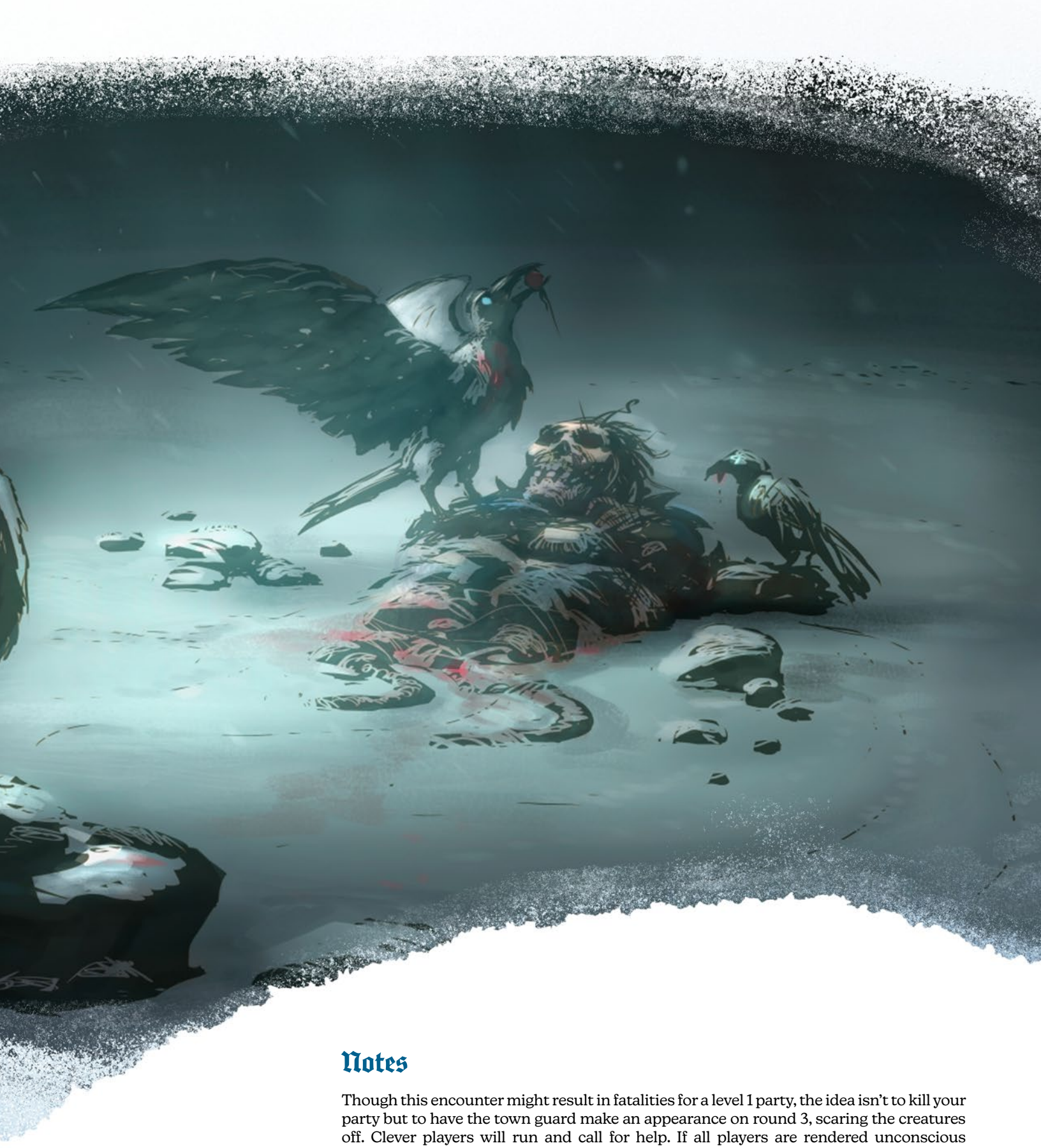
Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny raven. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Fluttering Tempest. Once per turn, the swarm can use a reaction to impose disadvantage on an attack made by a creature within its reach against another frostwing raven swarm or a primal yeti within 10 ft.

ACTIONS

Bites (swarm has more than half HP). Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target in the swarm's space. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage plus 5 (2d4) cold damage.

Bites (swarm has half HP or less). Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage.



Notes

Though this encounter might result in fatalities for a level 1 party, the idea isn't to kill your party but to have the town guard make an appearance on round 3, scaring the creatures off. Clever players will run and call for help. If all players are rendered unconscious before help can arrive, have them roll their death saves. Those who succeed, regain consciousness in a healer's house the following day. Those who fail do not.

You don't have to run these encounters exactly as written. Take what you like. Throw the rest away. And most of all, run with your players. They usually come up with cooler scenarios than a DM alone ever could.

Cryo Me a River

Crossing a partially frozen river is dangerous at the best of times. A single step in the wrong direction could see one plunge into its icy depths, forever lost in a half-frozen tomb. Pulling someone from the water might be an act in futility, for the combination of wet and cold will eventually take a person. Better to drown quickly than to slowly freeze in the night. When a cryo hydra has claimed a frigid body of water as its own, travellers best be vigilant lest they disturb the creature's slumber and summon their icy doom.

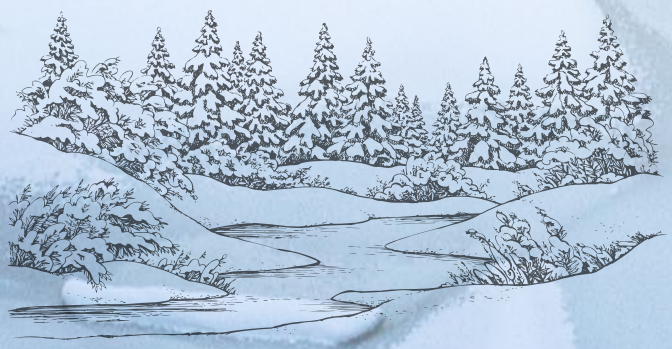
Encounter type: Deadly

This encounter is designed to build fear and tension as player characters navigate a dubious river crossing. What lurks beneath the glassy ice? The encounter is not intended to be deadly, as such, but it could easily go that way if players decide to combat the cryo hydra in its own territory. Therefore, it has been marked as such. The cryo hydra will use its surroundings to its advantage and might even attempt to pull a player character or two under the ice.

Plot Hooks

1. The party must cross a frozen river to reach their destination. Nearby hot springs have melted the ice on either side, making it all but impossible to cross there. The crossing itself, however, seems solid and is therefore their only option. Perhaps the party is pursued by orcs.
2. The river lies across a shortcut between two settlements. The party have crossed it several times without incident. As they will soon discover, a cryo hydra has claimed it as its own since their last crossing.
3. The party is summoned before a town council and informed that supply sleds from a neighbouring settlement stopped arriving weeks ago. The messenger they dispatched never returned. The prolonged winter has already stopped most trade. The town is scraping by, but without supplies people will starve, and the settlement will become a ghost town within a year. Having heard songs about their exploits, the council charges the party with an investigation.
4. Parents approach the party about Snowball, their missing puppy. It got away from their two children the day before while playing outside. The father went looking and heard Snowball barking in the forest across the river, but he got caught in a blizzard and barely made it home. The parents ask the party to search for Snowball in exchange for a small reward. The children beg.

Cryo me a River can also make for an interesting random encounter, providing you fit a frozen river into your setting on the fly.



River Crossing

When searching for a suitable river crossing, the party discovers an area that leads off a trail where the ice is thick. The trail has been carved by passing sleds laden with goods. If merchants have used this route, it must be safe! Unbeknownst to the players, a cryo hydra has been stalking the area and currently sleeps under the crossing. A perceptive player character will notice that the area is uncannily quiet, the silence broken only by the occasional crackling of ice up and down river. Birds and other wildlife make no sound here, and the wind doesn't blow.

Read the following:

> You hear subtle cracks and pops as the ice melts and breaks about 300 feet to either side of the crossing. However, before you is a section of solid-looking ice joining both banks. A track leads onto the ice from one bank and leaves the ice on the other. The path looks as well travelled as a path can be in such conditions.

If players make their way across the ice cautiously, fearing that it will crack under their feet, reassure them that it feels as solid as the ground upon which they just walked.

Shadow Under the Ice

When the party makes it halfway across the river, have them roll Wisdom (Perception) checks. If they are distracted or not otherwise vigilant, have them roll with disadvantage. Anyone rolling less than a 15 will notice nothing out of the ordinary.

If anyone rolls 15, read the following:

> Looking down at the ice, you're startled as you notice something moving down there. You realize it's a school of fish. You're about to breathe a sigh of relief when an immense shadow, at least 20 feet long, drifts by, heading in the direction of the bank you're trying to reach. The fish have gone.

If anyone rolls 18, add the following:

> Not only was the shadow possibly bigger than it looked due to the strange manner in which water and ice play with light, but you could swear it moved unnaturally. Like it had more than one head.

If anyone rolls 22, add the following:

> As you think about it, you're pretty sure you saw five heads attached to a larger shadow. Out of the corner of one eye you notice several holes in the ice around you. The holes are large enough for a medium creature to fit through.

The holes are packed with broken ice and are almost impossible to see from the banks. The cryo hydra has used the holes to pull unwary travellers under the ice. If the party chooses to remain still and stealthily cross the ice, have them roll stealth checks against the cryo hydra's perception. They might get lucky and make it to the other side without incident.

If they panic and start to run, read the following:

> The ice crackles under your feet as you move. Fractures spread and merge. Suddenly, a 3-foot wide fissure splits the ice between your party and extends to the bank with a mighty roar. Freezing water laps at your ankles and cold mist sprays your face. With a resounding crunch the ice by the bank ruptures, sending giant shard spiralling through the air and crashing down around you, expediting the breaking of the crossing. A sickening hiss issues from the explosion and the shadow of a beast emerges, its five serpentine heads whipping about. Lizard-like maws gurgle and snap as they appear from the white mist.

Roll for Initiative!

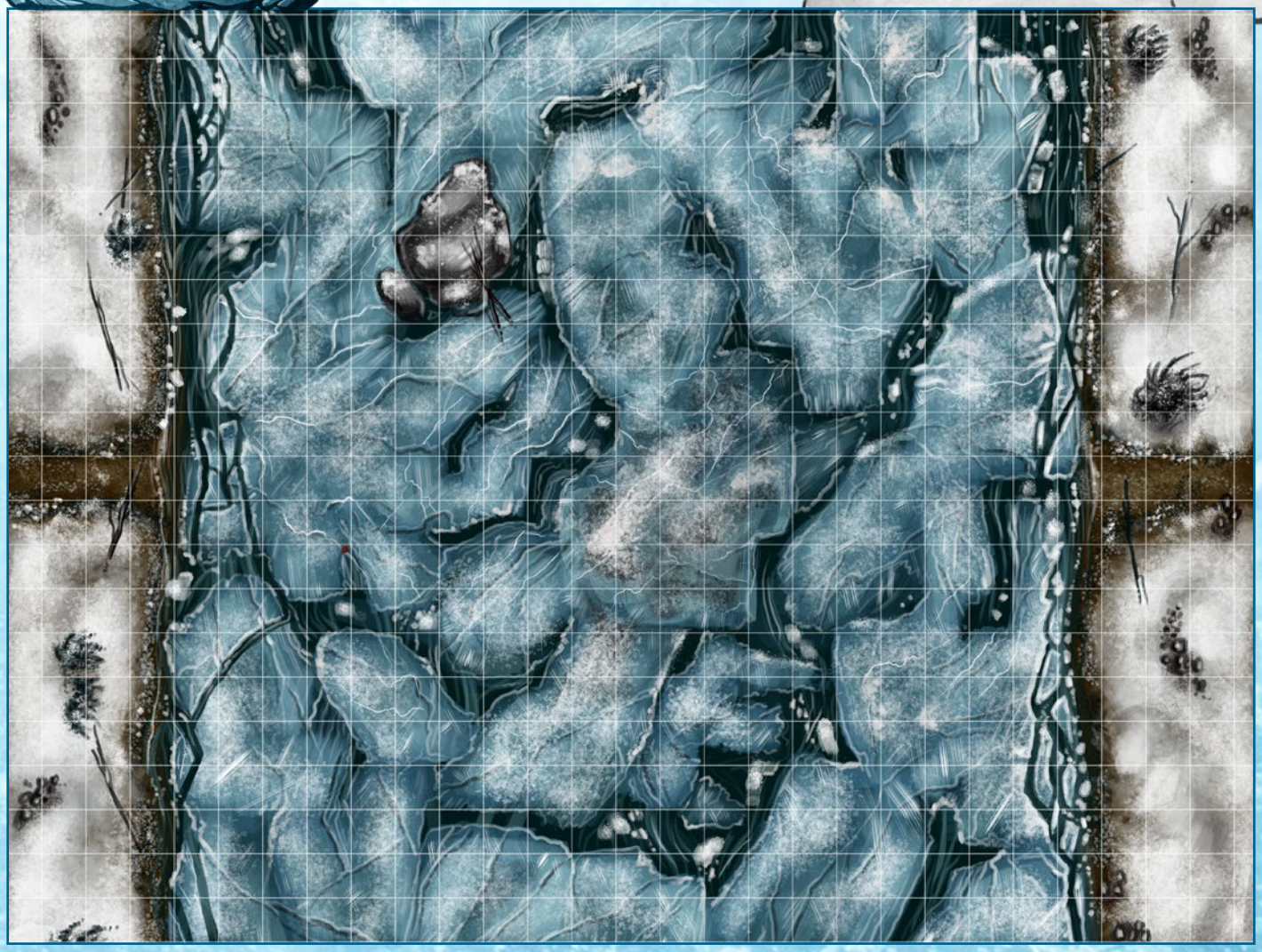
Map

A frozen river crossing regularly used by travellers. North and south of this crossing, the ice has begun to melt and crack due to the activity of local hot springs, but the ice here is thick and solid. However, things might not be what they appear to be. The crossing is difficult terrain.

Last week, Shikara claimed she saw giant snakes under the ice, but everyone knows its too cold for snakes this far north. You know how she can be with her wild imagination. Just this morning she told me she saw a five-headed dragon by the river, only it didn't have wings. She must be having nightmares again. I swear, with the stories that girl spins, she'll be a town speaker one day.

- A letter from Tiana to her husband working in the mines.

See Full Art



Taking A Dip

The ice breaks into giant rocking chunks, threatening to throw players into the churning icy water. At the beginning of their turn, players must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or slide into the freezing river. Creatures in the water can make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb out of the water. Pulling someone out of the water also requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

A creature in the water must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw at the end of their turn or receive a point of exhaustion. The DC increases by +2 for each additional round they spend in the water. If a creature in the water attempts to swim to shore between the broken chunks of ice, their swimming speed reduces by 5 feet at the end of each turn. This stacks with movement limits imposed by exhaustion.

Creatures attempting to move more than half their speed in one turn (such as with the dash action) must first make a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone.

Monster Stats

Cryo Hyrdra

Cryo hydras dwell in the icy caves and lakes of mountain ranges and glaciers but might be driven into lowlands by lack of food or disturbances in their environment. They generally avoid other creatures, especially when raising their young. Unlike other types of hydra, a cryo hydra will only attack when provoked, but they can become territorial and particularly aggressive while nesting. Either way, adventurers would be foolish to get too close to this monster.

Abandoned Buildings and Wrecks

A cryo hydra claiming an abandoned outpost or icy shipwreck as its home is not unheard of. Many a foolhardy treasure seeker, expecting to find such places vacant, has been caught by surprise. Despite their folly, most live to tell the tale unless they are unfortunate enough to stumble upon a cryo hydra's nest. Once discovered, or otherwise disturbed, a cryo hydra will move on in search of a new home.

The Icy Deep

Cryo hydras prefer a diet of birds when on land and fish while living in water. They will only hunt larger game when their favored food source becomes scarce. When threatened, a cryo hydra will use cold water to its advantage, whether that is to attack enemies or flee from them.

Cryo Hydra
Huge Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class: 17 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points: 172 (15d12 + 75)

Speed: 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills: Perception +6

Damage Immunities: Cold

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 16

Languages: --

Challenge: 9 (5,000 XP)

Amphibious. The cryo hydra can breathe air and water.

Multiple Heads. The cryo hydra has five heads. While it has more than one head, the cryo hydra has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Whenever the cryo hydra takes 25 or more damage in a single turn, one of its heads dies. If all its heads die, the hydra dies.

At the end of its turn, it grows two heads for each of its heads that died since its last turn, unless it has taken fire damage since its last turn. The hydra regains 10 hit points for each head regrown in this way.

Reactive Heads. For each head the cryo hydra has beyond one, it gets an extra reaction that can be used only for opportunity attacks.

Icy Armour. When in a cold environment, thick icicles form on the cryo hydra's heads, granting additional protection. As a reaction, the cryo hydra can increase its AC by (1d8 + number of remaining heads). The cryo hydra can use this ability 5 times per day.

Wakeful. While the cryo hydra sleeps, at least one of its heads is awake.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cryo hydra makes as many bite attacks as it has heads.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack, +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 1d6 cold damage.

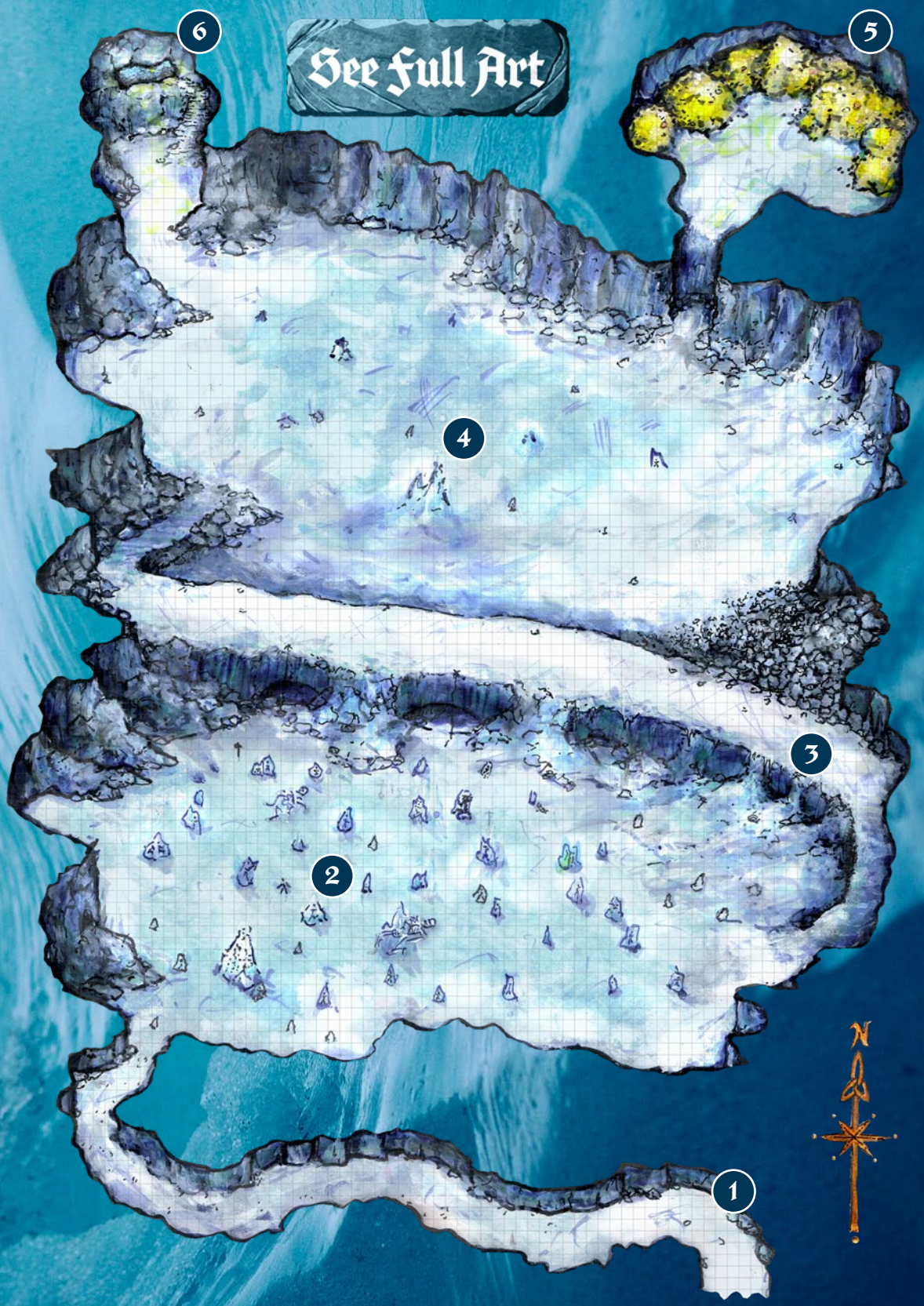
Icewave (Recharge 5-6). A wave of cutting ice sweeps out from the cryo hydra. Each creature in a 35-foot cube originating from the cryo hydra's center must make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 8d8 cold damage, is pushed 15 feet back, and is knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed away or knocked prone. In addition, unsecured objects that are completely within the area of effect are automatically pushed 15 feet away by the ability's effect.

See Full Art

DM Tip: If the cryo hydra was nesting under the ice, it will act aggressively towards the party and fight to the death. Otherwise, it will fight until it loses half of its hit points. It will then attempt to flee into the water if it is able. If within range, it might attempt to drag a player character or two with it as it leaves. The cryo hydra will then move to a new location.

The Lair of the Withering Winter

Deep within the heart of a mountain range lies a glacier. Preserved within is a cavern carved by some long-forgotten civilization. The immense hollow now serves as the lair of Blizwing the Withering Winter. No one knows how old this fearsome creature is. For many he is nought but a legend. Few have travelled deep enough into the mountains to reach Blizwing's glacier. Fewer still have returned. Common among the survivors are stories of a strange cold magic that flows there. Wild magic that freezes and shatters even rock in an instant. Dark magic so cold it reaches beyond the body and twists the soul. This magic is rumoured to have warped Blizwing's mind. Strange black crystals jut from between his white scales, and a large crown of black horns adorns his head. His name is spoken in terrified whispers if at all by denizens of the waste. None dare face him on the rare occasion he appears in the open let alone inside his own lair...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1. The Howling Hollow

> This tunnel, slick with frost and ice, is 20 feet wide and at least as high with icicles dangling from the ceiling and growing from the floor.

It is difficult to tell if the tunnel was hewn or burrowed or just worn by the relentless howling wind that moves through it. Those not wearing winter clothing or resistant to the cold are chilled to the bone taking 2d4 cold damage. The tunnel snakes through rock and glacier for 500 feet, climbing at a steep incline. The ground is slick with permafrost making it difficult terrain.

> As you climb higher through the tunnel the howling increases until it sounds like the very screams of the dead fill your ears.

To navigate the tunnel a creature must make a DC 19 Strength check. On a failure the creature falls prone and must make a DC 18 Constitution save or become exhausted.

2. Frozen Graveyard

The tunnel opens into a frozen cavern. The walls climb high before disappearing into the darkness above.

A chilling breeze blows between a field of frozen pillars, boulders, and stalagmites. A DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) or DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal creatures frozen inside some of these icy structures. Most are humaoid with faces forever fixed in expressions of horror and agony, but there are also beasts, a troll, and a frost giant. This is a frozen graveyard for those foolish enough to challenge Blizwing or greedy enough to seek his hoard.

Rough compacted snow and ice coat the ground. While not difficult terrain, any creature attempting to move through the cavern must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or cause a stalagmite to drop from the darkness above, delivering 2d6 bludgeoning damage to anyone within 5 feet and alerting Blizwing to their presence.

To the north of these frozen pillars lies a 30-foot high escarpment of ice. This is the side of a bridge that splits the cavern across the middle. Frozen picks, metal spikes, and bits of rope are what little remains of ill-fated adventurers who attempted to ascend its face. On the east of the cavern is a gentle slope onto the bridge.

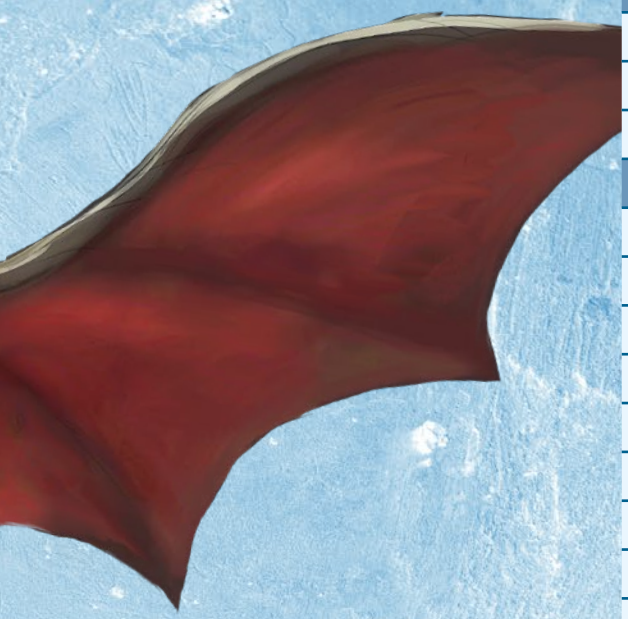
See Full Art

3. Frosted Expanse

A thin layer of undisturbed snow, carried by wind blowing through the cave opening in the north west corner, covers the bridge. Anyone wiping away the snow will find the bridge is so smooth it acts as a mirror.

On the east side of the bridge, part of the cavern has caved in, creating a 50-foot-high slope of rocks and frozen debris. Taking this path down to the cavern floor will trigger a landslide causing 4d8 bludgeoning damage and alerting Blizwing if he has not already been alerted.

If Blizwing was alerted to intruders passing through the Frozen Graveyard, he will attack the adventurers when they make it halfway over the bridge.



4. Field of Ice

On the west side of the bridge a ramp descends onto the northern half of the cavern. Snow has been piled against the north face of the bridge. A DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check will reveal claw and wing marks marring the otherwise pristine ice, showing that Blizwing keeps this field of ice clear to make it difficult for would-be intruders to move. The floor is considered difficult terrain. Anyone using their total speed to walk must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone until the start of their next turn. If alerted at any point, Blizwing will remain close to this area.

5. Blizwing's Hoard

On the north eastern face of the cavern is a smaller cave about 40 feet above the cavern floor. Players can ascend the cavern wall and reach the cave with a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. Half of the cave is filled with Blizwing's Hoard. If he has not been alerted yet, Blizwing slumbers upon his treasure. Any creature moving within the cave must make a DC 21 Dexterity (Stealth) check or alert Blizwing to their presence.

Blizwing, the Withering Winter
Huge Dragon, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class: 19 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points: 216 (16d12+112)

Speed: 40 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22(+6)	10(+0)	24(+7)	8(-1)	12(+1)	12(+1)

Saving Throws: Dex +5, Con +12, Wis +6, Cha +6

Skills Perception: +11, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities: Cold

Damage Resistances: Necrotic

Senses: Blindsight 60 Ft., Darkvision 120 Ft., Passive Perception 21

Languages: Common, Draconic

Challenge: 15 (13,000 XP)

Ice Walk. Blizwing can move across and climb icy surfaces without needing to make an ability check. Additionally, difficult terrain composed of ice or snow doesn't cost him extra moment.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Blizwing fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Blizwing can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus (1d8)cold damage.

Tail. Melee Weapon Attack: +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of his choice that is within 120 ft. of him and aware of him must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Blizwing's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Deathly Cold Breath (Recharge 5-6). Blizwing exhales an icy blast in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 31 (7d8) cold damage and 31 (7d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS
Blizwing can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. He regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Blizwing beats his wings. Each creature within 10 ft. of him must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. He can then fly up to half its flying speed.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Blizwing takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; he can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Freezing fog fills a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point Blizwing can see within 120 feet of him. The fog spreads around corners, and its area is heavily obscured. Each creature in the fog when it appears must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature that ends its turn in the fog takes 10 (3d6) cold damage. A wind of at least 20 miles per hour disperses the fog. The fog otherwise lasts until Blizwing uses his lair actions again or falls unconscious.
- Jagged ice shards fall from the ceiling, striking up to three creatures underneath that Blizwing can see within 120 feet. The dragon makes one ranged attack roll (+7 to hit) against each target. On a hit, the target takes 10 (3d6) piercing damage.
- Blizwing's eyes flash with black light and a creature he can see within 60 feet of him must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or look at the icy surface at their feet and watch their reflection emerge and grapple them. This grapple lasts until Blizwing uses this lair action again or falls unconscious.

Regional Effects

The region containing the legendary white dragon's lair is warped by the dragon's magic, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Chilly fog lightly obscures the land within 6 miles of the dragon's lair.
- Freezing precipitation falls within 6 miles of the dragon's lair, sometimes forming blizzard conditions when the dragon is at rest.
- Reflections on icy surfaces within 1 mile of the Blizwing's lair seem to move on their own and even glare at their owners.

If Blizwing dies, the fog and precipitation fade within 1 day. The reflections halt their unusual behaviour upon his death.

Behaviour

If attacked inside his hoard, Blizwing will attack in return and move into the Field of Ice and take flight so that he is less exposed and closer to a means of escape.

In the Field of Ice he will make use of his flight and lair actions to attempt to finish off the attackers. Should his health drop too low, he will attempt to flee using the cave mouth in the north western corner.

Encounter type: Deadly

This encounter is designed to highlight feelings of isolation and desolation in the frozen wastes. The players will see how high the steaks truly are upon entering the frozen graveyard. If they press on despite the obvious danger, they might be brave or foolish. Either way, may their virtue, or lack thereof, be rewarded accordingly.

Plot Hooks

There are many reasons one might venture into the lair of a white dragon but here are a few of the slightly less foolish:

1. Blizwing has emerged from his hibernation and has begun to destroy local towns and remote settlements, gathering what little gold he can find and other treasure for his hoard. A small town a few day's ride away pleads with the party for help. They offer mounts and all they have in exchange for slaying the dragon before he can attack again.
2. Blizwing has been gathering treasure for decades and many powerful artifacts lie among his hoard. With some research and investigation, the party may discover one of the artifacts he has collected is just what they desperately need.
3. An untrustworthy-looking merchant offers the party a map to a great and long forgotten treasure but neglects to mention what guards that treasure.

Treasure

If your players survive, reward them with gold, precious stones, and treasures from Gizcog's Wandering Emporium and other collections.

Gizcog's Wandering Emporium

See Full Art

Gizcog might appear eccentric, and maybe even a little insane, but he is as wise as he is old and even Gizcog himself cannot remember in which year, or even age, he was born. He is a seasoned adventurer, wielder of words and swords, and caster of many spells.

Gizcog Hereunder is a level 20 gnome artificer with a little wagon pulled by a pig he has lovingly named Krispy Bacon ... abbreviated to Kris.

Gizcog keeps three dagger-wielding, self-repairing clockwork gnomes in a box under his counter and if threatened will unleash them. He owns a mechanical sphere that when wound causes everything in a 20-foot radius to teleport to location or plane of his choosing.

Gizcog is friendly in nature and very curious despite deep knowledge accumulated over many years. However, he will make a powerful adversary to those who threaten him and even more so for anyone who hurts Kris.

> “Tickle my trinkets and fondle my baubles. But no licking now. You lick, you buy.

Contents

Welcome. Welcome. Welcome strangers and friends, friendly strangers, and even stranger friends. Feast your eyes on Gizcog's Wandering Emporium. Here you will find everything you could ever need from phosphorescent undergarments to saltwater tea. I harvested the leaves on the shores of the Forgotten Coast myself. Where is this coast, you ask? I couldn't tell you. I've forgotten! But if you buy two pouches, you get a third half price, and whether friend, family, or fiend, or all of the above, there is no denying that's a steal. It'll be the most interesting thing you've ever tasted. Of that I can assure you. Come up. Come up. Tickle my trinkets and feel my baubles. But no licking now. You lick, you buy.

Plot Hooks

1. Adventurers camping in a forest wake to hear a strange voice somewhere in the distance. Upon investigating, they find Gizcog's Wandering Emporium in the middle of a clearing with Gizcog rehearsing his sales pitch out loud. He is pleased to see them and asks for their feedback before attempting to sell his wears.
2. Adventurers turning in for the night are disturbed and upon investigating find a similar scenario to the one above.
3. Adventurers open a locked door in a dungeon to find Gizcog selling trinkets to a small band of goblins and a back scratcher to an ogre. The creatures seem won over by the tiny gnome and do not attack the party unless provoked.
4. Adventurers meet Gizcog on the road in the middle of nowhere. After interacting with him, an adventurer might turn to find that Gizcog and his Wandering Emporium have mysteriously vanished.
5. Adventurers discover Gizcog as a prisoner in the back of a yeti cave, his cart and wears off to one side.
6. Adventurers in the sewers find Gizcog eating a meal of pork chops, mashed potato, peas, and gravy...though it resembles the water flowing through the sewer.

Since Gizcog's Wandering Emporium travels between planes, it can appear in the most random and unlikely of places, whether that be in a prison cell, an abandoned ruin, the middle of the desert, the peak of a mountain, or on a boat at sea.

Gizcog's Wandering Emporium will also appear in issues of Mag of Holding, where he will display his most recent collection of curiosities.

Premium Vintages

Rare is an adventurer who does not enjoy a hearty draught of ale or glass of fruity wine after conquering the hardship's of the road. But some prefer premium vintages that exist for purposes other than to be chugged against a backdrop of chattering crowds, rolling bones, and cringe worthy bardic numbers.

These bottles are single use magic items with the potential to inflict impressive amounts of damage and possibly save an adventurer's life. Still, all rely on an adventurer's luck. For the Dungeon Master out there, giving a party one of these items increased the potential for dramatic life or death moments where everything hinges on the roll of the dice.

See Full Art

Bottled Lightning

Rare

A dark-wood wine bottle with the alchemical symbol of lightning and a set of strange runes saying 'use with care' carved into its side. A creature listening carefully will hear a buzzing noise emanating from inside.

When the cork is removed, a lightning bolt shoots from the bottle and strikes a creature within 200ft the bottle is pointed at. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure the target takes 1D100 lightning damage or half as much on a success.

"Trust me, you don't want to do that," he said, as the lordling began teasing open the bottle.

He scoffed as only a lordling could. "Trust a tinker? Not on my life," and yanked the cork out. With a blinding flash a bolt of lightning erupted from the bottle, hitting him square in the face. He collapsed to the ground, charred, the empty bottle still clasped in a blackened hand.

Later, the tinker smiled at the jangling of his coin purse. He pulled a crumpled list from an inner robe pocket and, with great satisfaction, crossed off the lordling's name.

Celestial's Light

Rare

A black bottle warm to the touch and capped with a metal cork of adamantine carved with runes.

When the cork is removed from the bottle a burst of radiant light fills a 30-foot-radius sphere surrounding the bottle. Any creatures in the sphere must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded for up to 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the save at the end of each subsequent turn, ending the effect on a success. Any fiend or undead creatures within the radius take 4d12 radiant damage.

See Full Art

Titan's Bellow

Rare

A clear glass bottle capped with darkened wax around a black cork. This bottle reverberates softly with the voice of an ancient titan.

When the cork is removed, a 30-foot cone of thunderous sound explodes from the bottle. All creatures in the cone must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure a creature takes 3d20 thunder damage or half as much on a success.

See Full Art

Breath of Winter

Rare

A beautiful bottle of crystal carved with snowflake patterns and coated with a slight layer of frost, the cork frozen in place.

When this bottle is opened the very essence of winter is released, a thick cloud of fog fills a 30-foot-radius sphere, heavily obscuring the area and causing each breath to sting with cold. Any creature in the fog cloud must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw at the start of its turn. On a failure the creature takes 8d4 cold damage and its movement is halved for the next minute. On a success the creature is unaffected. The cold effect only lasts for 1 round while the fog remains in the air for 10 minutes unless dispersed by moderate wind.

See Full Art

Alchemist's Fire

Rare

A bottle of polished silver engraved with arcane runes that make soft bubbling noises. A silver cork has been welded in place, sealing the bottle.

When thrown, this bottle bursts open, and a pool of liquid fire erupts in a 15-foot-radius circle. Creatures in the circle must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure a creature takes 5d10 fire damage or half as much on a success.

See Full Art

Wares & Trinkets

See Full Art

Gauntlets of Frigid Retribution

Wonderous Item, Rare
(requires attunement)

When a creature within 5 feet of you, that you can see, hits you with an attack, you can use your reaction to cause the creature to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. The creature takes 2d6 cold damage on a failed saving throw, and half as much damage on a successful one.

You can use this feature a total of three times per day. You regain all expended uses after soaking the Gauntlets of Frigid Retribution in at least one gallon of fresh water for one hour.

Brass Monkey

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

A little brass monkey dangling on the end of a necklace. It is cold to the touch. Once per day, when someone holding a weapon moves in your direction, you can use your reaction to roll 1d8 and cast the spell rolled on the following table:

1d8	Spell
1	Suggestion
2	Ray of Frost
3	Armor of Agathys
4	Ice Knife
5	Snilloc's Snowball Swarm
6	Sleet Storm
7	Ice Storm
8	Cone of Cold

See Full Art

Frosty Low-level Trinkets

A selection of the finest trinkets for the discerning explorer wanting to venture out into the frozen wastelands.

1d20	Trinket
1	**Icy Monocle** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A monocle of plain gold with a sliver of ice instead of glass. A creature wearing this item gains +2 to perception checks that rely on sight during a blizzard.
2	**Fancy Buttons** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): Ornate buttons that clip on over existing coat buttons. A creature wearing these buttons has a +1 to all Charisma based skill checks.
3	**Mechanical Snow Boots** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A pair of leather boots. When their command word is spoken snowshoes fold out of the soles. A creature wearing these is not affected by snow or ice based difficult terrain.
4	**Hand and Hook** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A magical prosthetic for a lost hand that is a combination of a hook and fingers. When making an unarmed strike with this prosthetic add +2 piercing damage on a successful hit.
5	**Foot and Boot** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A prosthetic for a lost foot with a metal coil inside. Once per long rest a creature can use their free action to release the energy in the spring, gaining a +2 bonus to initiative for 1 hour.
6	**Healers Cuff** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): The cuff easily stores a potion on the wrist allowing for easy delivery. A creature wearing this item can once per day deliver a potion as a bonus action.
7	**Cloak of the Ice Wolf** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A white fur lined cloak that wraps around you tightly to keep out the chill. While wearing it a creature has +2 to Constitution saves against exhaustion brought on by cold weather.
8	**Dragon Bone Ice Pick** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A pick made from the bleached bone of a white dragon, the wickedly jagged point designed to dig and grip the ice. While using the item to climb, the creature has advantage on athletics checks. If you used as weapon, it has the same stats as a dagger and deals an additional 1d4 cold damage.
9	**Cogsprink's Carriage Ski's** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A wondrous set of foldable skis that can be fitted onto the wheels of a carriage or cart allowing it to glide over the snow. A land vehicle fitted with this item ignores difficult terrain caused by ice or snow.
10	**Fire Crystal** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A red magical crystal that is carved with flame like patterns and set in an iron tripod. As an action a creature can spend a spell lot of 1st level or higher to kindle the flame inside causing it to glow. Any creatures within a 10-foot radius, while taking a long rest, do not need to make saving throws against the cold. Additionally, they recover an extra level of exhaustion if it was caused by the extreme cold.

1d20	Trinket
11	**Shard of Eternal Ice** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A small piece of magical ice carved into the figure of a woman. One per day, a creature looking at the shard can tell the weather in the general area for the next hour. If the shard is clear, the weather will be clear. If the ice is misty, expect snow. If the shard is snow-white, a blizzard is coming.
12	**Winkell's Wondrous Cure-all** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A simple potion invented by a travelling salesman to deal with the cold. A creature can down the small bottle in an attempt to cure a disease. The creature must make a DC14 Constitution saving throw. On a success they are cured of disease. On a failure they fall unconscious for 1d4 hours and take a level of exhaustion.
13	**Ring of Rope** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A ring of intertwined rope, as an action a creature can speak a command word and the ring will unwind and grow into a 200-foot-long hempen rope. After one hour the rope will revert into a ring. If damaged or cut, the rope will not revert.
14	**Needle of Threading** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A needle made of platinum with a tiny green emerald set in the eye. As an action a creature can sew with the needle and magically create 1d20 feet of thread per day. The creature using it can choose the colour of the thread.
15	**Ring of Noblekind** (Wondrous Item, Rare): A counterfeit signet ring made of gold. A creature wearing the ring gains +2 to Charisma (Persuasion) and (Intimidation) checks unless the target succeeds on a DC 18 Charisma (Perception) check to see that it is fake (Targets with a noble background roll with advantage).
16	**Ring of Shalestone** (Wondrous Item, Rare, Requires Attunement): A simple bronze band set with a piece of black shalestone. A creature wearing this ring gains +1 to Constitution saving throws.
17	**Ring of Wellbeing** (Wondrous Item, Rare, Requires Attunement): A ring of platinum engraved and inset with red spiral designs. A creature attuned to the ring can at the end of each long rest gain temporary hit points equal to their proficiency modifier.
18	**Boot Laces of Ropenkind** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): A pair of boot laces that turn into 30 feet of hempen rope when their command word is spoken.
19	**Amulet of Singing** (Wondrous Item, Uncommon): An amulet of a smiling face. Once per day when its command word is spoken it sings. Roll 1d4, on a one instead of being in tune it emits a painful shriek.
20	**Ring of Snow** (Wondrous Item, Rare): A band of platinum engraved with snowflakes. As an action once per day the creature can speak this ring's command word and cause it to begin to snow, the creature and any others with it are considered lightly obscured and any attempts to track them are rolled with disadvantage as the snow fills their tracks.

Cold Weather Rules Expanded

Blizzards, avalanches, and callous cold are just a few environmental dangers adventurers encounter while braving the vast icy wastes. Here you will find optional expanded rules for cold weather survival. If one ventures forth into winter's cold embrace, chances are one will not return unscathed. Let it be known.

Note: Tracking survival rules might seem like an unnecessary burden on the Dungeon Master, or cumbersome at the very least, but thanks to our Winter Survival Tracker, it couldn't be easier.

Click Here

Torn Clothing

While traversing the frozen tundra, good winter clothing plays a vital role in staving off death's icy grip. But what happens when a boot splits or a coat rips? These torn clothing rules work best if you use the following alternative Extreme Cold Rules:

Without cold weather clothing, you roll Consitution saving throws against exhaustion as normal.

With cold weather clothing, you roll with advantage.

Rule
When you take (10+your level+proficiency modifier) hit points worth of slashing, piercing, or fire damage in a single attack, roll a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a 10 or higher, you avoided a tear in your clothing. On a failure, your clothing sustains a tears. On a critical failure, your clothing sustains 2 tears. After this, each time you take 20 hit points of any damage type in a single attack before finishing a long rest, you gain an additional tear.

When you accrue 4 tears your cold weather clothing is considered destroyed.

Each time you receive a tear, you receive -3 to Constitution saving throws against cold-based exhaustion and contracting a Cold Disease.

Clothing Repairs

A player character can attempt to repair a tear during a short rest or all tears during a long rest, using a clothing repair kit with a DC 13 Dexterity check. Repairing a single tear requires 1 hour of focus.

During long stretches of winter such repair kits are often in short supply and therefore costly.

Clothing Repair Kit (5 SP)

This small leather pouch contains a sewing needle and enough thread, gut, and fabric to repair 1 tear.

Greater Clothing Repair Kit (1 GP)

This medium leather pouch contains a sewing needle and enough thread, gut, and fabric to repair 3 tears.

DM Tip: Encouraging players to use their PC's background lends itself to roleplay. What if a PC has the tailor or sailor backgrounds? A tailor might know how to stitch a particularly tight seam. A sailor's work might be a little rougher around the edges, but perhaps they have experienced repairing sails on a stormy sea? Asking a player if their PC knows something that might help, given their background, can be an effective way to help a player open up. And don't forget to reward players who go the extra mile.

Cold Disease

Stay as warm, as warm as you can, or winter's cold might shake you.

And stay well-rested, for even in warmth a Cold Disease might take you.

If you gain 2 levels of exhaustion, make a DC13 Constitution saving throw.

Success: You shrug off the cold.

Fail: Roll on the Cold Disease table.

1d4	Cold Disease
1	Cold Fever
2	Ice Chill
3	Blizardblains
4	Subtle Shiver

These diseases can be ended with a Lesser Restoration spell or similar magic. Otherwise, they last until you are no longer exhausted.

Critical Success: You are immune to Cold Diseases for 1d4+2 days.

Critical Failure: You gain the effects of the cold disease rolled and you gain an additional level of exhaustion.

Each time you recover from a Cold Disease, the DC reduces by 1 and the level of exhaustion requirement increases by 1.

Cold Fever

The ice burrows deep inside you like an icy parasite finding a new home.

Worse still, the parasite persists no matter how long you warm your body by the fire.

Worse again, the parasite extinguishes your internal flame before it can be expelled.

Rule
You contract Cold Fever. An icy sensation rakes your body, causing you to shiver uncontrollably. While infected with this disease, you have disadvantage on Constitution saving throws. Additionally, your maximum hit points are reduced by (1d4+your level) until the disease ends.

Ice Chill

The cold has an easier time taking a traveller after the Ice Chill weakens his bones.

Rule
Your joints become stiff and unresponsive. Though your body feels warm to another, you experience an intense chill in your bones. You cannot use your Reaction and you have disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws until this disease ends.

Blizardblains

Few know pain worse than the icy stabs of the Blizardblains. May the gods have mercy on anyone who contracts this horrible disease.

Rule
Once per day, at a time of the DM's choosing, a horrible pain rakes your body, inflicting 2d4+2 cold damage. Roll a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, you cry out in agony.

Subtle Shiver

Some diseases exhibit in a slight shiver that shakes your limbs from time to time. It might not seem like much, but it could still be deadly. Seek warmth and rest before it is too late!

Rule
A slight shiver doesn't seem like much, but you only receive half the number of hit points from healing spells and potions, rounded down, until this disease ends.

More Wintery Goodness

Additional diseases and effects to take your campaign's survival horror to a whole new level.

The White Lung

You don't catch the White Lung. The White Lung catches you. And it rarely lets its victims go.

Rule
If your hit points drop to 0 while exposed to the cold elements and you make at least one death saving throw, if you regain consciousness make a DC13 Constitution saving throw.

Success: You shake off the effects of the cold.

Critical Success: You are immune to the White Lung for 1+1d4 days.

Failure: You contract the White Lung. You develop a nasty cough giving you disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks for 1d4+1 days. Additionally, you gain 1d4 points of exhaustion. A Lesser Restoration spell or similar magic will end this disease but will not remove levels of exhaustion gained this way.

Critical Fail: In addition to the effects of a Failure, you gain another level of exhaustion.

While you are infected with the White Lung, you cannot contract diseases on the Cold Diseases table.

Frostbite

Frostbite should concern any traveller of the icy tundra. Even the best winter wear cannot stop cold of the creeping variety.

For every 8 hours spent on the tundra, make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. If you were caught in an avalanche or blizzard during those 8 hours, make the roll with disadvantage. If you experienced a measure of warmth during those 8 hours for at least one hour, such as from a spell or a fire, roll with advantage.

Critical Success: Your steely determination staves off the cold and you do not need to make another check this day.

6 – 13: 1 appendage loses all sensation. This effect can be undone by spending 4 hours in warmth.

2 – 5: 1 appendage no longer works. This effect can be undone by spending 8 hours in warmth.

Critical fail: Roll on the appendage table. The appendage has turned black and is frostbitten. This effect can be undone by a Greater Restoration spell or similar magic. While frostbitten you cannot gain the benefits of a long rest. For each day you spend frostbitten, your hit points are permanently reduced by 10 until you die or the appendage is restored or removed. Once an appendage is removed, you gain 3 levels of exhaustion until you complete a long rest.

1d6	Appendage
1	**Foot** -10ft movement.
2	**Hand** -5 to action rolls attempted with the affected hand. Cannot hold a shield.
3	**Ear** -2 for hearing-based perception rolls and -5 for Charisma checks.
4	**Nose** -2 for smell-based perception rolls and -5 for Charisma checks.
5	**Finger** -1 to action rolls attempted with the affected hand.
6	**Toe** -5ft to movement.

If an effect is not undone, it worsens after a day. For example, if a PC's index finger goes numb on day 1, it will stop working on day 2, and it will be frostbitten on day 3.

Variant House Rules

It is not unheard of for the weave to work in unexpected ways in an area affected by magic wielded by a god or another powerful entity.

In such cases cold resistance, and even cold immunity, might not grant automatic success on a roll. It might instead grant advantage or decrease the roll's DC.

Under such conditions, a Ranger might gain 1d10 good berries a day instead of automatically gaining 10, or there might be a chance those good berries are rotten with a failed Wisdom (Nature) roll.

Either way, the wintery wastes are not to be trifled with, especially when mysterious forces are involved.

Let it be known!

DM Tip: If players have taken other measures to stave off the cold, or if they have resistance to cold, consider reducing the Constitution save DC.

One's Own Path

Class: Wizard **Subclass:** Hedge

Hedge wizards are those individuals that are missed by the schools of magic and instead make their own way through the world, gaining knowledge where they can, and making it up where they can't. Hedges are self-taught and good at seeking out those hidden stashes of lost knowledge, whether a book fallen behind a dusty library bookshelf or a lost chest of scrolls in a dragon's hoard. A jack of all trades, hedges use all schools of magic but master none as the thirst for more knowledge drives them.

2nd Level

Arcane Secrets

At 2nd level, your continual hunting of secrets and knowledge has given you an insight into seeking out and finding hidden stashes. You gain proficiency in the investigation skill, if you are already proficient in this skill, you gain expertise.

Scroll Hunter

Your experience with scrolls, and recording the knowledge contained within them, has given you a better understanding of how to copy this precious text. When copying a scroll into your spell book you have advantage on the required Intelligence (Arcana) check.

6th Level

Weave Impossibility

All schools of magic are taught about the weave and its limits, but hedge wizards only know what they have cobbled together from scraps of uncovered knowledge. A hedge's understanding of the weave, or lack thereof, causes them to push further than most other wizards might dare. You can attempt to pull on more of the weave, casting a spell for which you have expended all spell slots. When using this ability, make a Constitution saving throw as the raw weave surges through you. The DC of the check is equal to 10 + twice the spell level. On a success, your body channels the pure, raw power of the weave and you cast the spell. On a failure, the raw power rips through you, causing (spell level) d8 force damage.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Intelligence modifier (a minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

10th Level

Frugal Casting

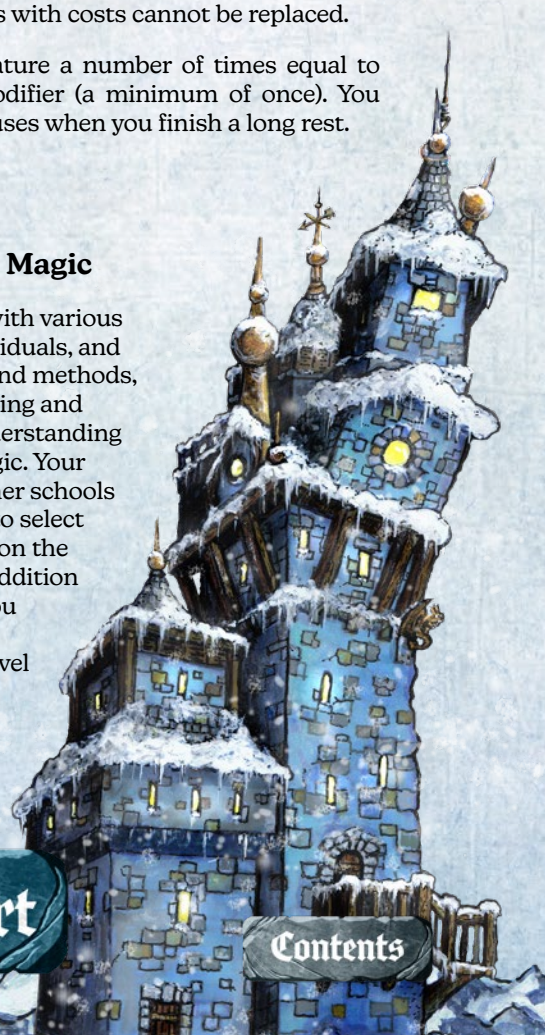
Hedge wizards push the boundaries with the bare minimum of resources. Constant experimentation leads you to a better understanding of the minimum requirements to cast spells. Using this feature, you can now drop one of the requirements of a spell (Verbal, Somatic, or Material) and still successfully cast the spell. Material components with costs cannot be replaced.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Intelligence modifier (a minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

14th Level

The Frontiers of Magic

Rubbing shoulders with various types or arcane individuals, and learning their ways and methods, has resulted in studying and broadening your understanding of the schools of magic. Your in-depth study of other schools of magic allows you to select 2 spells, that are not on the Wizard spell list, in addition to any other spells you learn. Each of these spells must be at a level for which you have spell slots.



See Full Art

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Vardus the Hedge (NPC)

Vardus the Hedge (human) grew up in the far north among the frozen wastes. At a young age he found a wizard's spell book and his natural curiosity pulled him down a path of arcane wonder and experimentation. After his growing power caused a few magical accidents; he was strongly encouraged to find his own place outside of town. Facing the harsh elements with grim determination, he crafted a wizard tower of his own in the wastes. There he continued his experimentation in isolation. He is always eager for more knowledge and will often provide crafted magical items for gold to fund his research. Alternatively, he will happily accept a new spell or two for the price of an item.

Vardus, the Hedge
Medium Humanoid (Human), Lawful Neutral

Armor Class: 12

Hit Points: 55 (10d8 +10)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9(-1)	14(+2)	13(+1)	17(+3)	12(+1)	11(0)

Saving Throws: Int +7, Wis +5

Skills: Arcana +7, Survival +5, Investigation +7

Languages: Common, Draconic

Challenge: 7(2,900 XP)

Spellcasting.

Vardus is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): Mage Hand, Message, Ray of Frost.

1st level (4 slots): Shield, Unseen Servant, Magic Missile, Burning Hands.

2nd level (3 slots): Flaming Sphere, Shatter.

3rd level (3 slots): Fireball, Haste, Blink.

4th level (3 slots): Ice Storm, Dimension Door.

5th level (2 slots): Conjure Elemental.

Weave Impossibility. Vardus is capable of pushing beyond the limits of the weave. He can attempt to cast a spell for which he is out of spell slots. If he attempts to do this, he needs to make a Constitution save (DC 10 + twice the spell level). On a failure he takes force damage equal to the spells level worth of d8's. He can use this feature 3 times per day with all uses restored on a long rest.

Frugal Casting. Vardus learned his magic in a place where resources are limited. 3 times per day he can drop one of the requirements of a spell (Verbal, Somatic, Material only without a GP value). All uses of this ability are restored on a long rest.

Actions

Dagger. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Staff. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit 5(1d8) bludgeoning damage.

See Full Art

Potential Plot Hook: Vardus needs a rare Snowdrop Bloom from the top of a nearby mountain to perfect a new spell. The area is inhabited by a particularly savage tribe of Yeti. He offers to share the spell with your party upon completion or to allow you to browse the items he has created.

The Stranger Side of the World

Many grow up with a family, a home, and friends. Others experience more peculiar beginnings, the beasts of the forest their family, the wild places of the world their home, the wind and the rain their only companions. And then there dwell a few that even such wild folk would consider strange...those created by some magical means who were raised on the fringes of arcane studies.

The following 2 backgrounds outline these stranger starts to life. We hope they inspire you and your players to create exciting new backstories that will enrich your adventures.

Wildling

As a young child you were lost in the wilderness, abandoned by your family, or the only survivor of some tragic event. Left alone in the untamed places of the world, you were adopted by the creatures of nature and raised as one of their own. Whether the member of a pack or herd or raised by an individual apex predator, you learned their instincts and the natural ways of the world.

Choose a beast that raised you, or work with your DM to expand on this background.

Skill Proficiencies: Survival, Nature.

Languages: Common, Beast speak of the animal that raised you.

Equipment: A ragged and tattered set of clothing, 5 simple animal traps, a blanket of fur pelts, 3gp.

Feature: Natural Instincts

Having lived so long in the wild, you are familiar with nature's ways. You know how animals mark their territory and can see the subtle impressions they leave on the world around them. You can tell what animal has left a paw or hoof print or scored a surface with its claws or horns.

Arcane Experiment

Created by an arcane individual, you have no mother or father but instead a creator who brought you into this world, whether your body is one of metal or wood or flesh and bone. Your creator raised you in his lab or tower, teaching you some of the ways of magic.

Skill Proficiencies: Arcana and additionally choose one skill from the following list:

- History
- Medicine
- Perception

Languages: Common and one standard language.

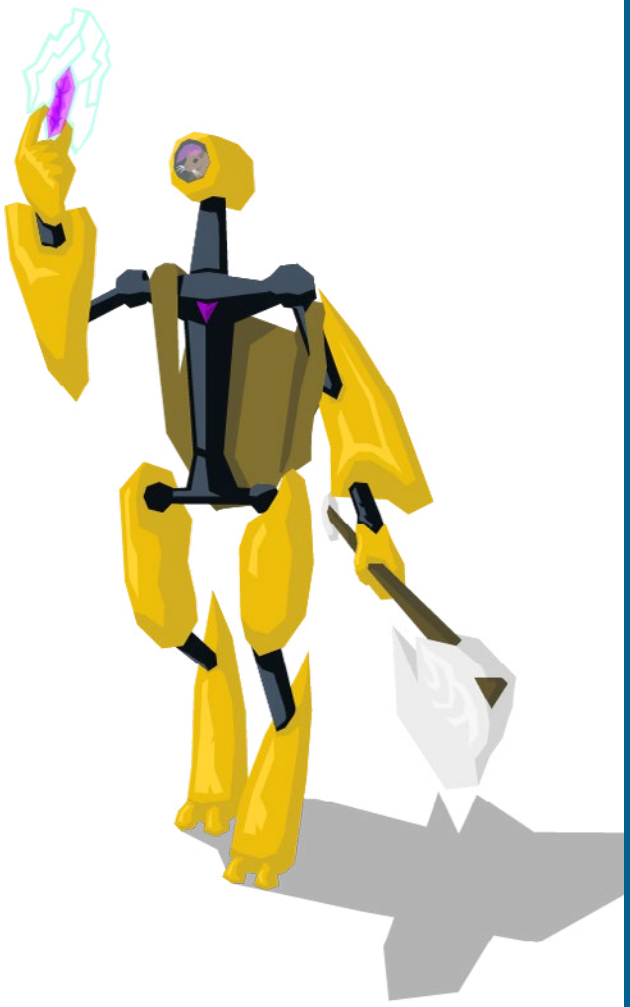
Equipment: A set of traveller's clothes, an herbalism or alchemist kit, a pouch containing 5 GP.

Feature: Arcane Upbringing

Being raised among magic, and assisting with experiments and arcane castings, has taught you a thing or two. You either have proficiency with the herbalism or alchemist kit or alternatively you may choose 2 cantrips from the wizard spell list (Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for them).

THE AWAKENED

By B. R. Bork



They're A Cute Animal In A Mech Suit. This answers the age old question of what would happen if scruffles' was piloting a Super Mega Ultra Combat Suit (S.M.U.C.S. for short). You know how hamsters love scooting around in their hamster ball? Well some mad artificer decided to take that concept and dial it up to 11. How exactly did scruffles get ahold of an aether-fiber mesh fit onto a core of quantum mcguffinite? Nobody knows, all we know now is that their bodies are made from a strange wood and ceramic mix resulting in a super cool super suit. Where a normal humanoid's head would be they instead have a containment chamber that endows the otherwise normal beast inside with complete sentience, as well as allowing food and waste to be brought in and out.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 2 and your Strength score increases by 1.

Age. Awakened age at a rate slightly faster than most humanoids. An infant beast kept inside of a containment chamber wouldn't reach adulthood until about the age of 15. Upon reaching maturity Awakened are able to live up to 80 years.

Alignment. Most Awakened are curious folks. Being a tiny animal endowed with sentience is a very strange experience, but most Awakened find joy and excitement in their ability to learn and experience new things. It is quite rare to find an Awakened that is not of a good by nature.

Size. Your size is Medium. Your height is 5' 5'.Your weight is around 150 lbs.

Speed. Your base movement speed is 30 ft.

Darkvision. Your containment chamber allows you to see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of green.

Fluffy Pilot. Being an awakened beast inside of a mechanical body you choose one CR 0 beast to act as your body and soul powering your super mega ultra combat suit. You do not gain any senses or abilities as a result of this form. You are able to communicate with others of that same beast as though you share a language. Your small organic body also requires significantly less food and water, you only need one tenth of the normal food and water required for a human to survive.

Little Body Big Heart. In the past? You weren't too big, nor were you too tough, and that kind of resilience really sticks around. You have advantage on wisdom saving throws made against spells and magical effects.

S.M.U.M.O. (Super Mega Ultra Maximum Overdrive). You may use one bonus action to cause yourself to swell with comically unrealistic wrist-strength. Doing so allows you to wield any melee weapon with one hand for up to 1 minute. This effect ends early if you are knocked prone or are incapacitated.

Big Speedy Rocket Fist. You may choose to use one attack to detach an empty hand from your body and move that hand up to 30ft to a point that you can see. That hand must be used to immediately make an unarmed melee weapon attack against a target within 5ft of the hand. This hand then immediately moves 30ft back to your body and attaches itself immediately after making this attack (this movement does not provoke opportunity attacks). You may not activate this ability again until the start of your next turn.

Language. You can speak, read, and write Common, and Sylvan.

See more of B. R. Bork's work here: https://linktr.ee/DMBrad

Visit Website

The Ice Box

Some burn wood and some burn whale oil, but in the frozen wastes neither are available in abundance. With fuel in short supply, heat is as valuable as gold.

Those who have grown protective of their resources might not be as quick to invite outsiders into their homes as they were in better times. And rightly so, for murder over a quart of oil or even a measly log of wood is not unheard of. The seemingly never-ending cold has much to answer for.

Those who cannot afford warmth freeze to death or die trying to steal warmth from others. Such desperate individuals are prime targets for the White Fist: a well-structured gang that runs fights in a cage colloquially known as the Ice Box. Some claim that it is named so for the boxing fighters who contend there in an attempt to escape the cold. Others will tell you that the name comes from the losing contestants who leave in the undertaker's frozen cart.

The White Fist

The White Fist is as shady an organization as there ever was. It operates in small cells, usually scattered throughout the settlements of frozen climates. They run tavern-like establishments of varying sizes where they host cage fights and encourage gambling. Though not in the business of drawing unwanted attention to themselves, one might know to look for the painted white fist on or above the door. Warmth, drink, and food of varying quality is too much for some desperate souls to resist. Entrance to White Fist establishments is free, but patrons must place bets on each fight or partake in one if they are to avoid being tossed into the cold with fewer belongings than when they entered and more injuries to boot. The White Fist show no mercy to those who would abuse their "hospitality".

Punching Paupers

The poorest of the White Fist establishments will typically have one 20-foot-wide cage, a little heat, lightly spiced melted snow for drinking, and heavily salted meat for eating...or chewing as the case may be. Fights can range anywhere between unarmed fist fights to armed combat to the death. Only daggers are permitted during armed combat. However, cheating is common. For example, a favored fighter might hold an opponent against the cage wall, where gamblers can try to grapple him or even stab him from outside the cage. It is not rare for participants to pull out a set of brass knuckles during a fistfight, and White Fist tavern owners have even poisoned food to swing the odds in their favor if rumours are to be believed. Despite the outrageous stakes, wagers are rarely higher than 1sp.

> As you enter the establishment, the stench of offal, vomit, and stale sweat assaults your nose. The patrons are dressed in little more than rags that clearly haven't been washed in weeks. Dried blood stains the bowing wooden floor, its boards creaking as you walk, as though they might suddenly give way under your weight. It is warmer than outside, but you wouldn't call it warm.

Wagers are collected by thuggish bouncers with limited vocabulary. Anyone who cannot pay has to either get in line for the cage or get out. Those who try to leave the line for the cage get pushed to the front of the queue and beaten. Most people here are sober, as there is no free alcohol. If you need information from the lowest rungs of society, this is the place to be.

Wrestling Workers

Mid-tier establishments usually feature several larger cages and host multiple fights on busy nights. These buildings are much better insulated, and patrons are served ale, diluted wine, and stew. Some fights see the use of exotic weapons. Such weapons may be chosen by the fighters, but other times they are assigned. (As a result, a fighter could end up with a weapon with which they have no experience). Drawing the kind of crowd that demands a little more, fights at mid-tier White Fist taverns are typically to the death unless a patron pays 10gp for the life of the losing contester. Onlookers tend to be better behaved in these establishments, as interfering with a battle means volunteering for the next. However, this doesn't mean an owner or regular won't poison, curse, or otherwise compromise a contestant to guarantee victory for their champion. Wagers range from 1sp to 1gp per round. A bet has to be placed for each active cage, or the wager for a single cage needs to be raised by the same amount.

This establishment is relatively clean, but under the scent of limewater you detect the faintest trace of what could be sweat and blood. Two normal-looking bouncers drag a bloodied body from a metal cage with a third mopping up the floor. The place is still buzzing with the excitement of the fight. Patrons talk, laugh, and bicker over flagons of ale and bowls of steaming stew. The room feels pleasantly warm.

Wagers are collected by attractive servers in revealing outfits who sweet talk the patrons and get them to raise their wagers above the required minimum. Those who cannot pay are encouraged to compete and are sometimes even given a weapon by the server. If they cannot be persuaded, the server calls an armed bouncer to remove said patron from the premises. Most people here are drunk and therefore loose lipped, which makes these places ideal for gathering information.

Cutting Class

High-class White Fist establishments might appear more cordial on the surface, but they are perhaps the most dangerous of the lot. After all, the stakes in these venues run high. These venues often have multiple floors, each featuring one or more 30-foot-wide cages. Each floor usually has an open bar and a banquet table with a wide selection of food, even for a fine establishment situated in the frozen wastes. This luxury, however, is offset by a mandatory wager of 10 to 100gp per fight...or one could enter the cages. "Volunteers" are pitted against a beast or monster from the personal collection of the owner. These creatures can take the form of the undead, armored goblins, yetis, and more. These fights are usually short lived and bloody as the beast tears the competitors to shreds while onlookers cheer from behind their tables. Cheating does not take place often since most patrons rarely care enough about the wagered money to bother even trying to rig fights. If someone loses to a beast, they cannot be bought out, but someone else can volunteer to enter the cage and attempt to save them.

The scent of delicious food is carried to your nose as if by a warm summer's breeze. The establishment is surprisingly spotless, and you notice servants magically clearing tables and cleaning floors as they zig-zag through the common room. Patrons appear to be well dressed and well-kept for the most part. A few look down their noses as you enter. But most take no notice as they watch a large cage with sickening glee as an owlbear mauls a screaming person.

Patrons here fall into one of two obvious camps. Firstly, the wealthy cluster together at the better stocked banquet tables. Their clothing and pompous behavior give them away immediately. Secondly, the lower class, tempted into the building by the promise of food and warmth that is allowed to drift from open windows. Both groups have their own type of server. The rich have trained butlers and the rest have servants not unlike those found in mid-tier establishments. However, the rules are the same for both parties: pay up or face the beast. Perhaps this is one reason the poor might come here. Who wouldn't want to see a pompous lord, who overestimated the size of his purse, being dragged off to become a meal or plaything for a polar bear or crag cat?

Playing in the Ice Box

Though be it knowingly or otherwise, when players enter one of these establishments, have the NPCs fighting in the cages reflect the level of the party.

It shouldn't be difficult to get one or more players involved, especially if they've come in search of someone they know only to find them losing a fight with a champion or monster. Otherwise, a server can approach between each fight to collect the next wager. If a player character complains about the price, they can be offered to fight instead. Alternatively, a fan of the current champion could attempt to goad one of the players to fight him.

"You look like a big guy, but I doubt you'd last a second against Big Darga?"

"Is that your missus? I bet she'd stand a better chance than you do in a cage fight."

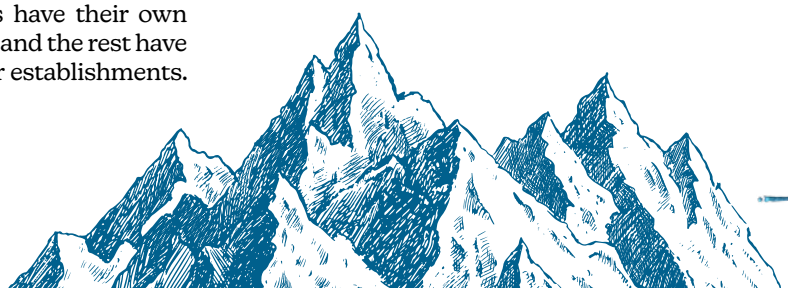
"I've always wanted to see a gnome take a bear on in unarmed combat. Wadya say?"

"I bet you 100gp your big friend here can't beat Zamson the Slayer over there."

Thugs, bandits, and bandit captains can be a good choice for lower-level players. Keep in mind that this is a 1 versus 1 battle, so enemies should have a CR of about one fourth of the level of the competitor...but then CR is only useful as a rough guide.

Plot Hooks

1. A party is lured into a White Fist establishment while searching for information as part of an investigation. A lead sent them there, thinking she was being helpful, or maybe that so-called lead uses the White Fist as an opportunity to rid herself of the players, given that she's the killer they've been searching for this whole time.
2. A party learns of someone who fell on hard times entering such an establishment, hoping for warmth and coin. Perhaps this person is dear to a player character, a childhood friend or family member.
3. A panicked mother pleads with the party to enter a White Fist establishment to retrieve her foolish son.
4. The party learns that several young children were taken from parents who couldn't pay their rent. The children are to face a creature in the Ice Box as payment.



Primal Yeti by Katy Carson

Frostwing Raven by Katy Carson

War of Worldcraft

Part 1: Laying the foundation

Many books on world building discuss the principles and philosophy underlying world crafting, but few offer actionable advice to help you get started. War of Worldcraft aims to rectify that.

This series of articles will give you a firm grasp on world crafting by following a step-by-step process that will help you craft your world one brick at a time. Each article will discuss a world crafting subject, give examples of said subject, and include an exercise to help you craft the next piece of the puzzle.

The subjects we will cover in later issues include:

1. Laying the Foundation
2. Worldcrafting Tools
3. Genre, Setting, & Theme
4. Dragon's Eye View & World Map
5. Monsters, Beasts, & People
6. Hamlet to City
7. Religion, History, & Culture
8. The Science of Magic
9. Worldcraft & Storycraft
10. The Finer Details

By following the series, you will end up with the bones of your very own world.

In The Beginning...

Even a non-denominational person like myself can tell you what book opens with those three words. And there is no better place to start our world building discussion than at the beginning. And when I say the beginning, I mean the foundation. And what that is, exactly, might surprise you.

Laying the Foundation

Okay, this first article does have a little bit of "fluff" but building anything significant requires a solid foundation.

Before delving into the practicalities of world building, consider this. The world you build may be your world, but the stories created in that world during play are not your stories. Those stories belong to everyone at the table. In fact, those stories will inevitably reshape and recolor your world. This can enrich your world and vastly improve upon it. Also, it will further blur the lines of "ownership".

I'm going to touch on something that I don't see talked about much in the community. Folks tout the tabletop RPG medium as a powerful collaborative storytelling tool. But playing a TTRPG isn't just collaborative storytelling. It's co-authorship. Playing a game like Dungeons and Dragons isn't just a game. It's an act of creation. This is why tabletop RPGs are so powerful as a gaming medium. People don't regularly take time out of their busy-as-hell lives to sit at a table (or computer) and play through a campaign filled with talk, dice rolls, and rules for four hours because they want XP. Okay, maybe they do want XP. But more than that, they play because it gives them a rare opportunity to create something. Even better; they get to create alongside a group of friends.

Do you ever get that eerie feeling at the end of a good session? Like you really accomplished something. Despite a tiring day before the game, you might even feel refreshed. You know the feeling I'm talking about! It often accompanies those sessions that lasted four hours but felt like four seconds. They say time flies when you're having fun. But any artist will tell you how much faster time flies when you're engaged in an act of creation. It's like casting haste on yourself! Artists spend much of their time searching for that illusive flow state. Yet, TTRPGs have the power to put an entire group of people in flow state at the same time! Collectively, you create something abstract yet tangible; something that achieves the seemingly impossible feat of straddling the razor-fine line between chaos and order. I don't know another medium that can do that. If you do, I'm all ears.

This might seem irrelevant or disconnected from the practicalities of world building. I can hear some of you already: "Paddy, we don't need to know all this philosophical crap. Just get on with world building."

Though some don't realize it in the early stages, the philosophical crap can be incredibly useful to world builders. Knowing how and why people play informs our worldcrafting decisions. Thus, we create emersion. The purer the emersion the deeper the flow state. The more you worldcraft, the more you come to understand the importance of this seemingly insignificant truth.

For now, you don't need to obsess over the how and why. It's enough to understand that good worldcrafting is important.

With that said, let's get building!

War of Worldcraft

Worldcrafters, like all creators, have strong beliefs about how their art form should and should not be executed. One only has to open a web browser to find arguments about how much detail to include when world building plastered all over the internet. Some take great pride in the vast worlds they've created when those worlds haven't seen so much as a die. Others boast about how amazing they are at improvising and building on the fly since players "do their own thing" anyway.

Both positions are extremes. As with all extremes, the most effective solutions fall closer to the middle.

A world where every npc and their dog are accounted for is a world bound for the bottom drawer or the dark archive of the mind because, "It isn't quite ready yet." Remember, perfection is the enemy of the good. Art is never finished. Only abandoned. On the flip side, many DMs who believe their improvising skills are legendary simply rolled a nat 1 on their insight check. Players can smell BS from a mile away, but they'll rarely tell you as much.

That being said, players heading off and doing their own thing can be a challenge, making improvisation a useful tool. But it should my no means be your only tool.

I often see players getting blamed for being chaotic and unpredictable, but a little digging usually uncovers that the DM simply didn't provide a strong enough reason to follow the plot he prepared.

A good DM will set several intriguing hooks the players just can't ignore and build just enough world so that he and the players can color things in as they go. This facilitates using your prep AND rolling with the punches.

While playtesting the Order of Elemental Chaos, I ran a group through a dungeon in the Elemental Plane of Air. A series of floating islands connected by vines and rubble made up the guts of the scenario. I thought it would be a nice idea to include a window looking out on a vast sky with a floating city in the distance, harkening back to various settings people enjoyed in earlier versions of D&D. "There isn't a hope my players will try to get there," I thought. I should have known better. The next thing I know, the Goliath Barbarian is flying out into the void with an elf, a drow, a halfling, and the party's pet Goblin dangling from a rope...with the help of a Potion of Flying and a bunch of pixie dust of course. It was SO close to a TPK.

The lesson? Not mentioning unnecessary details can curb a party's tendency to go off on a tangent.

Some people like it, but to others, too much detail can feel clunky. Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time filled most of the details in for you. Joe Abercombrie's Fist Law series provides a vague outline, leaving the "color" to your imagination. Brandon Sanderson falls somewhere in the middle.

Partially it's a matter of taste. But also, people today have shorter attention spans and less time to read every detail.

Personally, I fall somewhere between Abercrombie and Sanderson. I like to give people an outline because their imaginations can paint a better picture than my words ever could. This is why I prefer the term worldcrafting. Anyone can build an IKEA chair. But few can craft a masterpiece that people will sit in for generations.

How much world building you do is entirely up to you. Just don't lose view of the objective: create an immersive environment for yourself and your players.

Let There be Light!

The first question facing new and seasoned worldcrafters alike: "Where do I even start?"

I've written nine novels and every time I start a new series it feels like starting all over again.

But do not fear, there is light! And where there is light, there is hope...and lots and lots of worldcrafting.

Pulling an entire world, universe, or even multiverse out of your head is no mean feat. Creating something as monumental as a world is...eh... monumental.

Feeling overwhelmed is a good sign. So, don't let that stop you. It shows that you understand and respect the task and hand, and that puts you ahead of the curve. Knowing that might not solve analysis paralysis. But the exercise will!

Contents

Exercise 1

Let's start by making a short bio about your world. Nothing crazy. Just a few lines. And don't worry about this being messy. We'll return to these and change or expand on them later. That's the best bit about building things inside your head. Everything is fluid. Nothing is set in stone. So list out the following, bearing in mind they don't have to be perfect:

1. World name.
2. Name of the continent where the adventure begins.
3. Name of the land where adventure takes place.
4. Name of a settlement.
5. Name of 1 NPC.
6. How magic is perceived in your world.
7. List 5 races that exist in your world.
8. What is the most significant event that happened recently? It would be a war, plague, invasion, technological development, cultural shift, incredible discovery, etc.

This might not seem like much, but it's plenty to get the juices flowing. In fact, you'll likely find that as you start listing out this information, ideas will start to spring into your head unbidden. Write those down. The more you write, the more ideas will come. Before you know it, you'll have more ideas than time to develop them. But try not to get too carried away. We're just getting started.

Next Time

Keep an eye out for Mag Of Holding issue #2 where we'll review and recommend the best world building tools.

In the meantime, World Anvil is a tool I've been using for years. Learn more about World Anvil on the next page...

WorldAnvil

LIGHT UP THE FORGE!

World Anvil is a set of worldbuilding tools that helps you create, organize and store your world setting.

With wiki-like articles, interactive maps, historical timelines, an RPG Campaign Manager and a full novel-writing software, we have all the tools you'll need to run your RPG Campaign or write your novel!

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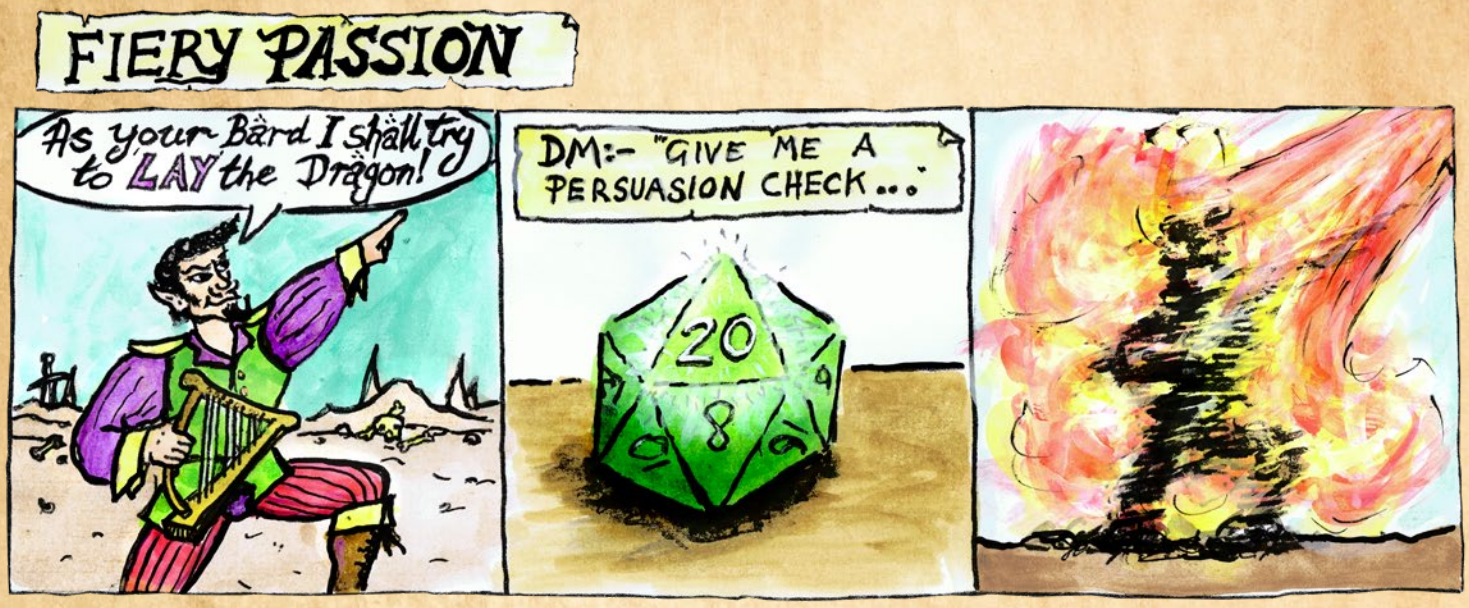


George Goblin

While doing a spot of spring cleaning around his hovel, George discovered a small chest containing his earliest work. A cursory glance earned it a place on the recycling pile. The comedy clubs are closed due to the plague. Times are tough. So, we present to thee a stack of horrible jokes salvaged from the green trash can of George Goblin.

What do you call an unarmed pit-fighter who's missed his yearly bath?

A Peeeeeugilist.

What do you call an abominable snowman that knows jiu-jitsu?

Yeti Bravo.

How does the eldritch knight deal with dragon's fire?

She turns up the AC.

Why did the mob throw the musicians out of town?

They were really bard.

Why did the dragon land on the merchant's table?

It had a dragon scale on it.

Dragon Pickup Lines

Red Dragons: You're so hot you set the room on fire.

White Dragons: You're an expert hunter and I'm your prey.

Blue Dragons: If I was a light bulb, you'd turn me on all night long.

Green Dragons: Would you like a mint?

Black Dragons: Let's get a coffee. I know a place that makes nice trolls.

Join us next time for more terrible jokes scraped from the bottom of the nearest barrel.

Whispers in dark corners name her The Contemptible. Behind locked doors and windows, voices claim her a daughter of Asmodeus ... as if mere wood, stone, or iron could conceal one's words. But if asked, Kayleigh would simply tell you that she is just a normal witch doing normal witchy things ... before promptly turning you into a salamander, dissecting you alive, and adding your innards to her bowing shelves of pickled spell components. Or she'll invite you to stay for a pitcher of ale and a kidney pie. Just don't ask where the filling came from.

Welcome to Kayleigh's Cauldron of Everything that Matters.

Marc Boyd works at Forbidden Planet and has been playing D&D for years. He has a Bachelor of Science in video game technology from Queens University and works with Penny Dragon Games as a game designer.

I sat down to my first interview for Mag of Holding with nerves running high. I'd met Boyd a few times but had never spoken to him in depth.

It quickly became clear that my anxiety was unfounded as Boyd and I started to banter about life, game design, character back stories, and everything in between. Many laughs were had.

I hope you enjoy getting his perspective on developing D&D content and discovering what D&D means to him as much as I did. We started, of course, with an all-important conversation starter.

My husband's been trying to get me to play D&D for years, but I only started recently. How did you get into it?

For me, three separate occasions come to mind. When I was 16, a friend from school ran a game in a club called Queen's University Dragon Slayers. He had a flare for the English language and colorful descriptions. His storytelling really drew me in.

Skipping ahead a few years, my friends came around to my house for my 30th birthday. I thought I was going out for a drinking session. Instead, they surprised me with staying in for a one-shot game of D&D. I was like a child at Christmas.

Then there was the more serious undertaking of meeting other nerds online who would go on to play games regularly in person, which was how I met Paddy. A one shot was not enough, I wanted more story and weekly sessions. The next thing I know, our DM is running games every other week with day-long Saturday games thrown in every few months. I think that was early 2018, not too long after seeing the success of Critical Roll and the inclusion of D&D in a variety of TV shows and movies.

Don't worry. If having kids doesn't work out, you can always add them to your growing list of ingredients.

I remember when Paddy (my husband) brought me into the shop to buy a bunch of Wizkids minis. You guys really go to town when it comes to Dungeons and Dragons and the more I play the more I can see why. What does the game mean to you?

It means a lot. It allows me to scratch my itch for game mechanics. I've played Magic: The Gathering to a high level, I've been a games guru in a boardgame café. I also have a BSC in Video Game Technology. I've always loved game design, level design, map design. All those different facets weave into D&D for me, all come together in this one game. If I'm honest, though, I enjoy being a player more than a DM.

Another thing I can't stress enough is how great D&D is for learning social skills. There are rules and expectations around what it will be like when people turn up. It teaches you to pick up on social cues, so you know when to speak or when to keep quiet. As outgoing as I seem, I do enjoy being able to sit down and observe others. Our player characters also create a safe space to do or say things we wouldn't normally do or say in real life...within the bounds of the expectations of the group, of course.

Another thing that really draws me to D&D is the fact that we're a bunch of heroes. I've watched heroes in stories my whole life, from Luke Skywalker all the way to Captain America; I've always wanted to be a hero. D&D typically lets you do that. I don't know anyone who plays evil campaigns. I mean, I've read about some online and they usually end poorly (laughing).

You guys are working on a book...or a series of books. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Where do I even start? It began with Paddy in early 2020. He'd created a few one-page adventures and asked for my thoughts. I dove deep and gave him some very detailed feedback. After seeing the quality of his writing, I asked if he wanted to write something together, just for fun. It grew organically from there.

But, yes, the project is a big old book full of magic items. It's called Aizendore's Vault of Tragic Treasure. It's going up on Kickstarter in a few months, but we've already written most of it and created almost all of the items. It's being thoroughly play tested. It just needs a bit of polish and more art. As for other projects, time will tell.

> A lot of the time, I randomly wake up at 3am with ideas and write them on my phone.

Stein Craggjaw

What are you currently working on in Aizendore's Vault of Tragic Treasure?

The last thing I worked on was something we decided to call 'Markovad's Boom Stick'. Essentially, it's a 12-gauge shotgun that we've designed as a magic item that DMs can work into their games. The idea with that one is to question the blurred line between tech and magic. To someone in the middle ages, a gun could easily just be a magical staff or wand with limited charges. It's a bit of a strange idea but also a lot of fun.

I bet it's really interesting creating all these things and seeing them going into a publication. What does your creative process look like?

A lot of the time I randomly wake up at 3am with ideas and write them on my phone. I try to make those as detailed as possible because what you think is a great idea written as shorthand in the middle of the night can easily turn out to be the scrawling's of a crazy man the next morning.

Coming up with ideas and refining them into something usable can be tough. Sometimes it can be hard to just get things down on the page. A lot of it has been very much a learn-as-you-go type of thing. A year into this project, I'm now going through old ideas and items and refining them. I look back and am amazed to see how far I've come.

But I love taking a pile of ideas and applying mechanics and rules to them. It's amazing seeing things like that take shape over time. I'm lucky to have a brain like a sponge for this type of thing, but I couldn't even tell you what I had for dinner last night. I've read so many books on it at this point, I can just look at an idea and write it down in D&D language, sentence structures, abbreviations, that kind of thing. It's hard though, creativity is not consistent.

Has the process always been the same or has it changed over time?

I think the process itself hasn't changed significantly. It's more the case that I've gotten better at using that process. It's still just writing down ideas and then changing them into D&D speak. I guess I've learned a lot more D&D speak.

People might be wondering, so when can we expect to see this tome of magic items?

The Kickstarter launches in early April, 2021 with a view to shipping the product by the end of the year.

You've been playing for a while now, but are you currently playing in any campaigns given the lockdowns?

I'm playing in an online Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden campaign at the minute. Paddy is the DM. It's a premade adventure by Wizards of the Coast. It has very cool horror vibes, sort of like The Thing. You're walking to the next town, minding your own business, and next thing you know a yeti's white claws are reaching for you from a snowy backdrop. It's too scary sometimes. I'm getting the chance to play a class that was recently reprinted in Tasha's Cauldron

of Everything. I guess it's a new class to a lot of people. I play a dwarven artificer called Hevrock. He's like a D&D version of Ironman...like an amalgamation of blacksmith, inventor, and wizard. Four of us play in the campaign. It's a lot of fun.

If you had to choose a favorite PC or NPC you've played, who would it be?

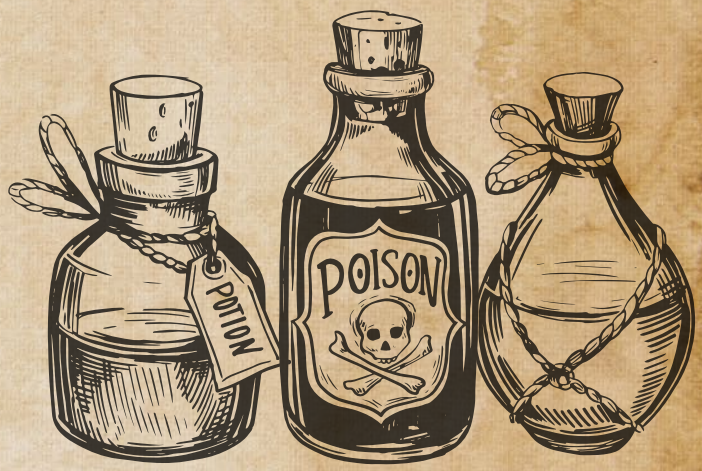
Now this is where I'm going to be terrible and talk about the character, I played in Storm King's Thunder (in-person game on hiatus). He was a bit of a unique little snowflake because those are the kinds of characters I like to make. I've never played an elf rogue, and I'll never play a goliath barbarian, for example. The character I created for that campaign was a warforged bloodhunter. At the time, I don't think the bloodhunter class was official content. It was made by Matthew Mercer from Critical Roll for one of his campaigns, but it was really well developed and balanced, so my DM allowed it. My character was called Stein Kraggjaw, and he was one among the first warforged ever built. He was very old and had lost a lot of his memories and those he still had tended to be all out of place. When he was first built, his jaw was made out of stone, hence the name Kraggjaw. Like a craggy face of a cliff, I loved that so much I just went with it.

Given its explosion in popularity, I see a lot of posts online by people who want to learn how to play D&D. What would you advise those new to the game?

One thing I keep seeing mentioned in the community regarding beginners is a "me versus them" type attitude. Make sure everyone at the table is having fun. No one should hog the spotlight. This is cooperative storytelling, not you on your character versus the DM or some kind of PVP battle. If you're new and you've got this covered, a big tip thing for me was actually roleplaying someone who is different from me. Lean on your character's traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws. These can easily become a forgotten part of your character, but they work so well as roleplaying tools. I found these particularly helpful early on when I'd ask myself, "What would my character do in this situation?" Answer that question and don't just go with your gut or with what you would do in real life.

Next time, Kayleigh will chat with Janet Forbes, Founder and CEO of World Anvil, about running an awesome online World Building toolbox, playing TTPRGs, writing, and more!

Join them if you dare!



You can find Boyd's work on magic items and other content in Aizendore's Vault of Tragic Treasure, launching on Kickstarter in April.

Vardus the Hedge & Blizwing the Withering Winter
by Henrique DLD

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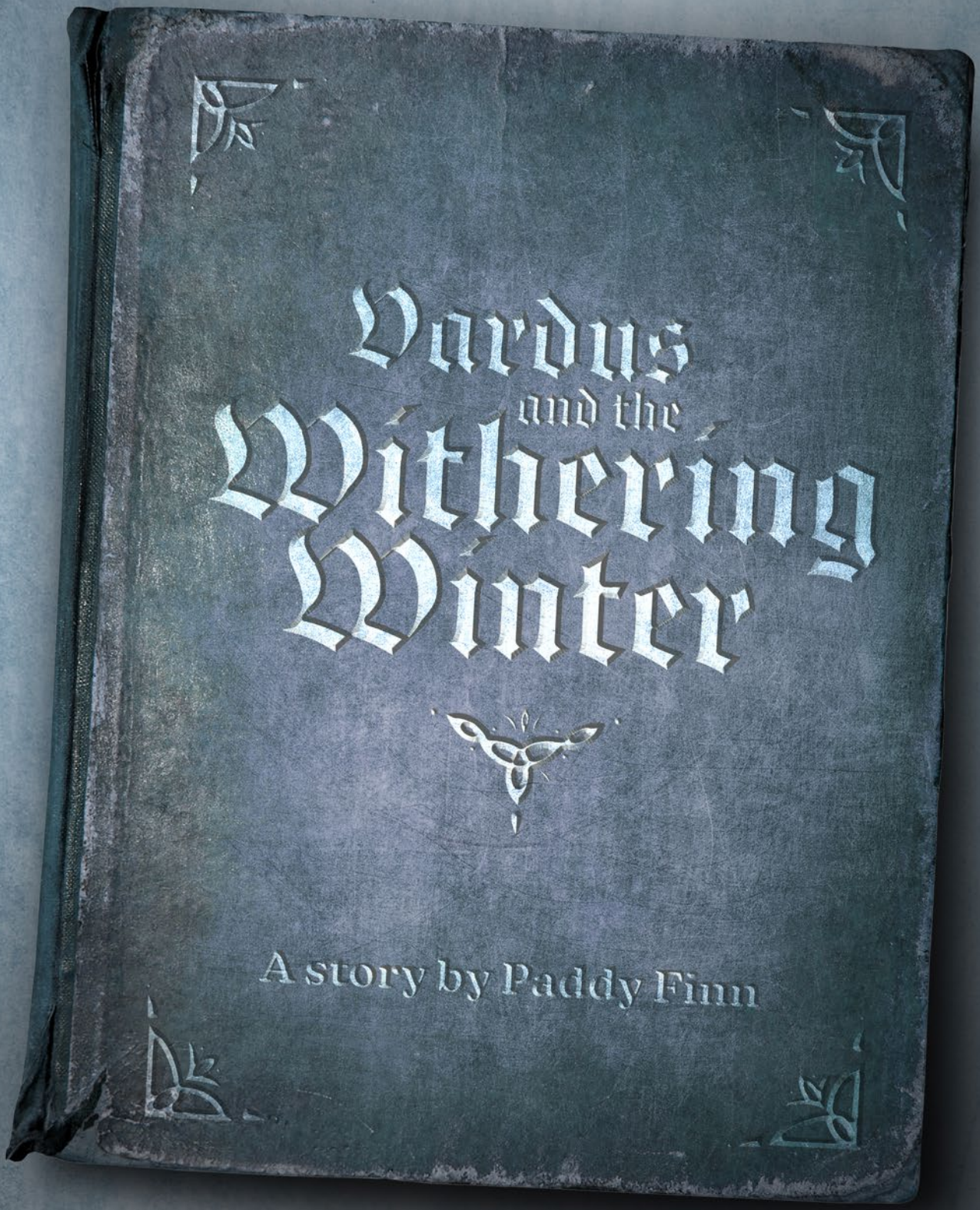
Vardus
and the
Withering
Winter
A story by Paddy Finn

Vardus and the Withering Winter

By Paddy Finn

The Howling Hollow

Vardus realized with no small measure of horror that he'd bitten off more than even he could chew…and being an archmage of the frozen wastelands he could usually chew quite a bit.

For years, he had searched every scrap of text he could unearth, hoping to find some new clue as to the whereabouts of the ancient artifact. Upon finally discovering its location, he spent precious months and piles of gold in preparation.

He'd come too far to turn back now.

"Only fools fall at the final hurdle," he spat between ragged, white breaths.

He leaned into the driving wind and forced one boot in front of the other, their soles scraping against the frozen tunnel floor.

The incessant tunnel blizzard battered his face, rendering the light of the halfmoon amulet around his neck all but void.

With teeth gritted and eyes closed, he urged his cold and wary feet on, promising them they would soon return to the tower where he would warm them by the fire as he read his latest finding, for back in his leaning tower was where the journey began.

Years of exploration had finally turned up a smattering of clues dredged from the depths of the Tome of Forgotten Lore, Darktroll's Compendium, and The Manual of Life, the Universe, and Everything—a text some referred to as the Book of Forty-Two, though Vardus had yet to decipher the number's significance. Those scripts revealed that the artefact had

long ago come into the possession of a much-feared white dragon. They described frigid glaciers, frozen tundra, and fields of ice, but none of that narrowed things much since Vardus knew of at least a dozen white dragons that dwelt in or near such environments.

After much toiling over the antiquated and forbidden writings of Killadorn The Wise, however, a scarcely legible scroll eventually relinquished the key. With the brief mention of black crystal that drove creatures to madness, Vardus unlocked the mystery of the whereabouts of the long-lost treasure he sought. The seemingly inconsequential detail omitted by other works told him exactly what dragon hoard held the artifact and where he'd find it.

It also told him that retrieving said artefact would lead to a great deal of pain and potentially worse.

A surge of such pain flared in his side, snapping his mind back to the present. He drove against the tunnel's fierce winds with the aid of his staff, doing his best to ignore the half-healed wound. A close encounter with a primal yeti and flock of frostwing ravens the previous day had left its scars and cost him all but one of his healing potions. An encounter with a nomadic band of barbarians the day before that had gone better but only by virtue of the magic-imbued brass monkey dangling from the chain around his neck. With it, he'd hoped to scare them off with a cone of cold. Instead, the item decided to cast the suggestion spell, and the next thing Vardus knew, he'd convinced the band chief to guide him to the foothills of the Withering Winter's Glacier. Upon reaching the base, the barbarians turned back in fear.

Part of Vardus wished he'd had the sense to do the same.

He stopped for a moment and rested on his staff, the tunnel's unrelenting winds whipping his hat and cloak with semi-corporeal white thongs. Winter's claws snaked under his collar, scratching at his skin. He called upon his ring of prestidigitation and sighed as renewed warmth seeped into his bones. The stubborn dull ache in his lower back remained, however.

"Time is catching up on this old man," he whispered into the howling wind as he shouldered several feet deeper into the icy tunnel, the mighty maelstrom seeking to drive him back.

He craved rest and warmth and other such comforts, but perhaps most of all, he longed for his books, for Vardus the Hedge imagined that if he

should die, he should do so while deep in study. Having spent much of his life pouring over scrolls and tomes, he was hardly an uneducated wizard even if his education was of the self-made variety. Yet, he chased down new knowledge like a predator would its prey. To Vardus, the world held few things with greater significance or wonder than words. So unquenchable was his thirst for knowledge, Vardus would travel great, and often perilous, distances to secure as little as a single sliver of text scribed in a language long forgotten.

He scaled the peak of Mount Hosht during its worst blizzard in recent remembering, made the long descent into the shadowy depths of Polmore's Hole, and sailed through a great tempest to the lands beyond the Misty Isles of Tharst. He haggled with pompous lords and deceptive thief kings of great cities, undertakings he considered more dangerous than any mountain, hole, or ocean.

One knew what to expect with nature. One could fall from a mountain, get trapped in a hole, or drown at sea. People, on the other hand…Those were selfish, unpredictable, and corrupt. People trampled on each other in their endless and vain attempts to climb a pathetic social structure. People dug for themselves holes of debt so deep those holes became graves. People drowned themselves in the stale air, putrid filth, and deadly disease of cities. Creatures who should gather in so great a number to live amongst their own mess were a blight upon the world and there were few things Vardus detested more.

That was his reason for traveling alone. People were liable to get in the way and likely to get themselves and others killed. The few good people Vardus knew lived only on tattered browned pages, their deeds eternal, their bodies long dead.

All the good people had long since gone from the world.

Vardus could think of few things he disliked more than people. Dragons perhaps. Losing his eyesight maybe. Even those had solutions so long as one knew what tomes to study. People, however, were slippery, messy problems and their only solution was illegal in most lands and a somewhat morally grey area in even the freer places of the world.

When not adventuring in search of some forbidden knowledge or forgotten lore, Vardus confined himself to his lonely tower where he would remain until he could decipher his next puzzle or discover a new clue as to the whereabouts of some lost trove of learning…such as that which led

him into an icy tunnel where the wind whistled a merry note one second and wailed in agony and sorrow the next.

It was when one particularly shrill cry tore from the throat-like shaft that Vardus decided to name it the Howling Hollow.

Frozen Graveyard

Howling wind and biting ice wrestled with Vardus at every step. Iron-set determination and steely resolve nudged him forward foot by agonizing foot, but even though his pig-headedness would one day be the subject of many a song and story, stubbornness no matter how raw and wild had its limits. He had all but accepted defeat when the wind's strength failed suddenly. Expecting resistance, he stumbled out of the Howling Hollow and fell face first into a mound of snow.

He pushed himself onto his knees, his tired arms shaking under the strain. He wiped the snow from his cloak, allowing his amulet's soft moonlike glow to spill forth.

He found he had come frighteningly close to falling upon a bladelike icicle jutting from the rocks. The late owner of an impaled fur coat had not been so fortunate. Their skull's dark holes looked at him expectantly from inside, as though pleading for a reason for the cruel trick that had been played upon him, like his life struggles had culminated in a trivial joke for the amusement of frivolous gods.

Vardus couldn't blame him, but the man had probably come seeking jewels and gold, and only fools dared enter a dragon's lair in search of riches. Perhaps the warrior deserved such a fate.

Either way, Vardus was pleased to avoid a similar demise. His sense of relief, however, was washed away upon standing. The amulet cast its gentle glow over a grizzly scene, a series of icy structures refracting and somehow amplifying the magical light. Chills travelled the length of his spine. The nearest block of ice stood twenty feet or more tall. Locked inside the perfectly transparent slab was a frost giant, its enormous great axe poised to strike, its white-bearded face forever twisted somewhere between ire and anguish. Smaller slabs spread out behind the frost giant like pieces in a game of the gods—no—like a vast graveyard of frozen headstones, each icy block a testament to one who had reached the Withering Winter's lair

but ultimately failed. A white dragon's pantry.

A warning!

Vardus retrieved his staff and stood straight with a sigh—or as straight as he could with his sore back and weary legs.

With a click of his fingers and a small burst of feathers, an owl appeared perched upon his staff.

Speckle flapped her wings and hooted in objection to being stuffed inside her pocket dimension without warning.

"Hush," Vardus said, holding a finger to his cold lips. He spoke in gentle tones. "I know you hate being tucked away, but the Howling Hollow would have blown your beak off let alone your feathers. I scarcely made it through myself."

"Hoot," Speckle said in defense.

"There wasn't time," he said in a manner soft yet hurried. "When that howl issued from the tunnel mouth, I thought a yeti had selected us for its next meal. I promise to warn you next time but getting upset about it now will only get us both killed."

He gestured to the icy prison slabs littering the area ahead.

Speckle's head turned a half circle then turned back, her disklike eyes wider than usual.

"Hoot."

"You're telling me? I almost soiled my undergarments."

"Hoot. Hoot."

"Don't be silly. They're frozen in ice. They can't hurt us."

"Hooot?"

"Yes, the dragon did this."

"Hoooooot!"

"Keep it down, dammit," he seethed under his breath. "I don't like dragons either, but hopefully it's sleeping. Though it won't be for long if you keep hooting your tiny lungs out. If we're lucky, it might even be out hunting."

"Hoooot?"

Vardus locked eyes with the bird. "Well, the only way to know for sure is to go have a look."

Speckle shook her head slowly.

"I'll make it worth your while."

She shook her head faster.

"When we get back to the tower, I'll feed you a nice big juicy rat.

"Hoot."

"What do you mean that won't be enough?"

"Hoot. Hoot."

"Okay," Vardus said, tugging at his beard in frustration. "Three big juicy rats. But hurry. The sooner we get out of here, the sooner we eat."

With a flutter of speckled wings, his familiar was off into the darkness.

Vardus was about to approach the frosty graveyard when he noticed the ice underfoot was brittle and likely to crack. Not wanting to alert the dragon, he backed into a cold boulder. He ran his eyes over the vicinity once more. Satisfied he wasn't in immediate danger he closed his eyes.

Darkness waned and shifted as Vardus spied the dragon's lair through Speckle's eyes. As always, the sudden motion and dysphoria made his head swim. He gripped his staff hard with both hands, grounding himself, and the image grew clearer.

Speckle sailed over the graveyard, unveiling its true magnitude. The frozen tombs stretched much further than Vardus had suspected, and the cavern was much larger than he had guessed.

Approaching a giant wall of ice, Speckle ascended.

Vardus's vision dimmed as his grasp on the owl weakened.

Scout ahead, he thought to her. Get a feel for the lay of the lair and see if you can find the dragon's hoard.

Hoot, Speckle thought back to him.

It was a simple affirmative, but in it Vardus detected fear.

Speckle climbed ever higher and swooped over the icy wall.

Vardus caught a brief glimpse of a yawning window in the far north east of the vast lair.

"Must be an exit," he whispered to himself.

His connection with Speckle severed and he found himself once again staring into the darkness behind his eyelids. He gave his mind a moment to adjust to the change and slowly opened his eyes. A dull phantom impression of Speckle's vision floated before Vardus. He blinked several times until it had cleared.

He walked as close to the cavern wall on his right as he dared, careful not to upset the unstable ice underfoot. In an effort to conserve his higher-level magic, he considered casting a levitate spell and pulling himself along the cavern wall, but even if there had been handholds, it would likely take

longer than the spell would last.

"Flying it is then," he mumbled, shaking his head.

He took stock of his belongings and carefully arranged his spell components so that those he'd need most were within easy reach. He gave prime position to a swatch of cured leather, a bundle of white feathers, a piece of adamantine wrapped in cloth, a pouch of diamond dust, the tooth of a red dragon, and other ingredients required by abjuration magic, for when it came to dragons, every learned wizard knew that a good defense was…a good defense. He had a few tricks up his sleeve in case he needed something with a bit more punch, though he hoped it wouldn't come to that. Only madmen traded blows with a dragon.

"Would be best if that damn dragon was out for lunch."

As if reading his thoughts, Speckle came back into range. Vardus reached out and touched her mind. She was making the return flight. From what he saw and heard, the familiar did not appear to be in any danger. His mind snapped back to his own body and he held out his staff as Speckle descended, landing on the end of his staff expertly. She cocked her head at Vardus.

"Hoot," she said quietly.

Vardus reached out and scratched just above her beak the way she liked it. "You're sure there's no dragon?"

"Hoot hoooot."

"You checked the ceiling and any caves?"

"Hoot. Hoooot."

"Only a hole leading outside and the dragon's den, you say. And it's full of treasure. North west of here well, at least we know we're in the right place. And you're sure you didn't see anything dangerous?"

It wasn't that he didn't trust Speckle. She had a good set of ears and eyes for an old owl, but she could be a tad forgetful at times.

"Hoot," she replied.

"Good. Then this should be a slice of pie. Let's proceed quietly. Better to err on the safe side."

"Hoot."

"Agreed." Vardus extinguished the half-moon light around his neck. "Better not to be a beacon to danger. As long as you can be my eyes."

"Hoooot."

"Let us go then," Vardus said. "Keep an eye out and keep quiet."

Vardus pulled a feather from his belt and whispered a transmutation spell's words while tracing runes in the air with the quill.

A gust snatched the feather into the air, and as it rose Vardus rose with it, slow at first then swifter.

Speckle hopped onto his shoulder and turned her head as she watched at all angles.

He stretched out his staff forward as he sped into the frigid air, cold wind blowing in from the opening on the north-eastern wall.

Maintaining a fly spell took a great deal of concentration at the best of times. Doing so while viewing the world through a familiar's eyes and ears was a feat few wizards could accomplish.

Vardus allowed his mind to synchronise with Speckle's senses. His body wobbled and began to descend. He drew a deep breath as he slowed and focused, steering into a long arch over a frosted expanse that acted as a bridge, splitting the cavern in two.

Vardus pondered on who may have created the original hollow. Had it been some long lost dwarven civilization or perhaps a community of giants. The latter seemed more likely given the size. Or perhaps it had been carved out by some other race time had forgotten. Some of his books described such creatures. He often wondered what it would be like to meet a being no one living had seen.

"Hoot." The sound tore Vardus from his reverie.

"Speckle, I told you to keep—"

Broken ice raining down around them cut him off mid-sentence. Vardus looked to the dark cavern ceiling with horror as a white spec grew into the unmistakable form of a gargantuan white dragon, its chest pitted with glittering black shards, its head crowned with dark horns.

Vardus snapped back into his own mind and reactivated his moon amulet.

The dragon dove from the dark above like a bird of prey before he could figure out what to do next.

Speckle launched and darted for Blizwing's head, pecking at his eyes.

The dragon roared and banked sharply, narrowly missing Vardus. The creature slammed into a large chunk of falling debris but recovered quickly.

In a panic, Vardus raced to the icy floor. He produced a pinch of phosphorescent moss and cast a light cantrip on the tip of his staff. He glanced back to see Blizwing swatting at Speckle the way a large man would

a bothersome fly. They vanished into darkness, crashing and roaring the only sign of the battle above if it could be called a battle. Vardus thought to go after Speckle in an attempt to dismiss her to her pocket dimension, but he needed time to think.

He touched down in a field of glassy ice.

Silence.

Field of Ice

He waved his staff back and forth, pointing it at the ceiling as though it might reveal something. One foot slid on the slick floor, but he threw his weight onto his staff. Gathering himself, he tossed a pinch of Wychwood into the air and three glowing orbs appeared. He sent them spinning in a circle on high. Their light was dim, but it was better than no light.

Speckle swooped into the glow.

A gaping maw appeared behind her.

Teeth snapped shut like a giant bear trap.

A cloud of feathers exploded.

White glowed in the dragon's throat.

Vardus raised his staff of primordial fire using both hands and cried its name. "Lauffeuer!"

White fire exploded from Blizwing's mouth, spraying Vardus with freezing flames.

A thin orange barrier sizzled and hissed as it repelled the dragon's breath weapon before crackling out of existence.

Blizwing sailed overhead and began to circle for another assault.

Vardus had to think fast but had yet to recover from the surprise attack. Blizwing must have known they had entered his lair and hidden himself among the icicles on the cavern ceiling.

The dragon's colossal wings cracked as he turned sharply and swooped down, his claws ready to strike.

Vardus tossed a pinch of crushed white sapphire in the air. He muttered his spell's name in some erstwhile tongue and an invisible dome of force took hold around him.

The glowing orbs of light vanished.

Blizwing struck, the immovable wall sending up sparks as his claws

bounced off the barrier. The unexpected blowback threw the dragon off balance and he barrel rolled before crashing onto the ice with a resounding crash. He recovered quickly and approached Vardus more cautiously, sniffing around the base of the unseen wall.

"What magic is this?" His low voice rumbled. "Ah, yes. I've seen this one before."

"You cannot reach me in here."

Blizwing gave a sickening grin. "Your pathetic tricks mean nothing. One of your kind did this before. The wall did not last long. Nor did its caster."

"I only came for a single item." Vardus knew better than to bargain with dragons, but he needed to buy himself time to think.

"Lies," Blizwing roared. "You miserable creatures always come for gold, and you miserable creatures always die."

It was a difficult point to argue.

Most men saw a dragon's hoard as something to be plundered. Most men would die on the return journey, unable to part with the yellow metal weighing them down. Even if they managed to make it home, most men would squander the gold on beer, firewater, and whores. But Vardus was not most men.

Perhaps there was hope in negotiating with the monster after all.

"I would rather piss on your gold. I just want a dusty old book. Taking it off your hands would be doing you a favor. Less…err," he looked around, "less maintenance to worry about."

Blizwing's head snaked along the edge of the barrier to get a closer look at Vardus. His giant eye narrowed.

Vardus sighed a breath of equal measures relief and disbelief. He was getting through to the dragon. He noted that the dragon's gaze seemed somewhat vacant. As he pondered that, his staff's light caught the edge of jagged black ice under Blizwings jaw.

Another flash issued as the Withering Winter snapped at the barrier.

It held, but the Dragon was right. Vardus had mere minutes left. His eyes darted about as he tried to come up with something, but his light spell barely reached forty feet. Beyond that was darkness.

Blizwing rested on his hunches, waiting for the wall to fall.

Vasrdus raised his voice. "There must be something—"

"You think I care for what you do or do not want," the dragon's

booming voice echoed in the darkness, "or that you might have something I desire? Puny creature. You entered my lair. Now you must die. How can you not understand this?"

Vardus wracked his brain in search of a solution. Invisibility was hardly an option. Stories abounded where magic users hoped that trick would work only for them to end in a dragon's belly. Most such stories were fables, but even bizarre works of fiction contained grains of truth. Besides, dragons being perceptive creatures with an uncanny ability to detect any presence, invisible or otherwise, was hardly a secret.

"Come, Wizard," Blizwing snapped. "Let us dally no further. There is no use in delaying the inevitable. Put us both out of our misery, won't you?"

Something in the way the dragon spoke seemed off, but Vardus couldn't quite put his finger on it.

White dragons usually weren't big on words and rare was it that even an ancient white dragon had anything akin to Blizwing's command over language.

It dawned, striking Vardus like a hammer on an anvil. Blizwing had a look in his eyes Vardus had seen before. The same look some wizards got when they meddled in mind magic and went off the deep end. Vardus knew a clever divination wizard once. The old man was wise beyond even his many years, but after peering into a Bowl of Durkados spent his few remaining years with a mind scarcely brighter than that of a cock and made twice the noise.

Blizwing had gone mad. Likely corrupted by the ancient black crystals found in the frozen lands surrounding the glacier. Vardus had studied the black shards in some details. Their purpose remained a mystery, but some writings alluded to a warping of the mind. The black substance on the dragon's chin and neck was not glass, but the black crystalline material.

It made sense. But it didn't make his situation any easier.

"Well, now," Vardus said, fighting down a gulp. "Let's not make a song and a dance out of this affair."

"Why make a song and dance out of it," Blizwing seethed, "when we can make a meal out of it."

Blizwing's tail smashed the wall of force with a flash.

The wall held.

"Final warning," Vardus said, doing his best to stop his voice from

quivering. "Let me go peacefully and I promise not to harm you."

A horrible sound blew from the dragon's throat, like a thousand discordant wind instrument playing in unison. Blizwing chortled.

"Silly little human. Enough with the games. Come out. Eating you will make me happy."

Vardus noted the wide ridges jutting from Blizwing's skull just above his eye sockets. Being an apex predator, the dragon rarely had to worry about threats from above. Taking the high round would offer an advantage.

"Very well," Blizwing growled, "but know that I will not make it quick when your time comes." Blizwing circled the dome before retreating into the shadows.

What the Withering Winter did there, Vardus couldn't tell, but he imagined the dragon waiting for its chance to pounce. Vardus cursed the flock of frostwing ravens that had broken his darkvision goggles.

He considered his options if options they could be called. He could flee back the way he'd come. The north-eastern window was closer. But then what? Either way, Blizwing would follow, and white dragons were known as the best hunters among dragonkind.

He could teleport to relative safety then maybe the dragon wouldn't find him.

He shook his head.

"No," he whispered under his breath. He had come too far to run away with his tail between his legs. Besides, even if the school of conjuration was his forte, and it wasn't, teleportation magic was not without its own serious risks.

He twisted the Ring of Doublestep around his finger.

It was a dark item rumored to have been forged by Aizendore the Collector when trying his hand at magic item creation. The ring was said to be cursed with an equal chance of working and sucking its wearer into the depths of hell. Vardus had hoped never to use the object, but the situation was dire, and dire times called for dire measures.

Even if the item worked as expected, his plan still relied on Blizwing falling for his trick.

White dragons were hardly intelligent and if Blizwing was indeed maddened, it might just work.

Vardus turned the ring again and closed the sharp red ruby inside his fist. He squeezed and winced as it stabbed into his palm. The sudden pain

caused him to lose concentration on the wall of force.

In a flash of teeth and claws, Blizwing had Vardus in his jaws, the world thrashing back and forth as the dragon shook him violently. Bodily fluids and entrails stained the pristine glass floor.

An invisible Vardus watched from afar as the light of the fake staff held by the homunculus copy created by the spell flicked back and forth as the Withering Winter tore it to shreds like a cat would a helpless shrew.

Vardus stowed his staff, leaving his hands free for magic, and upon casting another fly spell leapt into the air. He clutched at the weave in ways most wizards had never dared, tearing additional bursts of speed from his magic. He knew his ploy wouldn't last long.

As though to confirm his thoughts a roar boomed from the ice below, quickly followed by the cracking and beating of wings.

Vardus pulled on the weave harder, afraid that he might unravel something, or inadvertently unleash some horror into the material plain, but he had no choice.

He cast a light spell upon the staff over his shoulder and glanced below.

Blizwing's maw was opened wide, ready to swallow.

Vardus looked up again in time to see the cavern ceiling mere feet away and instantly looked back down, casting misty step.

The world twisted before his eyes and in a gentle cloud of white appeared before him as he materialized thirty feet below the ceiling.

Blizwing howled in surprise and anger but was moving too fast and crashed into the ceiling, sending giant shards of ice spinning past Vardus. He shielded his face as he was battered by bricks of ice and chunks of hail. A particularly large shard knocked him on the back of the head almost costing him control over the fly spell.

As the debris cleared, he looked through the haze. A shadow moved in the mist and Blizwing emerged, rage burning in his eyes.

Vardus's heart sank. He'd hoped the blow would finish the foul beast or at least knock it unconscious, but he should have known better than to rely on hope or blind luck. Neither rarely acted in his favor and both seemed bent on stopping him from obtaining the treasure he sought.

He lived for knowledge and was about to die for it too.

"Of what use was knowledge to a dead man?" he screamed at Blizwing as the dragon shook its head and looked his way.

He'd entered the Withering Winter's lair expecting just another adult

white dragon and instead found a dragon gone mad and imparted some great power to boot.

He had exhausted all but one option.

He pulled a wooden bottle from his belt and pointed the neck at the Withering Winter. He squinted as he pulled the cork free.

Thunder roared and lightning flashed, almost simultaneously deafening and blinding Vardus. The white fork clawed a long line across the ceiling.

Blizwing scrambled out of harm's way and let go a hideous howl Vardus took for laughter.

"Your pathetic attack missed. Not that it would have done much if it had met its mark." Blizwing gave a tooth-filled smile and a growl rumbled in his long white throat. "I will dine on your flesh and pick my teeth clean with your bones."

The Withering Winter was about to pounce when the ceiling popped. The dragon looked up at its feet confused.

"I didn't miss," Vardus said, mustering a weak smile.

He released his concentration on his fly spell and instantly dropped like a lead weight. As Vardus fell, he reached for the sliver of adamantine inside his components pouch and mouthed the words of an invulnerability spell as he traced a rune upon his palm. The metal crumbled to dust, pulverized by magic. Countless unseen particles surrounded Vardus as a dwarf-sized chunk of ice smashed into his ribs, sending him spinning.

The ceiling exploded.

Down the great dragon was hurled, the one called Blizwing the Withering Winter, and Vardus was hurled down with him.

In a flurry, they did battle, the field of ice racing up to meet them.

Sparks flew. Teeth gnashed. Fire roared. Claws slashed.

They plunged, frozen chunks of ice and rock tumbling with them.

With all his might, Vardus struggled to concentrate on his spell. Yet the last threads of control slipped through his fingers.

Blizwing's Hoard

Ringing pierced his ears. Agony raked his body. Vardus opened his eyes to darkness.

His trembling arm stretched forward. A beam of light cut through the

shadow. He gritted his teeth as he clawed his way out of the cold debris.

He climbed onto wobbly legs and was surprised to find he still held his staff. That the bottom half was missing was not surprising.

He conducted a swift assessment.

A jagged ice-spike jutted from his thigh. He rested his staff in the snow and pulled. It slid out with little resistance. Vardus fell against a boulder, his chest heaving. Sweat, drool, and tears soaked his beard.

He plucked his final potion of greater healing from his belt and was relieved to find it still intact. He unstopped the bottle poured the liquid over his bleeding leg.

His energy spent, he slid onto his bottom, his back grateful for the boulder's support despite its draining him of warmth.

He lay for what felt like an age, his heaving chest rising and falling, expelling white mist. He watched his breath rise into the air above. It was mesmerizing.

A single snowflake drifted before his eyes. He somehow saw every detail. Every fractal branch. It was a tiny spec of beauty, yet its existence was fleeting. Snowflakes and all their beauty didn't last long.

Just like humans.

Darkness tugged at his periphery. A strange song played in his ears, as though people long-gone called to him, promising light, warmth, and good company. Vardus wondered why good company should feel most important. He had spent so long living in the books and minds of dead writers, perhaps he had been blind to the true value of those who still lived. Perhaps good people did still exist in the world. Perhaps finding them would be his next quest, for good people were surely rarer than even the oldest fragment of forgotten lore.

He wondered whether he had gone mad or whether the black crystals had begun to warp his mind. Maybe death had already taken his mortal body. Sleep beckoned him like a childhood friend. No longer did he have to concern himself with such paltry things as life. Or people. Or dragon's hoards.

He woke with a start, his heart racing.

"The artifact," he croaked.

His fumbling fingers checked the wound in his thigh. The skin was sensitive to the touch, but the potion had closed his flesh.

The remnants of the primordial staff lay at his side, casting a stark light

and ominous shadows. His ragged breath escaped in soft clouds and his extremities had grown numb. Vardus knew that the cold would soon take him if he didn't move.

He wiggled his toes and though they were numb he knew they moved. He stretched his fingers, and a thousand needles stabbed every digit. A good sign.

From the dregs of his soul Vardus summoned the will to stand. His legs threatened to give out on him, but he forced them to straighten and leaned against the boulder on one elbow. He retrieved what was left of his staff and waved it in a slow arch before him.

Blizwing lay no more than twenty feet away, his head jutting from under a piled of rocks. The Withering Winter did not move. It was difficult to be sure, but Vardus suspected the dragon was not done.

He regarded the beast for a moment wondering if he should deal a killing blow.

He had to stop himself from laughing in case of waking the dragon and eliciting further pain from his bruised and beaten body.

He had not the strength nor the mind to kill a dragon, even one as mad as Blizwing, for as much as he loathed dragons, Vardus understood their place in the world. Whether good or evil, dragons maintained a delicate balance in the greater scheme of things. A resounding crack in the dark above reminded Vardus that even if he did have a mind for it, he had not the time, and his aching body told him he had not the strength.

He reached under his cloak and winced at the pain in his side. His fingers came away covered in semi-congealed blood. He had spent his potions and had not thought to bring medical kits. A chill shook him as a shiver touched his spine. The cold or creep of death's finger he couldn't tell, but he summoned another prestidigitation spell from his ring.

Nothing happened.

Staring slack-jawed at the broken ring, the cold clawed deeper, reaching for his bones. He pulled his collar about his neck. He had less time than he thought.

"Dragon slaying is a fool's errand," he whispered.

Cross referencing the direction of the cold wind blowing from outside and what he recalled from Speckle's debriefing, he judged the general direction of the opening to Blizwing's hoard.

Tossing a feather, he summoned his waning magic and drifted into the

air, doing what little he could to ward off the cold. After a few moments of bleary-eyed exploration, Vardus happened upon a dark opening high off the cavern floor. He slowed, careful not to run into a trap or a nest of dragon younglings, but the area turned out to be vacant.

Beyond the cave mouth jewels, gold, and other precious metals glinted under the light of his spell. Vardus hurried inside with renewed fervor. Elaborately decorated weapons, suits of exotic armor, and jewelry of every description littered the hoard. But none of that interested Vardus in the slightest. His eyes were peeled for scrolls and books. He found one tome amidst a pile of silver, but a cursory glance confirmed it wasn't what he was looking for.

He approached a particularly tall pile of gold and scooped handfuls of coins out of the way, but he didn't find any writings. Remembering himself, he used the last of his magic to detect anything magical in the vicinity.

Several items drew his attention, but a quick investigation led him to a corner to the rear of the dragon's hoard filled with rotten rags, broken armor, rusted weapons and other useless items.

The object he sought was buried under a pile of bones and discarded metal. It was wrapped in a tattered piece of leather. Vardus checked to make sure it wasn't cursed and carefully peeled the wrapping away.

He gasped upon grasping it and held it aloft, admiring it like a father would a new-born son. Bottomless wells of untold knowledge all in a single bound tome. Some scholars called it the Tome of Tomes. Others named it the Superlative Script. But one little-known historian conceived of the name Vardus liked the most: The Mag of Holding.

The ground rumbled and a roar tore from the Field of Ice outside Blizwing's Hoard, cutting the moment of triumph short.

Vardus looked around for anything else that might be useful and fished a fist-sized brass teleportation sphere from inside a steel helm of some long-fallen hero. He grinned for the first time in as long as he could remember. The sphere was an ancient teleportation device, much more reliable than raw teleportation magic. A quick scan showed it had a single full charge. That was all he needed.

A louder roar echoed from the cavern proper.

Vardus turned to find Blizwing scrambling into the cave opening.

The dragon clambered into his cave, throwing up piles of gold and precious stones.

There were several other items of note he would have taken had he had the time, but he cut his losses and considered himself fortunate to have retrieved the item he came for plus a means of escape.

Vardus wound the key protruding from the brass teleportation sphere.

"Until we meet again, Withering Winter," he called.

The dragon lunged for Vardus, furious roars tearing from its throat, its jaws wide.

Vardus held the Mag of Holding close to his chest as the teleportation sphere clicked.

The dragon's lair vanished with a faint pop.

The End

End Note

One final thanks to you, dear reader. The very fact that your eyes gaze upon Mag of Holding issue #1 - Winter Wastelands is both how and why this publication exists. Without you, it would be nought but a dream bound for obscurity in some unchartable corner of the Ethereal Plane. With you, we have forged a magic item in its own right. With your continued support, we will continue to publish new issues quarterly. And who knows? This deceptively little DM toolbox might one day see a monthly release schedule. Perhaps it will eventually become legendary or even a powerful artefact. Lacking divination magic, we'll have to leave that one in the hands of the gods.

I hope you found useful tools for your games or at the very least a spark of inspiration for a memorable encounter or two.

The Penny Dragon Games party would love to hear what you thought of the mag and /or how you used the content at your table. Or just drop us a line and say hi at contact@pennydragon.games

We look forward to journeying with you again soon.

Until then, my adventuring companion.

Keep rollin'!

Paddy Finn

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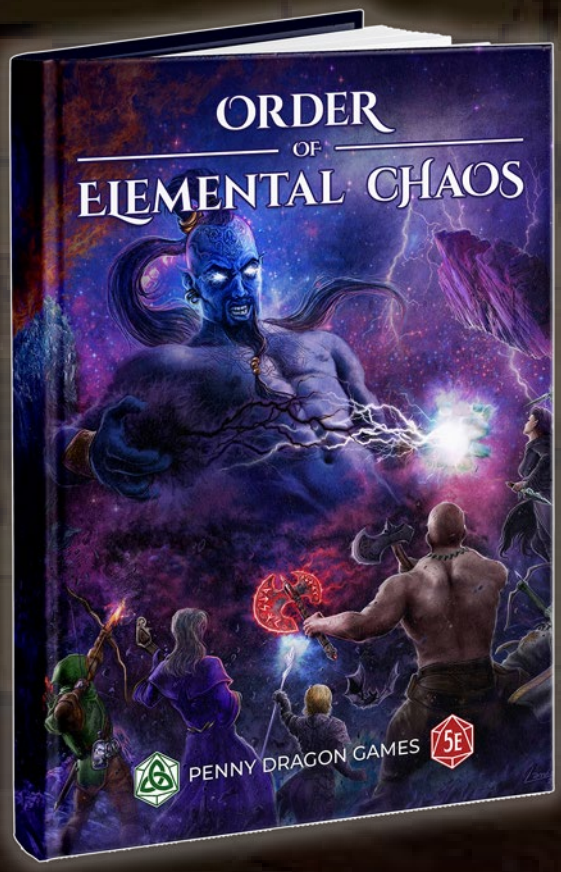

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Hi! My name is Matthew Perkins and I like Dungeons & Dragons. I run a small YouTube channel all about D&D advice and green screen silliness — I'd really appreciate your support. Below is an excerpt from my favourite video. For more, please visit www.MatthewPerkins.net

Visit Website

How to roleplay WITHOUT voice acting

You shouldn't have to be a professionally-trained actor to make your Dungeons & Dragons character shine.

The theatrical style of roleplaying is exemplified by the players of Critical Role. They're taking every element of roleplaying and dialling it up to eleven.

But you might not feel comfortable channelling all that thespian energy on game night. If roleplaying like an actor doesn't feel like your gig, I have two tips to help you become an excellent D&D player; this is how to roleplay like a writer.

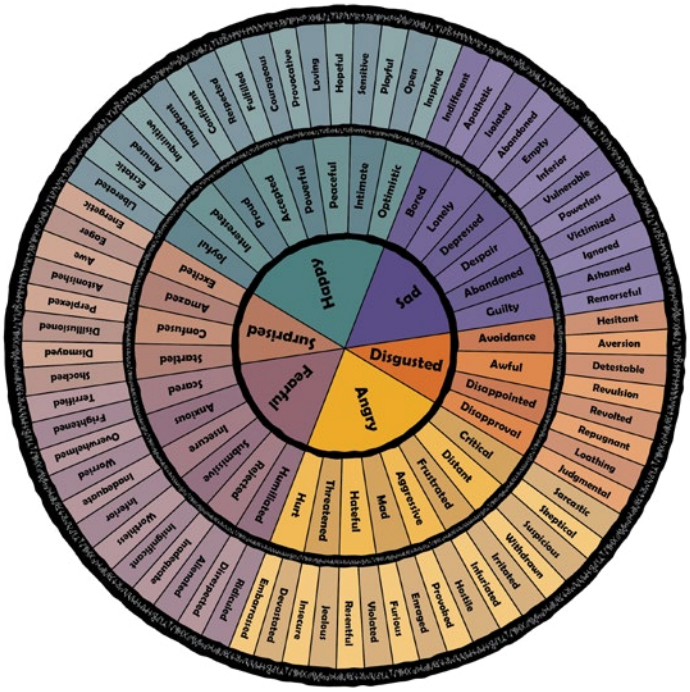
Tip 1: Pick the perspective of your narration.

Writers typically use either first-person or third-person perspectives. A lot of roleplaying happens in first-person, so "I swing my axe at the dragon." This is great for people who really want to get into the game and blur the line between player and character. But you can also speak in third-person. Rather than saying, "I swing my axe at the dragon," you could say, "John the barbarian swings his axe at the dragon." This puts distance between the player and the character, decoupling your immediate reactions at the table from the character's in-game reactions. Just remember to give the other players and the dungeon master a heads-up that you're planning to roleplay in third-person.

Tip 2: Train your emotional vocabulary.

As writers, we're not relying on our ability to emote at the table to convey our characters' emotions. When our character is angry, we're not physically scowling at the table. When our character is nervous, we're not stuttering our speech at the table. So we have to rely on our descriptions.

The first step when describing your character's emotions is to tell the other players and Dungeon Master how your character is feeling. Literally say: my character is feeling insert-your-emotional-state-here. Since the other players can't rely on your tone or body-language to infer your character's feelings, you have to communicate directly and vocally.



MPDM Emotion Wheel
Use this Feely Wheely to train your emotion vocabulary – high-resolution version available on Patreon

The second step when conveying your character's emotions is to show how your character feels with a short description. When your wizard is anxious, maybe she absent-mindedly twists her wedding ring. When your barbarian is excited, maybe he bounces on the balls of his feet and shifts his weight from side-to-side. These emotion descriptions should be unique to your character and will help solidify everybody's mental image of who your character is.

This might seem super simple, but vocabulary around emotions can get pretty complicated. Is your character angry or frustrated, excited or focussed, sad or discouraged? There's nuance with emotion. I illustrated this emotion vocabulary wheel (the Feely Wheely) which could help demystify some of the ambiguity around emotions. For homework before your next session, try writing a single-sentence description about how your character acts when they experience each emotion on the wheel.

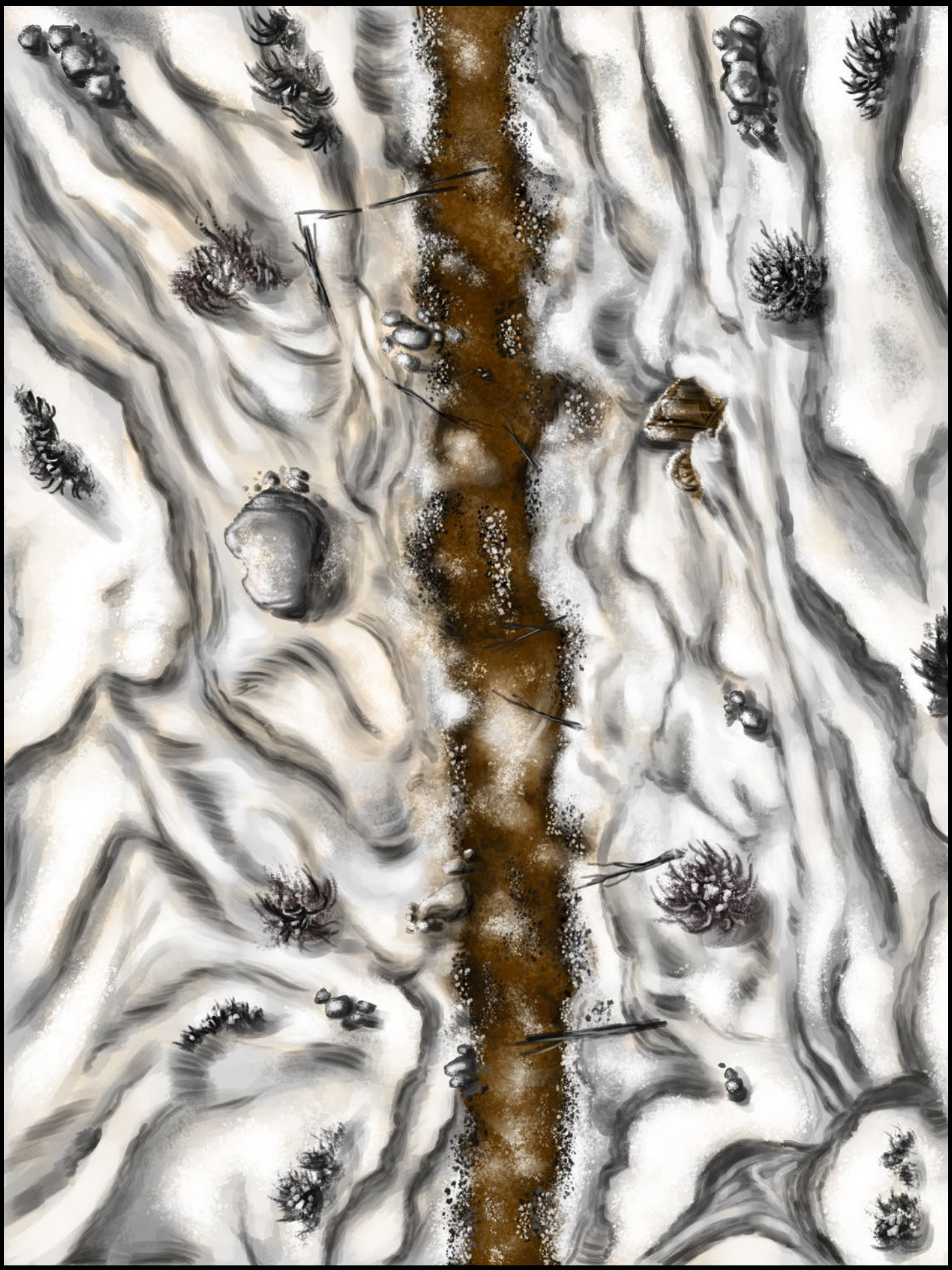
Some readers may wonder: why bother roleplaying in this indirect, homework-heavy, writerly way? Isn't it simpler to just Critical Role your way through every situation, getting into character and flexing your acting skills?

But some people don't feel comfortable roleplaying like an actor. And when somebody thinks that's the only way to roleplay, they might shut down at the table, step into the background, become a non-participant. I think these games are much richer when everybody participates. So my hope is: these tips might help one of my fellow introverts, these tips might help somebody become a participant, these tips might help somebody roleplay like a writer.

Please subscribe to my stupid YouTube channel.

Dungeon Master's Art Box

When running a game it can be difficult to share images with your players without giving too much away. That is why we've included the practical image assets at the end of this issue. That way, you can show your players only what you want them to see. No more awkwardly covering stat blocks, flavor text, or other spoilers.



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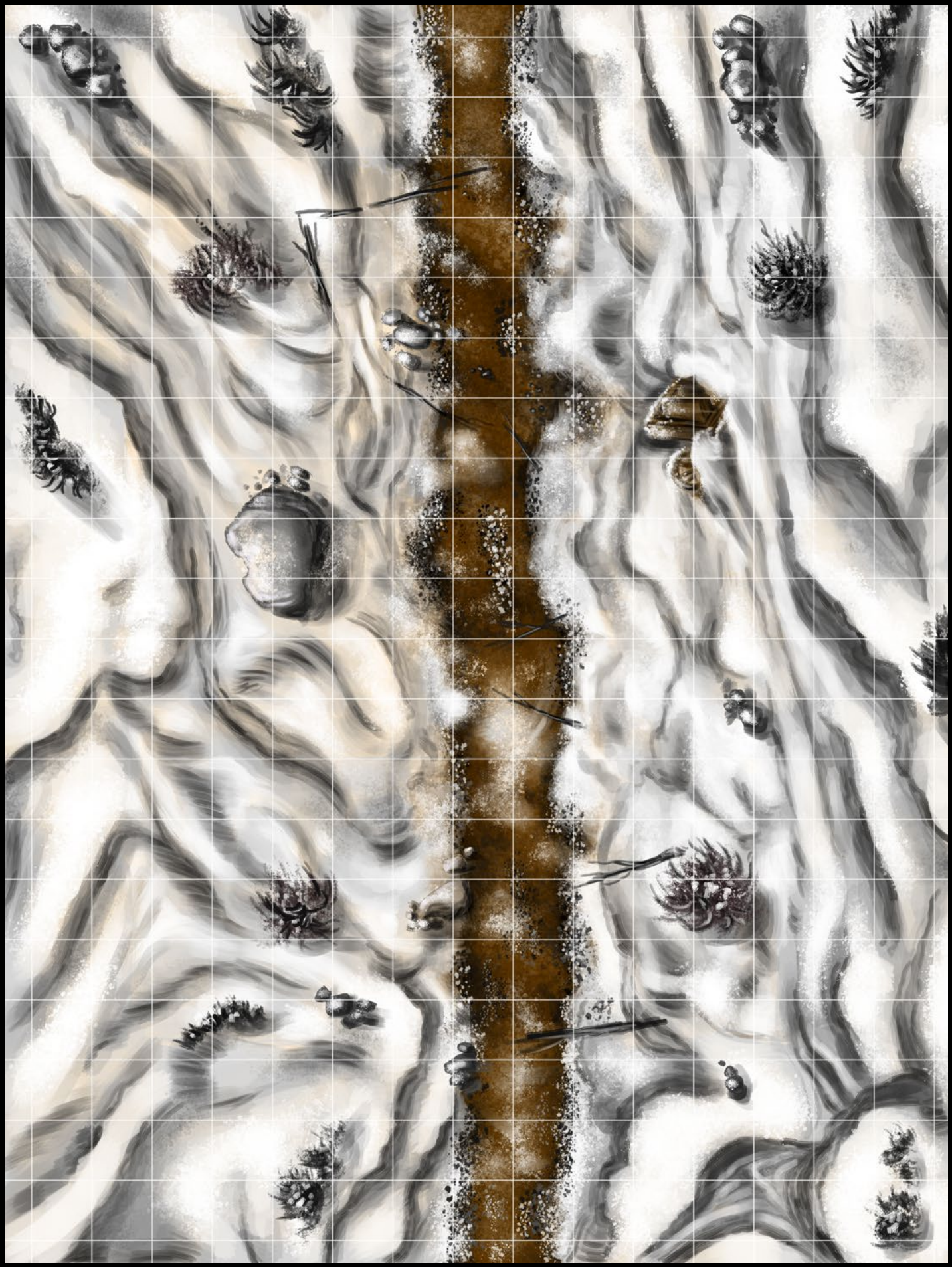

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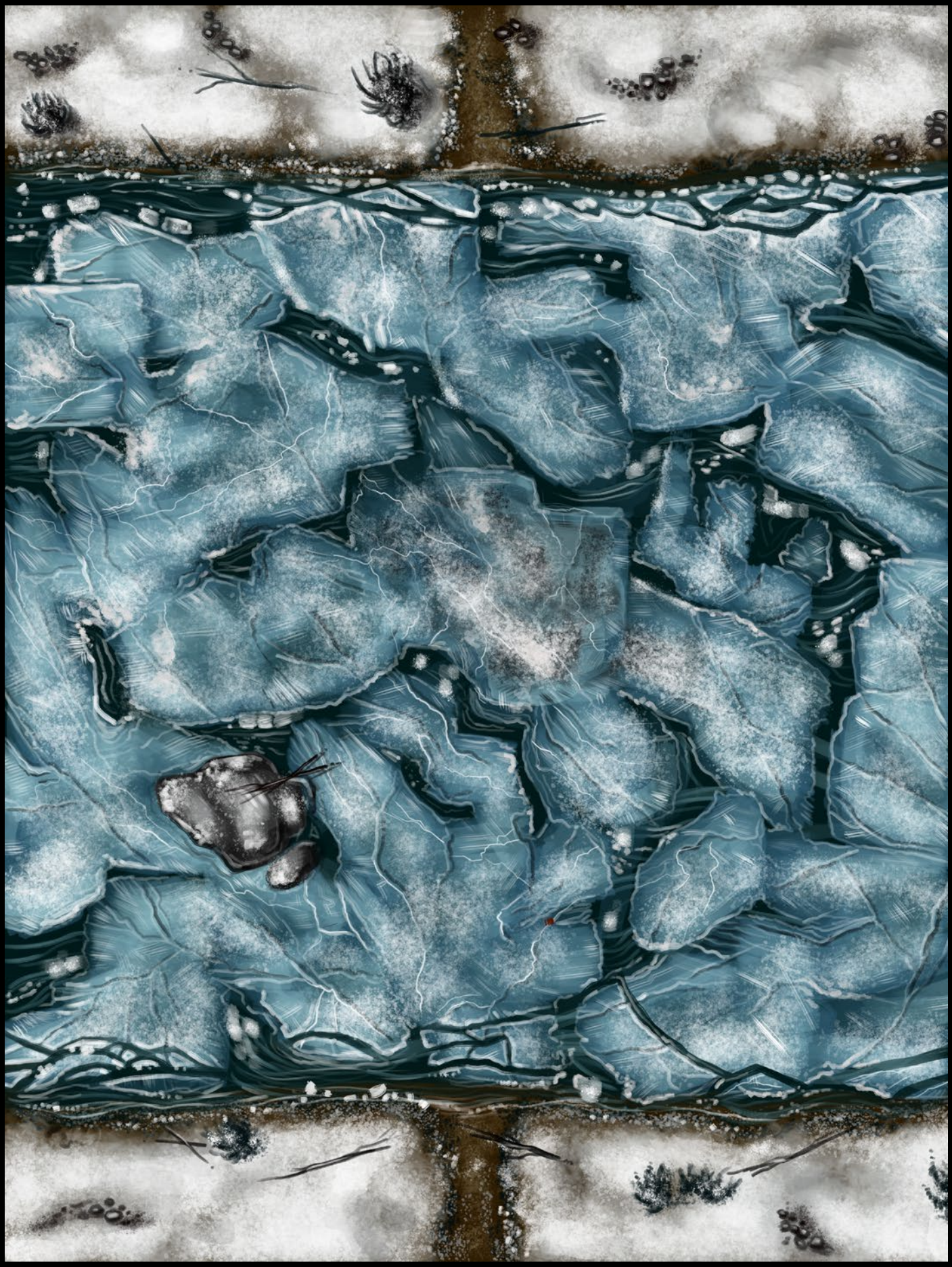

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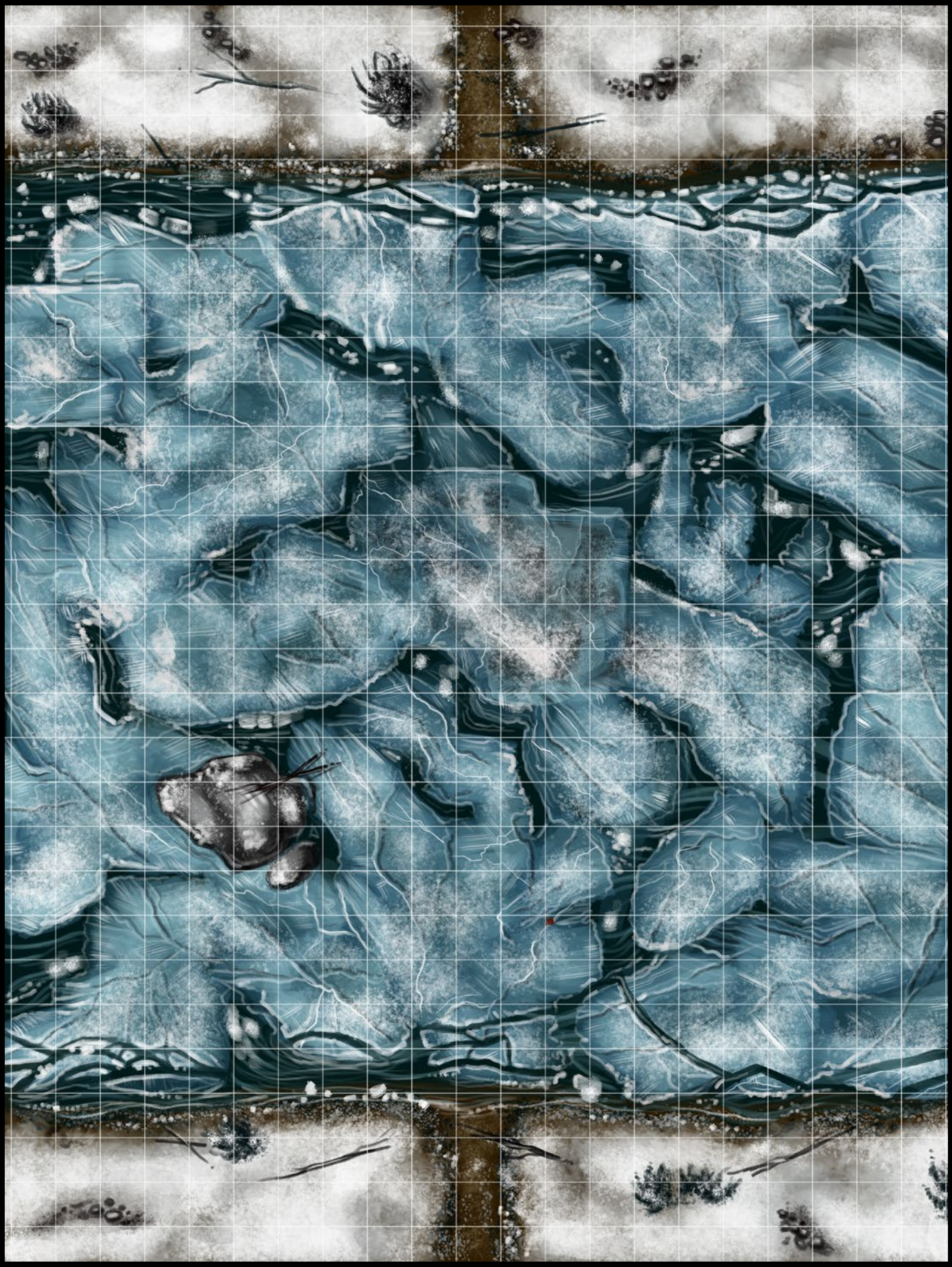

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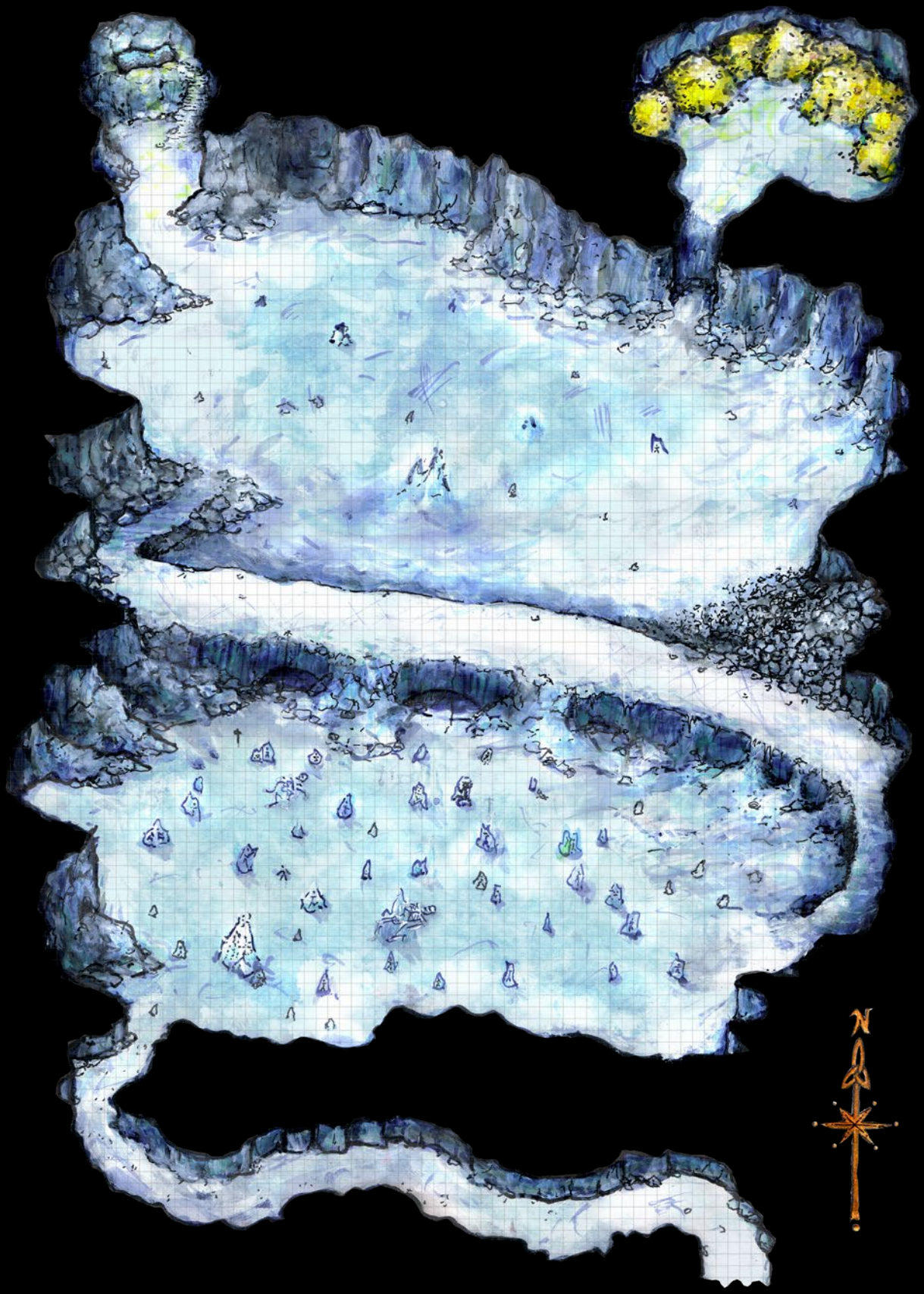

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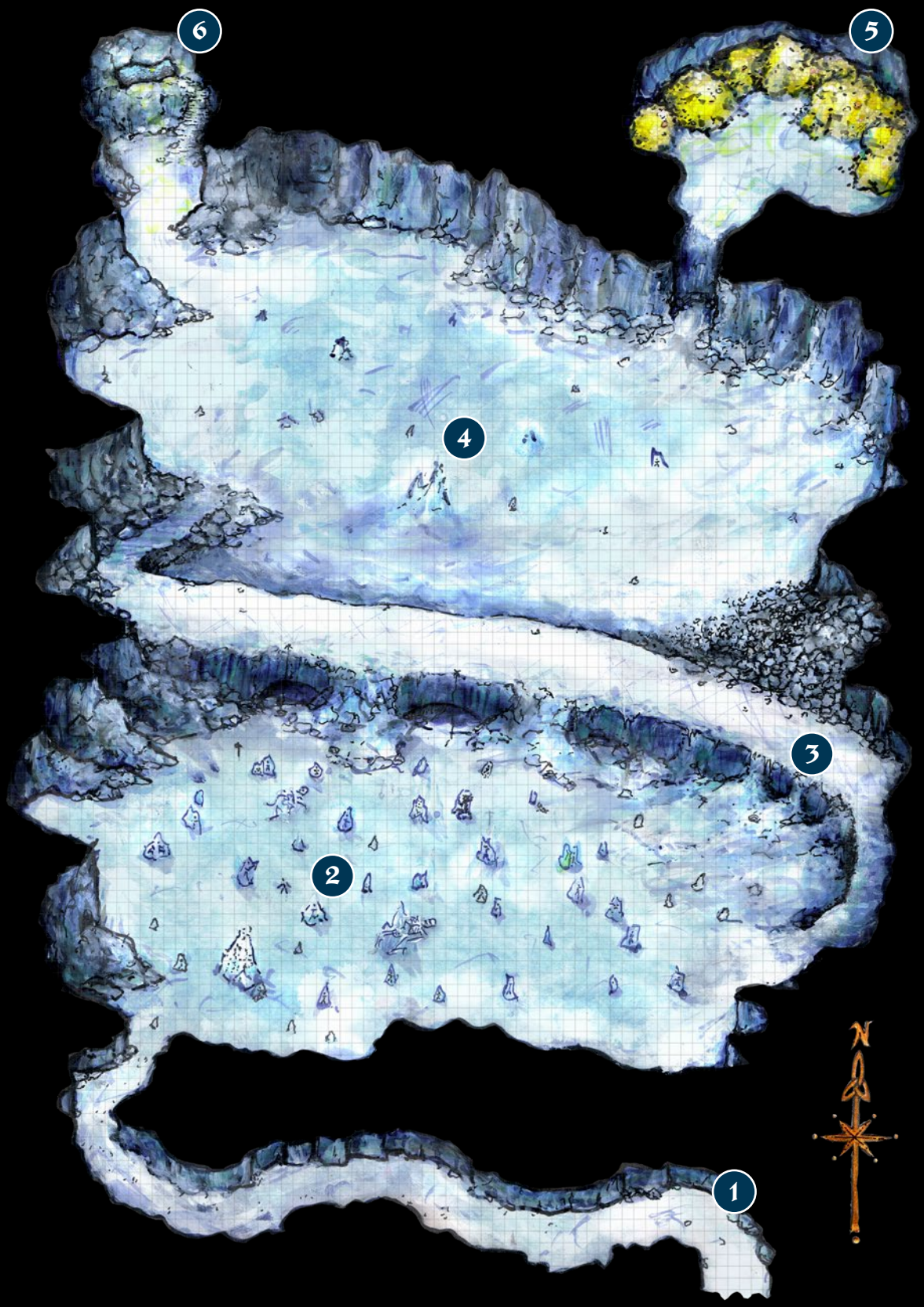

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Bottled Lightning

Rare

A dark-wood wine bottle with the alchemical symbol of lightning and a set of strange runes saying 'use with care' carved into its side. A creature listening carefully will hear a buzzing noise emanating from inside. When the cork is removed, a lightning bolt shoots from the bottle and strikes a creature within 200ft the bottle is pointed at. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure the target takes 1D100 lightning damage or half as much on a success.

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Celestial's Light

Rare

A black bottle warm to the touch and capped with a metal cork of adamantine carved with runes. When the cork is removed from the bottle a burst of radiant light fills a 30-foot-radius sphere surrounding the bottle. Any creatures in the sphere must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded for up to 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the save at the end of each subsequent turn, ending the effect on a success. Any fiend or undead creatures within the radius take 4d12 radiant damage.

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Titan's Bellow

Rare

A clear glass bottle capped with darkened wax around a black cork. This bottle reverberates softly with the voice of an ancient titan. When the cork is removed, a 30-foot cone of thunderous sound explodes from the bottle. All creatures in the cone must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure a creature takes 3d20 thunder damage or half as much on a success.

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Breath of Winter

Rare

A beautiful bottle of crystal carved with snowflake patterns and coated with a slight layer of frost, the cork frozen in place. When this bottle is opened the very essence of winter is released, a thick could of fog fills a 30-foot-radius sphere, heavily obscuring the area and causing each breath to sting with cold. Any creature in the fog cloud must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw at the start of its turn. On a failure the creature takes 8d4 cold damage and its movement is halved for the next minute. On a success the creature is unaffected. The cold effect only lasts for 1 round while the fog remains in the air for 10 minutes unless dispersed by moderate wind.

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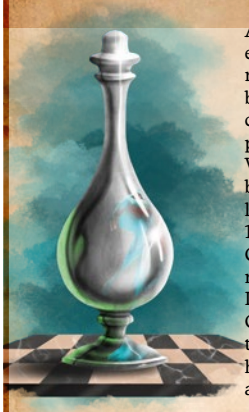
Alchemist's Fire

Rare



A bottle of polished silver engraved with arcane runes that make soft bubbling noises. A silver cork has been welded in place, sealing the bottle. When thrown, this bottle bursts open, and a pool of liquid fire erupts in a 15-foot-radius circle. Creatures in the circle must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure a creature takes 5d10 fire damage or half as much on a success.

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Gauntlets of Frigid Retribution

Wonderous Item, Rare (requires attunement)

When a creature within 5 feet of you, that you can see, hits you with an attack, you can use your reaction to cause the creature to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. The creature takes 2d6 cold damage on a failed saving throw, and half as much damage on a successful one. You can use this feature a total of three times per day. You regain all expended uses after soaking the Gauntlets of Frigid Retribution in at least one gallon of fresh water for one hour.

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Brass Monkey

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

A little brass monkey dangling on the end of a necklace. It is cold to the touch. Once per day, when someone holding a weapon moves in your direction, you can use your reaction to roll 1d8 and cast the spell rolled on the following table:

1d8	Spell
1	Suggestion
2	Ray of Frost
3	Armor of Agathys
4	Ice Knife
5	Snilloc's Snowball Swarm
6	Sleet Storm
7	Ice Storm
8	Cone of Cold

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