

DROPPING BELOW ZERO



JEFFERY PRETTI

Warm up to the Icewind Dale with this chilling
adventure for the world's greatest roleplaying game



CREDITS

Designer: Jeffery Pretti

Cover Illustrator: [zschnepf](#)

Maps & Interior Illustrations: Jeffery Pretti

Layout Template: [Simple Microsoft Word Template](#) by Laura Hirsbrunner

Author's Bio: Jeffery Pretti lives with his wife and two “dice game”-loving kids in Portland, Ore. He has a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Madison, Wisconsin, where he studied the impact language has on how we mentally represent the world – and vice versa. He now puts that degree to its best possible use designing worlds where our language and mental representations have a much more visceral connection.

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

Thank you for your interest in **Dropping Below Zero**. If you and your players enjoyed the adventure, I'd be grateful if you left a 5-star review on the [DMsGuild product page](#). It helps share the experience with others and helps support me in writing additional adventures!

If you have any questions, feedback, or suggestions for improvements, please connect with me! You can reach me on twitter [@RogueNonGrata](#) or via email at RogueNonGrata@gmail.com.

Cheers,
Jeff

ON THE COVER



Frozen Trees Under El Capitan, by [zschnepf](#)



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INTRODUCTION

This adventure is intended to evoke a sense of isolation, horror, and building dread amidst a frozen, austere landscape. Can the local heroes find hope, in themselves and in each other, to push through the oppressive and unknown threats of this long, bleak night?

SYNOPSIS

Accompanying a caravan through a mountain pass – perhaps up Ten Trails and into the Icewind Dale, while traveling at any point within Chapters 1 or 2 of *Rime of the Frostmaiden*, or generally in the course of traveling within any wintery landscape – the adventurers find that their travel is severely impeded by a gathering snowstorm. Initiative kicks off soon after with a skills challenge to keep one of the carts – and themselves – from sliding into the frozen river.

With exhaustion becoming a real danger and the snowstorm only strengthening, the adventurers must take shelter under a small copse of mountain fir to wait out the storm. But as dusk falls upon them, so does a sense of dread. Mistaken for a curious mountain lynx, a fey lynxal has been unofficially adopted by the caravan. Unbeknownst to anyone, the lynxal is also inadvertently nullifying both fear and even the instinct of self-preservation among the caravan's members, including perhaps the adventurers. Through seeded social encounters, the adventures find that their fellow passengers are becoming unnaturally calm, seemingly indifferent to their dire situation.

Matters only grows worse as night sets in and watches are posted. One by one, caravan members begin to go missing, leaving only the occasional frozen appendage behind to mark their passing. Pursuing a trail leading into the small woods, the adventurers encounter a couple timber wolves, seemingly injured in the same way but still with fight left in them. With resources wearing thin, the adventurers finally discover the real threat: Hidden deep within the copse of mountain fir is the cavernous lair of a couple swarms of ice sprites, freezing and draining the life force of the charmed, placid caravan members. Can the adventurers remove the threat and protect both themselves, and the caravan, before drawing the ire of whomever, or whatever it is, these ice sprites serve?

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure is applicable to any scenario in which the player characters (PCs) are traveling through a wintery terrain. It may serve well as a prequel, introductory session to the Icewind Dale campaign setting, but can also be scaled up through a party of level 6 characters.

To drop the adventure into an ongoing campaign, any opportunity for winter travel suffices: Perhaps the PCs choose to accompany a caravan as hired muscle, making a few coins between towns? Did the PCs get caught in the same snowstorm, only to join forces with the caravan as they all try to make headway against the wind and sleet? Or perhaps their story begins here, with a kismet meeting on the road, their tales converging when they step up to protect their fellow travelers?

ADVENTURE DIFFICULTY

The adventure, as written, works well as an introductory session for an average party level of 1 (APL 1) – i.e., a party of 3 – 5 PCs, all or mostly level 1 characters. Suggested modifications are provided in the footnotes, where appropriate, for how combat encounters may be scaled up for larger parties or those with an APL up to 6. A party with an APL above 6 may not be substantially challenged without some additional creativity on the part of the Dungeon Master (DM).

NOTABLE NPCs

NAL

With the slight hunch from years of driving a carriage and a perpetually wind-burned nose, Nal (M NG human **Commoner**) is husband to Joselyn and half of the caravan's owner-operator team. The paying passengers are just one more piece of freight for Nal, though he prides himself on keeping to a schedule and delivering all his cargo as promised. He is extremely competent in navigating these treacherous lands, and because of this he knows just how dire a situation an unexpected winter storm can pose. Unfortunately for the others, he lacks the emotional intelligence to hide his growing fears and frustrations over the worsening storm.

INFORMATION NAL MIGHT PROVIDE:

- “This blasted weather makes no blasted sense! We’re well into Mirtul, and it feels like the night before Midwinter... one where ya’ spent the last year up to no good and know what’s comin’ t’ya!”
- “Hmmp, Joselyn would want me to point out the good news: There’s no chance we’ll lose our way in this *skit*-straight-shot of a box canyon. The bad news is that in this *skit* box canyon, this *skit* snowstorm has nowhere to put its *skit* snow but on our godsforsaken heads. It may well bury us all before the next waypoint.”
- “Don’t let the shelter of these canyon walls fool ya none. Until we hit the next waypoint, we’re as much in the wilds now as you’ve ever been. Gryst will tell ya. He’s seen it up close and personal, if’n ya follow.”

JOSELYN

In a mountain of leathers and a fur-lined hood, with only a few gray curls poking out around her seemingly ageless face, Joselyn (F LG half-elf **Commoner**) is wife to Nal and serves as the customer-relations half of their partnership. She also serves as the caravan's self-taught medic while on the road (See also *Player's Handbook (PH)* Chapter 6: Feats; Healer). Joselyn grew up in Ten-Towns and has proper reverence for the fey lords who have influence in this region. While she projects eternal optimism, she is as practical as her husband and keenly understands the dangers of these mountain passes.

INFORMATION JOSELYN MIGHT PROVIDE:

- “Sorry for the bumpy ride, darlin’. This wind and snow make it a bit hard to pick out the smoothest, safest path. Hopefully the worst of this trip is a sore bum. Come find me when we make camp, though, as I’ve got some minor training in patchin’ folk up.”

- “No, honey, nothing to be too concerned about. Did Nal put that scare in ya? No, I’ve been walking these same steps for neigh on 60 years and I’m standing here, still, ain’t I?”
- “True, true, the fey lords keep watch over what’s theirs. But I’ve given ‘em their due, for sure, as I do afore every pass through this way.”
- “Don’t let Gryst’s complaining bother ya’ll none. He’s a stout enough fella when the weather turns, pardon the phrase. He has jumped in front of a handful of bandits and naught but a few wolves that prowl these passes in order to keep our little caravan safe.”

GRYST

Unofficial head of the caravan’s guard, if only because he’s been with Nal and Joselyn the longest, Gryst (M LN mtn dwarf **Guard**) is short even for a dwarf. Sporting a warhammer (or other weapon suitable for a PC’s reward, preferably of the bludgeoning type) and a pair of ugly-but-functional cat-gut snowshoes, he prefers to plod along the snowbanks, putting him *almost* at eye level with fellow travelers. Gryst trades in gossip picked up on the road. He is genuinely interested in hearing about PCs’ backgrounds and what brought them to join the caravan, but he invariably seems to have a short, terse complaint about every place mentioned.

INFORMATION GRYST MIGHT PROVIDE:

- “*Jävla Fey!* Nal has got us into it this time! *Fah*, you there, what’s-your-name, new guard! Other than this godsforsaken storm, have you seen anything in this mess likely to kill us?”
- “Keep a keen eye, comrade. There may be no sane bandits out in this storm, but the veil is thin through the pass. *Fah*, I can tell ye’ don’t believe me, but you just go an’ ask Joselyn, why don’t ‘cha.”
- “Eh, comrade, where d’ya’ll say you’re from again?...
Small Town. Ugh, never heard of it. It’s a small place? Sounds like a town we passed through just this past Uktar. Joselyn was able to pick up some healing supplies from the clinic, there, a nice place by the name of Tak’s Hospital and Grille.”
Large City. I once had the pleasure of staying three nights there...three full days and nights waiting in a *skit* wagon line before Nal got fed up with the traffic and just went the long way around.”
Coastal Town. Is that the place with that sour smell rising up from all the streets?”
General Response. Ah, yes, I was once relieved of my purse there. Twice. But I did find the town guards were always courteous about it.”

ADAPTATION FOR RIME OF THE FROSTMAIDEN (RotF)

As appropriate, the canyon pass through the Spine of the World can be substituted for any wintry landscape:

- If PCs are traveling between towns in Chapter 1, they might be following along the edge of a lake rather than a river.
- If they are traveling into the Wilds in Chapter 2, there are various rivers, both mapped and unmapped, that suffice.
- If mountains aren’t present, a simple rocky outcropping, small cavern into the Reghed glacier, or even a mere hole down into the ground suffices for the Sprites lair in Ch. 4.

CHAPTER 1 — WINTER’S PASS

As an introduction to the setting, read or paraphrase the following text:

The soft padding of paws on the gathering snow is all but lost as the storm picks up again. With its coat a mix of mottled grays and snowy white, the lynx’s outline is quickly obscured as the storm continues to swirl. But despite the wind whipping all around it, the lynx sits calmly at the edge of a ravine, squinting only slightly against the biting cold. Its bright ochre eyes can barely make out your caravan as it slowly plods along below, following next to a frozen river that snakes its way through this mountain pass.

The weather has been unseasonably severe, and the wind and snow have been building throughout the day. The caravan master, Nal, isn’t hiding his growing concern that the group is far behind schedule and perhaps won’t be able to make it to the sheltered waypoint before nightfall. His wife, Joselyn, oscillates between trying to quiet him and trying to quiet the nerves of the caravan’s paying passengers. Meanwhile, the captain of the caravan’s guard, Gryst, isn’t helping the mood with his constant complaining, currently about how the low visibility isn’t making his job any easier, as the heavy snowfall is lightly obscuring the surrounding area (See also Notable NPCs, above).

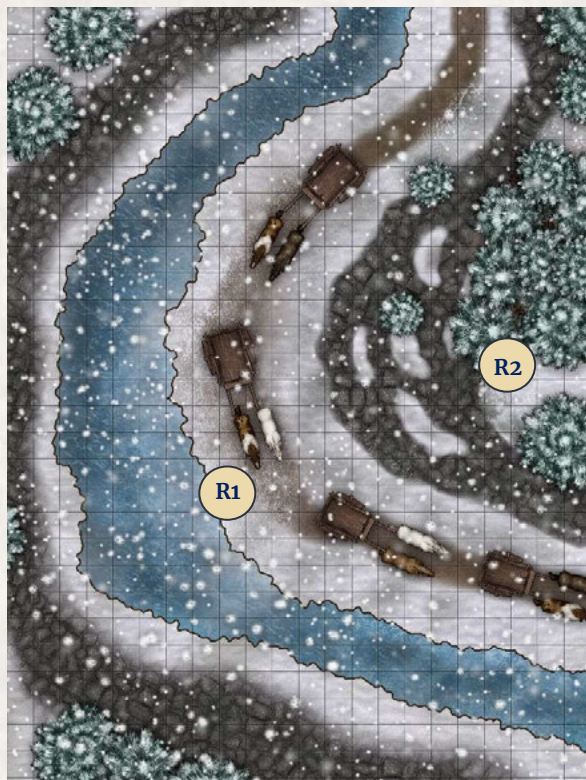
TREADING ON THIN ICE

Following the boxed text, above, and using the information each NPC might provide, Nal, Joselyn, and/or Gryst can start passing word down the line that the travel is becoming more treacherous. The NPCs might each begin a conversation with one or more PCs, depending on whether that PC is serving as a guard (Gryst), a paying passenger (Joselyn), or one of the caravan laborers (Nal).

This is also an opportunity to establish the positioning of PCs along the caravan and, if appropriate, an opportunity for players to describe and introduce their characters as each share in or overhear the others’ conversations with one or another of the NPCs.

As the storm worsens, the caravan makes its way around a bend in the canyon. As one or more PCs turn the corner, a PC serving as a guard or caravan laborer might perform a Wisdom (Perception) check, perhaps at disadvantage given the heavy snowfall (See *Dungeon Master’s Guide* (DMG) Chapter 5: Wilderness Survival; Heavy Precipitation).

KEYED MAP: RIVERBEND



R1. SLIPPERY SECTION OF THE TRAIL

The river's path has carved a sharp turn through canyon. The resulting steep outer canyon wall and the gentle slope to the inner canyon wall have left a trail that narrows around the bend. There is only about 20 ft. of clearance between the frozen river and the canyon's inner wall.

Unfortunately, the lull in the wind has caused the area to end up heavily banked with accumulated snow. The winter storm has put down layers of packed snow that have now smoothly merged with the river's edge, creating a single, glistening sheet of ice. As a result, this stretch of the trail has become extremely perilous, and yet the tight canyon walls provide no other means of progress.

As the PCs attempt to round the bend, their cart that containing both paying passengers and essential gear begins to slide. In their panic, the horses only make the situation worse. Without intervention, the horses, the cart, and everything on the cart will slide out onto the frozen river, which is coated by only a thin layer of ice.

R2. LYNXAL'S LOOKOUT

What appears to be small, curious mountain lynx sits calmly on the overlooking ridge, watching as the caravan passes underneath.

SLIPPING TOWARDS FREEZING

Hearing the horses scream and seeing the cart begin to jack-knife, Nal might issue a command to save the cart at all costs, as it contains much of their food and their only dry timber for fires until they get through this pass. Joselyn might wryly note that there are also passengers on the cart, and that someone needs to save the people, too.

Roll initiative. To save the cart and themselves from falling into the frigid river, the PCs must succeed in a skills challenge by achieving the number of successes appropriate for their number and APL before accumulating three failures. Parties of 5 or more PCs need 5 – 6 successes with a DC10, whereas smaller parties might only need 3 successes with a DC15.¹

Each success slows the cart's slide towards the icy river. For the skills challenge, players may use any of the following ability checks, though they cannot use the same ability check they used on their last turn nor the same one used by the immediately preceding PC:

- a simple ability check,
- an ability check with a skill proficiency,
- an ability check with a tool proficiency, or
- an ability check with a saving throw proficiency. However, a saving throws may only be used when the immediately preceding player failed their ability check, as an attempt to negate the damage caused by the previous failure.

Within the first round of initiative, any PC with a high passive Wisdom (Perception) might notice that some of the NPCs who were previously screaming for help have gone quiet, or perhaps that any PCs recently enlisted to help have stopped and calmly stepped back. With a quick check over their shoulder (no action required), the PC notices that the NPCs are now standing quietly at ease, seeming to watch calmly as the cart continues its intractable slide into the river. Should any of the PCs use their turn to elicit help from NPCs after this point, consider this merely a free communication (no action required) as the NPCs stare placidly in response, or at most calmly state that the PCs seem to have it all well in-hand.

RUNNING THE LYNXAL AS AN NPC

After the second failure, the curious lynx-like creature from the introductory block text – which is really a fey lynxal (See also Appendix A: Stat Blocks) – might descend down into the canyon, jumping into the initiative order to help. For example, the lynxal might perform a Strength (+2) or Dexterity (+3) saving throw to try to negate the damage cause by the previous PC's failed save, using its considerable weight or perhaps its bite to grab ahold of a PC's clothing, stopping them from sliding down the slippery ice on a failed Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If the lynxal fails its ability check, this should not add to the total number of failures for this skills challenge.

The lynxal might thereafter be a fairly consistent background fixture for the PCs. Just as with any helpful NPC, the lynxal might warn of dangers or draw attention to overlooked information. The lynxal also understands any PC speaking Common or Sylvan. And while the lynxal cannot speak itself (not even through Speak with Animals, as the fey lynxal is not a beast), its motives are akin to any semi-domesticated feline, even down to its purely neutral alignment.

¹ For parties with an APL above 4, consider increasing the number of successes necessary to 9-15 with a DC10 for 5 or more PCs, or 4-5 with a DC15 for smaller parties.

At the top of the second round of initiative, both the cart and PCs that are near the cart begin to slide out onto the ice-covered bank of the river. Slippery ice is difficult terrain. In addition, before each ability check can be made, PCs must first perform a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or else fall prone (See DMG Chapter 5: Wilderness Survival; Slippery Ice). This also counts as a failed ability check, as the cart continues its slide as they fall prone. On their next turn, a prone PC may perform a suitable check to save the cart, but if they must stand up and move to support their action, the PC must perform another DC Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If unsuccessful, the PC falls prone again and adds a failure to the skills challenge.

If the PCs roll a third failure before the required number of successes are met, the cart slides the rest of the way onto the river. As appropriate, any creatures near the cart as it slides also end up on the thin ice. The weight of the cart will cause the thin ice surrounding it to break, and the cart and any creatures within 10 feet of the cart fall into the freezing water (See also DMG Chapter 5: Wilderness Survival; Thin Ice). The cart and objects on the cart are lost, though the tongue of the cart might snap just as it plunges into the water, freeing the panicked horses.

Any creatures within the freezing water must find a way to get back onto land or else risk suffering exhaustion and being swept down river (See DMG Chapter 5: Wilderness Survival; Frigid Water). It should not be challenging to find suitable opportunities to exit the frigid water: low rolls on ability checks should still be considered successes, though this is an opportunity to add a bit of levity in describing the PCs cumbersome or clumsy attempts at getting back onto dry land following the stressful skills challenge.

CHAPTER 2 — THE FROST'S BITE

Once past the skills challenge, Nal shares that with the delays in travel there is no hope in making it to the next waypoint before dark. With the storm worsening, their best bet is to stop for the night under a nearby copse of mountain fir for what little shelter that might provide. The caravan will be hard pressed to even make it that far, so they must get underway: Any PCs who ended up in the freezing water will have to wait to dry off and warm up until they can get to out of the wind.

Travel to the copse takes about an hour and the PCs used precious energy trying to save the cart. Just before they arrive, have all PCs perform a DC10 Constitution saving throw. Those PCs who ended up in the river should roll at disadvantage, as wet clothes don't provide any protection against the snow and wind (See DMG Chapter 5: Wilderness Survival; Extreme Cold). Any creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed. Any PCs who failed gain one level of exhaustion. For APL 1 parties or less experienced players, the DM may wish to remove this exhaustion once camp is established and the PCs have had a chance to warm up around the fire.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: FORCED MARCH

For higher-level parties, tactically proficient players, or parties comprised mostly of races resistance to cold damage (e.g., goliaths or tritons), Nal might inform the players that given the delays, they must march past dark to even get to the shelter of the copse. Having already traveled a full day, each extra hour or more worth of forced marching requires each PC to make a Constitution saving throw or else gain one level of exhaustion (See also PH Chapter 8: Movement).

SETTLING FOR A LONG NIGHT

As the PCs approach the copse of mountain fir, read or paraphrase the following:

As you turn a final bend, hope momentarily fills you as the canyon widens out and you catch sight of the small copse of mountain fir. The comforting scent of pine almost catches your nose before being swept away again by the sterile, frigid wind.

Then the last vestiges of twilight fade away, seemingly moments before they should. Night comes too quickly between the canyon's looming walls. As the snow continues to blow and pile up, the prospect of setting up camp in the dark chills any hope of finding either rest or warmth anytime soon.

The PCs might be asked to help set up camp, secure the campsite, or simply get settled in, depending on their role in the caravan. This is also an opportunity for continued conversation with Nal, Joselyn, or Gryst, as well as allowing the players to better introduce their characters.

For example, Gryst might enlist one of the PCs to help him set up the tents. Tossing them one of his light

hammers² to better stake down the tents against the storm's winds, he might ask more about where they're from or why they have joined the caravan and are headed to their destination.

Nal might enlist a PC to gather what wood is available for the cookfire, foreshadowing how little wood they have to keep the fires strong throughout the night. This may also be an opportunity for a PC to catch sight of some of the strange carvings around camp (See also "C1. Strange Visages," below)

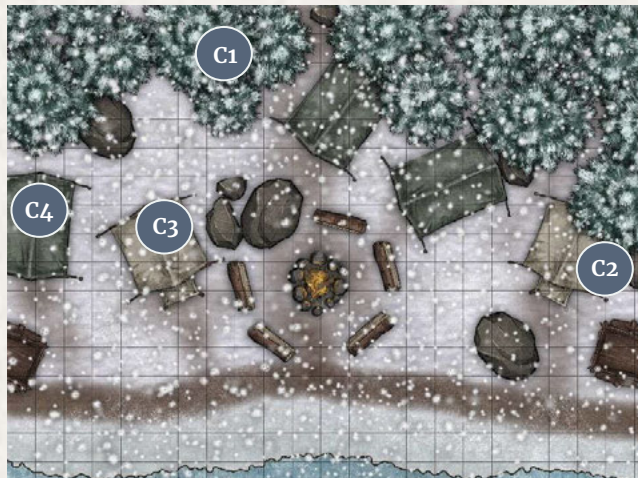
Joselyn might gather any wet or cold PCs and invite them to come help start chopping tubers for the soup pot, assuring them that it will soon be the warmest seat available.

For narrative flare, it may also be worth noting that the mountain lynx (lynxal) that seems to have been following the caravan is now making itself well at home, perhaps sitting next to Joselyn as she tosses it scraps of salted pork while preparing the night's soup. It may even begin to show preference to a PC that shows it kindness – or perhaps one that keeps trying to avoid it, in true feline fashion! If any PC attempts to investigate the unnatural behavior of the lynx-like creature, the check simply confirms that while the lynxal seems to be a curious addition to the caravan, its presence is benign and unthreatening (See also its Sovereign Presence trait under Appendix A: Stat Blocks).

Once the PCs' activities die down, Nal might tell Gryst to assign watch. If no PCs are serving as official guards for the caravan, they might be drafted into service given the low visibility, paired up with various NPC guards.

Gryst assigns watches in pairs, taking the prized spot as part of the first watch himself and assigning part of the second watch to Yeana, his second-in-command. He then abruptly leaves the PCs to figure out their own assignments, including who will pair up with Gryst and Yeana on the first and second watch.

KEYED MAP: CAMPSITE



C1. STRANGE VISAGES

Any walk near the tree line reveals a handful of fairly old but still detailed carvings in the bark of trees surrounding the camp. These carvings seem to be profiles – various

faces and ages – and perhaps indicate the copse has been used previously as a makeshift waypoint.

Later, after watch is established, a PC serving first watch will also catch sight of a bright, fresh carving in the bark of one of the trees surrounding the camp that captures a visage of Gryst.

C2. GRYST...OR WHAT'S LEFT OF HIM

Once watch has been established, Gryst suggests spreading out. When the PCs last sees him, he is walking towards the trees on the other side of the tent. When the PCs later investigate, they find his frozen hand clamped around the wagon's wheel with no other tracks in sight (See also Rewards).

C3. JOSELYN AND NAL'S TENT & CAMPFIRE

If the PCs lost the cart, the fire spits and smokes without given off much light, as the only wood available was a few fresh, green limbs found in the copse. Joselyn and Nal's tent is situated next to the camp's communal fire, where planning meetings might occur (See also A Path Diverges).

C4. KAR'LAI AND SHA'VRE'S TENT

The small tent where Kar'lai and Sha'vere, human sisters and paying passengers, sleep (See also When Nature Calls).

A LAST FIRST WATCH

First watch begins as the rest of the caravan members head to their tents. Without moonlight during the winter storm, it is fully dark. Open flame sources, such as torches, might blow around and light only erratically in the wind. And with the blowing snow, the area is lightly obscured even for those with darkvision.

Gryst and the PC might have a bit of conversation, if appropriate, but eventually Gryst suggests they spread out. If they stay within 60ft, they should be able to see the full camp and keep in visual range of each other.

As the PC begins to serve watch, have the PC roll a Wisdom (Perception) check, likely with disadvantage on the roll due to the weather or perhaps feeling the effects of exhaustion. Depending on the roll, the PC may see more or less detail, but at least sees what appears to be a pale face staring out from the woods. Located near the PC is a bright, fresh carving in the bark of one of the trees that captures a visage of Gryst. If called over to investigate, Gryst might shrug it off, claiming that often times the kids in the caravan end up longing for the adventurous life and looking up to him. Figuratively speaking, of course.

Gryst then offers to take a lap around the camp. If appropriate, he might suggest that the PC stay near the campfire – perhaps the PC has poor darkvision, still needs to warm up, or is clearly jumping at shadows given their reaction to the carvings in trees. As he leaves, Gryst may also grumble about always getting stuck with underqualified help.

Immediately have the PC perform a DC13 Wisdom saving throw, saving against the lynxal's Emotional Suppression:

- On a failed save, the PC realizes that the snow is kind of serene in its own way. The PC finds themselves surprisingly calm, perhaps thinking that this is the sort of experience they'll look back on fondly once they all reach their destination. The PC doesn't

² Gryst's weapons may be helpful to the PCs, as they may realize the BBEGs are vulnerable to bludgeoning damage.

really mind the cold, nor the surprisingly high-pitched scream coming from Gryst. No, everything will likely turn out just fine. Have the other PCs roll a DC10 Wisdom (Perception) check, hearing-based, to see if Gryst's scream wakes them up. If so, they might find the PC on watch staring off in a calm, trance-like state. If none of the PCs are awoken, have Joselyn find and eventually snap the PC on watch out of this trance-like state.

- On a successful save, the PC should be able to see, just at the edge of their perception, Gryst's grip seem to go slack and his warhammer (or other weapon suitable for a PC's use) drop to the snow. Gryst then takes a few steps forward before his short stature is lost behind a tent. Almost immediately, the PC hears Gryst's surprisingly high-pitched scream come from behind the tent. If appropriate to move the action forward, have the other PCs roll a DC10 Wisdom (Perception) check, hearing-based, to see if Gryst's scream woke them up.

REWARDS

If the PCs need to find Gryst, a group Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal to at least one PC that Gryst's Warhammer is sticking out from behind the tent. As needed, Joselyn might eventually insist that a proficient PC hold onto this. When any PC searches the area, an Intelligence (Investigation) check may reveal Gryst's hand – and only his hand – is clutched tightly around the rim of a wagon wheel. The hand is frozen solid, which any suitably high ability in Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine or Survival) will reveal is unnatural given the length of time since Gryst disappeared, even considering the biting wind and snow.

On Gryst's frozen hand is a small bronze ring, ornately worked in the shape of a six-pointed snowflake, worth perhaps 2gp. If interested, a PC might perform an Intelligence (Religion) check, which may reveal that this is the symbol of Auril, the Frostmaiden – aka, the Goddess of Winter. The religious symbol is typically worn not necessary in worship, but in deference to her power and reign over the frozen north and to avoid her frosty wrath.

Oddly, any further Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals no additional traces of what might have happened, including the clear fact that there are no tracks to be found other than Gryst's comically large snowshoe prints, which abruptly end next to the wagon.

For narrative flare, either the PC performing the prior Intelligence (Investigation) check or else whichever PC has a high passive Wisdom (Perception) might notice another newer carving in the trees near where Gryst died – this one depicting the visage of a member of their own party.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: HORROR

To signal the dangers ahead, have the PC whose visage was carved into the tree perform a DC10 Charisma saving throw, or else gain a short-term form of madness. For APL 1 – 3, have any effect end with an appropriate intervention from a fellow PC. (See also DMG Chapter 9: Adventuring Options; Fear and Horror).

CHAPTER 3 — OUT IN THE COLD

The commotion eventually brings Joselyn and a few other NPCs, if Joselyn is not already there. The PCs have a moment to catch her up on what they found, during which time Joselyn will wonder aloud where Nal might be. Given Nal isn't there to take charge, Joselyn instructs one of the nearby guards, Yeana (F LG human **Guard**), to pass word that no one is to venture out of their tents and that Yeana should reestablish watch.

Joselyn then invites the PCs back to the campfire to plan their next steps. At the campfire, they find Nal, sitting quietly and slowly petting the soft lynx, which is leaning its substantial weight against Nal's lap. Joselyn is eventually able to snap Nal out of his trance. If questioned, Nal says he had simply been strolling around the camp when he heard Gryst scream. But seeing that the campfire was delightfully empty, he naturally took a seat. Any Wisdom (Insight) check indicates he is being honest.

A PATH DIVERGES

Joselyn or Nal might solicit ideas from the PCs for how best to protect the caravan, though the winter storm and darkness limit their options. When appropriate during the discussion, three things happen in fairly quick succession:

- Any PC with a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 13 or higher notices the lynxal, who had been snuggled up against Nal's lap as he absently scratches its back, pops its head up to look out into gloom surrounding the camp. Should any PCs wish to perform a Wisdom (Perception) check, it reveals nothing. However, any PC who wishes to perform such a check must also make a DC13 Wisdom saving throw or else suddenly find themselves completely at ease, reassured that the comfort of the small campfire is preferable to worrying about what lurks in the dark, gloomy woods.
- Immediately following this, a guard, Yeana, comes from the east end of the camp to tell Joselyn, Nal, and the PCs that she just saw something moving just past the trees.
- Depending on the PCs' response and when appropriate, the PCs also hear another sudden, shrill scream, a crying out of "No, please! Let her go!" followed by uncontrollable sobbing. The sounds seem to come from the tent next to Joselyn and Nal's. Joselyn and Nal head for that tent.

The PCs may pursue either lead. Either way the lynxal will attempt to accompany them, trailing slightly behind. The lynxal will continue to accompany the PCs through the end of the adventure, seeking their security as they are clearly the "alpha" humanoids of this caravan.

That said, the lynxal understands Common and Sylvan, and will understand if the PCs earnestly want the lynxal to stay behind. Relatedly, if at any time a PC realizes the small lynx-like creature is the source of the Emotional Suppression and tries to convince it to stop, the lynxal fully complies. It doesn't wish any of the caravan members to be harmed by its actions. Rather, the effect is an innate fear response on behalf of the lynxal – i.e., when it experiences fear, it instinctively tries to suppress strong emotions from any other creatures in its vicinity in attempt to nullify the perceived threat.

WHEN NATURE CALLS

If the PCs investigate the scream, whether first or second, Joselyn informs them that it came from the tent of two sisters, Kar'lai and Sha'vre (F NG Human Commoners). Kar'lai is sobbing uncontrollably until the PCs arrive. If the PCs try to calm her, it helps but only to a degree. Then, assuming the lynx is following though without any obvious cause, Kar'lai suddenly drops all sense of grief. She placidly relates the following:

- Her sister, Sha'vre, got up from her bedroll and said she had to head to the tree line. Kar'lai pleaded with her to use a makeshift chamber pot, but Sha'vre was unconcerned, saying that everything was fine, that there was no need to worry.
- Kar'lai watched from the tent flap, but still can't fully comprehend what she saw.
- Sha'vre simply stood there as a pack or swarm or horde of...something...some sort of white shadow emerged up from the snow and approached her sister.
- Sha'vre didn't start screaming until the things were already all over her. They were clawing and scraping or...Well, they covered her. They just covered her. Then they took her.

If the PCs go to investigate where Sha'vre was attacked, a Wisdom (Perception) check might reveal two sets of prints. An Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check may reveal that one set is clearly Sha'vre's while the other seems to be at least a couple sets of footprints, though small and seemingly irregular in stride. The latter footprints seem to arc around the camp, from west to east, just within the tree line. If they follow the tracks to the east, they come across Yeana, back out investigating the tracks on the east side of the camp.

GRYST'S RIGHT-HAND

If the PCs investigate the guard's report, whether first or second, the recently promoted captain of the guard, Yeana, tells the PCs the following:

- She couldn't get a good look through the snow and dim light, but she definitely saw something moving around the camp.
- She scouted out just enough to see footprints, though she couldn't make them out well. All she could tell was that there appeared to be more than one set and seemed as if they were dragging something.
- She couldn't make out which direction the thing was traveling, but the tracks seem to circle the camp just on the other side of the trees.

By the time the PCs investigate the tracks themselves, the falling snow has hidden any distinguishing marks. However, the depressions left in the snow can still be tracked in either direction. If they follow the tracks back west, they find Joselyn and Nal trying to comfort Kar'lai.

ALTERNATIVE PLANS: GATHERING AROUND THE FIRE

The PCs might plan to forego tracking the threat into the woods and instead gather the remaining caravan members around the fire to try and wait out the night and storm.

If so, Nal and Joselyn might remind them that they only have enough wood to burn brightly for another hour or so, having previously picked the copse clean of burnable wood.

Nal might appeal to the PCs as the only option to protect them, to keep the passengers and children from being picked off one-by-one. He may also indicate that Yeana and the other guards are only trained to fend off a few bandits or errant wolves, not this unnatural threat.

That said, if the PCs insist on safety in numbers, simply skip the Trailing Behind encounter. Once the PCs resume watch, and once the fire has died down, the swarms of ice sprites from Chapter 4 might begin threatening the caravan, first with skirmishes against their inconsistent torchlight and eventually coming in their full strength.

TRAILING BEHIND

Assuming the PCs follow the tracks farther to the east, whichever PC is leading should perform a Wisdom (Survival) check and will more or less find that the tracks lead deep into the copse.

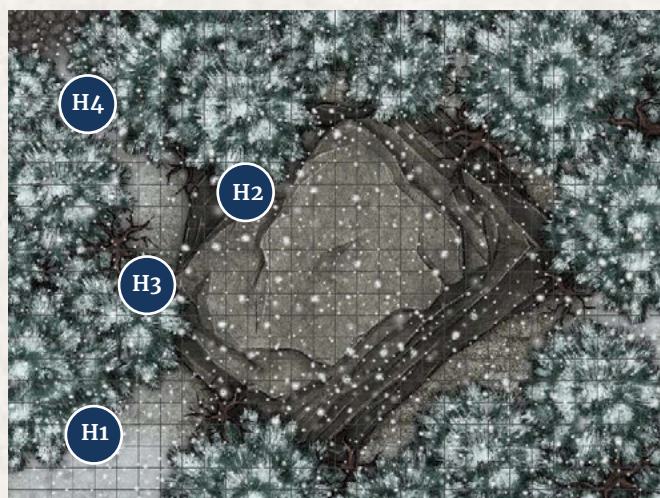
Additional Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) checks may be necessary as they make their way deeper into the gloomy copse. In addition, the opportunity might present itself for the PCs to find another visage of one of their profiles carved into the trees, now clearly conveying something sinister.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: HORROR

To signal the dangers ahead, have the PC whose visage was carved into the tree perform a DC10 Charisma saving throw, or else gain a short-term form of madness. For APL 1 – 3, have any effect end with appropriate intervention from fellow PCs. (See also DMG Chapter 9: Adventuring Options; Fear and Horror).

Eventually, the tracks fade away as they lead up onto a bald hilltop, the surrounding area growing more and more rocky as they near the canyon wall.

KEYED MAP: HILLTOP



H1. TRACKS

The PCs arrive from the southwest, following the trail of several sets of tracks and drag marks that led away from the camp. The perpetual strong winds have swept the falling snow, along with any remaining tracks, clean off the bare rock covering the small hilltop. The last set of tracks led up onto the rocky outcropping: Perhaps if the PCs were to search the surrounding snowbanks they may find where the tracks pick up again. However, the copse of mountain fir is thick around the hilltop, casting a dark gloom to the understory.

H2. LAMED WOLVES

Two wolves, previously injured, lie in wait for the first PC to come within their limited bounding range. See also Tactics.

H3. SMALL SWARM OF ICE SPRITES

Following the same trail as the PCs, a swarm of ice sprites hunt for their escaped prey. They find the PCs only after the PCs finish off the lamed wolves. After the encounter with the wolves is complete, the ice sprites wait in ambush for the first unsuspecting PC to come within range (See also Skirmish with the Swarm).

H4. PATH OF THE FLEEING ICE SPRITES

Following the Skirmish with the Swarms, below, the PCs see at least a few ice sprites flee to the northwest, disappearing into the canyon wall just at the edge of their perception.

Roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check (+4) for each wolf, averaging the result.³ As the PCs start searching for where the tracks pick back up again, the first PC who comes close enough triggers the wolves' attack.

Roll initiative, including for each wolf and the lynxal if it accompanied the PCs. All creatures whose passive Wisdom (Perception) does not beat the lamed wolves' average Stealth rolls – including the lynxal (passive perception 14) are surprised for the first round of combat (See PH Chapter 9: The Order of Combat; Surprise). Any PCs recently

scouting for tracks near the wolves may substitute their most recent active Wisdom (Perception) check. Those PCs who are not surprised may hear something moving in the shadows, but are unable to see the wolves until they attack from where they lie hidden on their first turn.

LAMED WOLF

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Senses Passive Perception 13

Languages --

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The wolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The wolf has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the wolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

TACTICS

The pair of wolves will attempt an ambush, waiting until a PC comes within their limited movement range. As pack members, they attempt to coordinate their attacks, taking full advantage of their pack tactics. Both have already taken damage (as already built into the stat block, above), with one favoring a leg that seems to drag behind it and the other with one eye appearing frost-covered and opaque (though the other eye remains functional).

Because they are injured, slowed, and feel cornered by the PCs who seem to have been stalking them, the lamed wolves feel they have no other option left: They will fight to the death without attempting to flee.

For lower APL parties or less experienced players, the lynxal will not use its Emotional Suppression action, as these natural beasts might not present a significant threat. Instead, it will spend its turns growling and tentatively swiping at the heels of one of the wolves, providing the Help action to one of the PCs.

For higher APL parties and at the DM's discretion, the Lynxal might spend its first action using its Emotional Suppression ability. Though requiring no verbal, somatic, or otherwise obvious indication to the PCs, the lynxal will target the wolves and any other creatures within 30 feet of

³ For APL 3 or higher, the two wolves might be substituted for a lone, lamed dire wolf (CR1), modified by decreasing its movement by 15 feet and removing the base-modifier for both its HP and damage (e.g., 2d6 piercing damage, rather than 2d6 + 3). For APL 5

or more, a lone, lamed winter wolf (CR3) may be more appropriate, following the same modifications (See also Monster Manual: Appendix A, for base stat blocks for these alternatives).

it which have taken either an attack action or reaction so far – i.e., any creatures already acting on their fight-or-flight instincts.

All such creatures must make a DC13 Wisdom saving throw or else become suddenly devoid of any strong emotions, such as those that would prompt further fight-or-flight actions. These creatures are considered charmed against all enemies and dangers for 1 minute (See PH Appendix A: Conditions; Charmed). Any affected creature can repeat its saving throw at the end of its next turn, or might be shaken or otherwise snapped out of the charmed state by other PCs at the DM's discretion. It will then spend its future turns growling and swiping at the heels of one of the wolves, providing the Help action to one of the PCs.

REWARDS

If the PCs defeat the pair of wolves, they receive 100XP, divided between them.

If a PC has proficiency with the necessary tools, they may be able to harvest from one or both wolves. There is no additional treasure to be found.

Regardless, with an Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) or Wisdom (Animal Handling, Medicine, or Survival) check, the PCs might realize that the wolves were injured in the same manner as Gryst, and that each has part of its body that seems almost frozen solid.

If appropriately skilled or with a high enough roll, the PCs might also realize that for multiple wolves to have been attacked in this way – or if scaling, for such a large creature as a Dire or Winter Wolf to have been injured so badly – the beast(s) may have been attacked by more than one creature.

At the very least, it is clear these wolves weren't the creatures that attacked either Gryst or Sha'vere. Perhaps by simply appealing to a high passive Intelligence (Investigations) score or related ability, at least one PC should realize that whatever attacked Sha'vere was likely attacking these wolves before being interrupted. When Sha'vere presented a more tempting prey, the wolves took their opportunity to flee.

CHAPTER 4 — NO REST FOR THE WEARY

A small swarm of ice sprites crossed the trail of the adventurers when pursuing the pair of lamed wolves that they had previously abandoned (Refer back, as needed, to the above Keyed Map: Hilltop, above, as well as Appendix A: Stat Blocks). The swarm of sprites is timid and cowardly, wishing only to ambush an unsuspecting victim.

SKIRMISH WITH THE SWARM

If the PCs are sufficiently diminished in resources, prompt a group Wisdom (Perception) check after the PCs finish investigating the wolves, presumably to try find any further tracks or clues. While they see no other tracks in their immediate vicinity, they do hear what sounds like icicles softly chiming within the trees near where they arrived. If they investigate, a swarm of ice sprites flees towards its lair, as described under Tactics. Alternatively, if the PCs can take at least one more hit, then roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check (+5) for the swarm of ice sprites.⁴

Roll initiative. If the lynxal is with the PCs and its passive perception of 14 beats the ice sprites Stealth roll, then the PCs notice it bolt upright, first staring off into the woods, then moving behind the small cover provided by the legs of the nearest PC. For lower APL parties, the lynxal refuses to engage. Instead, it stays close to and behind the cover of the PC that is farthest from the swarm of sprites.

For higher APL parties or more experienced players, have all PCs within 30 feet of the lynxal make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, or else find themselves at peace with their impending death (PCs who have already saved against the lynxal's Emotional Suppression automatically succeed). Any PC who failed is considered charmed against all enemies and dangers for 1 minute. They may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, or might be shaken or otherwise snapped out of the charmed state by other PCs at the DM's discretion.

Any PCs not under the lynxal's Emotional Suppression who have a passive Wisdom (Perception) higher than the ice sprites' Dexterity (Stealth) roll are not surprised when the ice sprites attack. All others are surprised.

TACTICS

If the opportunity presents itself before the party is fully alerted to its presence, the small swarm of ice sprites will attack. If the swarm attacks, they speak to their victims, but this is little more than disturbing, gruesome whispers heard only by their immediate victim. These are at the DM's discretion, but included below are a couple rhymes to signal the stakes for the PCs and tie in the carved visages:

*Carve your image into ice,
your likenesses we will collect;
Her ladyship takes your warm, weak flesh,
then she strengthens, then perfects.*

⁴ For APL 3 or higher, consider substituting a regular swarm of ice sprites for the Small Swarm, as found in Appendix A, or have the

small swarm fight to the death, leaving only a few remaining sprites that flee towards their lair, as noted under Rewards, below.

*Ahhh, laugh as we rend your skin
As you become like winter, hoarfrost and ice,
Fear us not as we gather your soul,
Oh, new sibling, do come play nice!*

*Mmmmm, strong of mind, strong of bone and
strong of sinew turned to icy stone.*

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: HORROR

If using the optional horror mechanics, above, this may be an opportunity to signal to the players the dangers of the protracted battle. Any PC who hears these whispers should perform a DC10 Charisma saving throw or gain a short-term form of madness. For APL 1 – 3, the effect ends with any damage or appropriate intervention from fellow PCs.

Importantly, following any aggressive action from the PCs, the small swarm will flee at the next opportunity. It will disengage, if necessary, then spend its turns moving its full flying speed and dashing, if available. The flying swarm easily glides over the snowy landscape as it escapes, whereas the PCs encounter deep snow drifts once off the wind-swept hilltop, which presents difficult terrain.

REWARDS

If the PCs are fortunate enough to kill the ice sprites before they can flee, they receive 200XP, divided between them. If they are sufficiently depleted of resources, this may serve as the final combat, without making reference to their lair or the Feywild (See also Conclusion). If PCs still have sufficient resources – perhaps needing only to recover some hit points (hp) – they notice a few remaining ice sprites flee from the larger swarm as it dies, heading towards their lair, as described above.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: EVERY CARAVAN HAS A FIELD MEDIC

If the group is seriously injured, an Intelligence check may remind them that Joselyn has medical training. Joselyn will offer to administer some measure of additional first-aid and healing with a few remaining uses of her healer's kit, or even offer a precious common healing potion or two (See also PH Chapter 6: Feats; Healer).

Whether during combat or as the ice sprites flee, it takes an active Wisdom (Perception) check to see that the translucent, shimmering figures are each roughly fist-sized and they seemed to roil and roll over one another as they skim across the snow. They seemed to disappear into the side of the canyon, though no tracks are left in their wake. Any PC attacked by the sprites may have the uncanny impression that one of them had a face that looked a little like Gryst's.

In any case, while the figures generally remain indistinct, any Wisdom (Insight, Perception, or Survival) check likely reveals that the creatures seemed to be fleeing towards safety, and the PC performing the check might fairly intuit that the gap in the canyon's wall is the entrance to their lair. If appropriate, a PC may also find another visage of one of the party members, carved in the trunk of a tree near where the swarm fled.

Having scared off the initial wave and having located the ice sprites' lair, the PCs may wish to regroup back at camp to take a short rest. However, the storm is only increasing in strength and the camp's supply of wood is dwindling. By appealing to a PC's high Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) score, at least one PC should realize that the remaining caravan members won't be safe while any of these creatures remain in the vicinity.

A CALM BEFORE THE STORM

When the PCs are ready to proceed, read or paraphrase the following text:

From atop the windswept hill, it is easy enough to locate the opening in the canyon's wall: a foul, frigid wind gusts out from behind a few rugged shrubs and around the snow that has accumulated against the canyon's wall.

Behind the shrubs, there appears to be what was once a natural, small cave opening that has been dug out a bit, albeit haphazardly and only roughly buttressed up. Circling and sniffing at the cave's entrance, the small lynx-like creature gives a low growl, then cautiously backs up under a nearby bush.

Have all PCs who have not previously saved against the lynxal's Emotional Suppression make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, or else find themselves calmly accepting the inevitable bleakness of this cold, dark night. That said, either by being shaken by a fellow PC or simply coming back to their senses after an indeterminate length of time, the charm effect is easily removed from the affected PCs.

Even if all PCs have previously saved, they feel the wave of dampened emotions pass over them. If they haven't already, the PC with the highest passive insight might realize that the lynx-like creature seems to be causing this calming effect. Perhaps with a prompted Intelligent (Nature) or Wisdom (Insight or Survival) check, a PC may at least suspect that the effect is an innate fear response on behalf of the lynxal – i.e., each time it has experienced fear or a significant danger this evening, it also attempted to suppress the emotions of any creatures in its vicinity.

At the very least, the lynxal doesn't appear to have wished the caravan members any harm. The lynxal understands Common and Sylvan and it will comply and even appear remorseful for any trouble it has caused before quickly scampering back to its hiding place.

A CHILLING CELLAR

As the PCs enter the cave, those with darkvision or a suitable light source find that the inside immediately opens up into an immense cavern.

KEYED MAP: ICY LAIR



11. ENTRANCE

The PCs enter through the small, slightly worked hole found in the canyon walls which opens up into a cavern with a towering height – one that seems inconsistent with the possible dimensions when viewed from outside. The cavern ceiling appears slightly domed, but disappears into the gloom overhead, at least for any PC with darkvision up to 120 feet.

The cavern has ice-covered walls and an even, packed dirt floor scattered with loose rocks, which range from fist-sized to perhaps as large as a haversack. Scattered around the cavern are also several larger, flat-topped boulder outcroppings, ranging from around 10 to 25 feet in height, glistening with frost and ice that may make them difficult to climb (a DC 10 – 15 Strength (Athletics) check is needed, depending on their height).

12. OLD CAMPFIRE AND BROKEN FURNITURE

Within 60 feet of the entrance there is the scattered, cold remains of a campfire and various broken bits of furniture and other detritus, indicating that perhaps someone took shelter here from a similar winter storm. If they move forward to investigate, an Intelligence (Investigation) check may reveal that a battle occurred here, as there are several pieces of broken and discarded weaponry scattered around.

13. BROKEN CHESTS

There are two chests, likely remaining from whomever built a camp in the cavern. With an Intelligence (Investigation) check, the PCs may find that the western chest is unlocked and not trapped, but merely contains antiquated, moldy clothes.

With a second Intelligence (Investigation) check, the PCs find that the eastern chest is locked. They may also realize that while not trapped, *per se*, there are razor-sharp ice shards that have formed around the closed lid.

The chest has an Armor Class of 15 and 6 hit points. Any attempt to open the chest using brute force will shatter its contents. However, if the PCs take the chest back to camp, Yeana will offer to help open it.

Alternatively, a PC with proficiency in thieves' tools may attempt a DC 13 Dexterity check to unlock the chest. Once unlocked, any PC who attempts to open the chest without doing so carefully takes 1d4 slashing damage from the icy shards.

The chest contains various vials and bottles, but most of them are already shattered or cracked. Near the bottom, a PC may find one or two small vials containing red liquid which seems to shimmer when swirled around. If the PCs are unable to identify the potions, Joselyn will be able to easily identify them as common Healing Potions.

14. SWARM(S) OF ICE SPRITES

Swarm(s) of ice sprites wait in ambush, well-hidden behind and pressed up against the icy boulders.

15. FROZEN CORPSES

The ice sprites have piled up several corpses in the back corner. The bodies are nearly all frozen solid, though seemingly otherwise unharmed. Given the expressions of terror on their faces, it appears as if they were frozen in an instant, with all their warmth suddenly stolen away.

With any Intelligence (Investigation) check, the PCs will find Gryst, including one or both of his light hammers that he carried in his belt and a now-brittle set of studded

leather armor that could probably be oiled back up and repaired.

Depending on the Intelligence (Investigation) roll, among the other bodies the PCs may find other treasures. The DM should consult the treasure hoard tables in the DMG, Chapter 7: Treasure, for the appropriate APL and challenge rating, modified at the DM's discretion for their particular style of play.

For example, an APL 1 party may find the following if they take enough time to search: Up to 240 copper, 122 silver, and 36 gold pieces. With a sufficiently high Intelligence (Investigation) roll, the PCs may also find up to eight small blue quartz stones, hard to pick out against the ice, probably worth about 10gp each, along with a potion of greater healing and 3d10 (15) arrows (or bolts) that look exceptionally sharp and accurate (+1).

Finally, just when the PCs think they are done searching, they find Sha'vere, who is unconscious and nearly mistaken for being frozen given how cold she feels. However, she is still breathing, if barely. She is wearing only a nightshirt, but with a golden locket around her neck that may be worth 5gp. To seed a future adventure and at the DM's discretion, the locket might be ajar with a note starting to slip out. This note may provide a potential story hook should the PCs save her. For narrative flare, see The Lady of the House as a means of interrupting any PC that is attempting to immediately read the note.

16. CAVERN OPENING LEADING DEEPER INTO THE CAVE

In what appears to be worked stone, there are steps leading up towards the back of the cavern. The adventurers will be best served avoiding going deeper into this unnatural structure (See also The Lady of the House, below, as a means to discourage the PCs from delving deeper).

LIKE A SWARM OF TRAPPED, CREEPY RATS

Any swarm(s) of ice sprites begin out of line of sight of the PCs, well-hidden against the large icy boulder outcroppings.⁵ If the PCs are cautiously scouting the cavern, have the PCs roll a group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the average beats the ice sprites' passive perception of 14, the ice sprites might be surprised, at least until the PCs are within line of sight. A DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check from the PC scouting the area may indicate where the ice sprites are hiding.

If the PCs are not actively scouting for enemies, then when a swarm has the opportunity to attack, preferably on a PC within 5 ft. of a frost-covered boulder or wall, roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check (+5) for the attacking swarm.

Roll initiative. Any PCs with a passive Wisdom (Perception) higher than the ice sprite's Stealth roll are not surprised. All others are surprised when the first swarm of ice sprites attacks. If there is a second swarm present, determine which received damage, if any, from the prior skirmish. The second swarm of ice sprites will remain hidden and only join combat following the first swarm's attack.

TACTICS

Ice sprites are cowardly, but they are now fighting within their lair and will fight to the death.

Given their flying speed and Frosty Stealth trait, they will attack, move, and attempt to hide each turn if doing so does not provoke an opportunity attack, such as when a PC is within 5 ft. of any icy boulder or cavern wall.

If a swarm ends up surrounded by three or more hostile creatures, that swarm will disengage, move, and attempt to hide as a bonus action in order to ambush again on their next turn.

As a reminder, when the swarm attacks, they seem to whisper to their victims, perhaps offering a growing threat that the PCs will soon join them, making a worthy addition to their lady's collection. If the DM has been making use of horror mechanics, above, the target PC must make a DC 10 Charisma saving throw upon hearing their whispers, perhaps even when the swarm misses on an attack, or else gain a short-term form of madness through the end of their next turn (See also DMG Chapter 8: Madness; Madness Effects).

The nature of these whispers is at the DM's discretion, but included below are a few additional rhymes that might increase the tension, perhaps using Gryst's voice for the first offering:

Jävla warmth! Jävla life!

Join us, Comrades, join Winter's strife.

Tasty forces within, let loose your storm;

Remake you in our image, we will, a chill and frigid form.

⁵ For APL 2, consider adding a second small swarm of ice sprites.

For APL 3 or higher, the small swarm of ice sprites can be substituted for a single, regular swarm of ice sprites.

For APL 4 - 6, consider adding one or two small swarms of ice sprites in addition to the regular swarm, or a second regular swarm.

*Our mistress comes, please, do make yourself at home.
All types can be reborn, be you orcish, goblin, or gnome!*

*Mmmmm, yes, you must reject the
warmth that you have lived in.
Suck out the marrow, mine brothers,
for unto the lady this shall be given.*

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: HORROR

If using the optional horror mechanics, any PC who hears these whispers should perform a DC10 Charisma saving throw or gain a short-term form of madness until the end of their next turn. For APL 1 – 3, the effect should end with any damage or appropriate intervention from fellow PCs.

REWARDS

If the PCs defeat the swarm(s) of ice sprites, they receive 200XP for any small swarm of ice sprites and 700XP for any regular swarm of ice sprites, divided between them.

There is nothing left to harvest from the ice sprites. As individual members of the swarm died, and eventually as the creature itself is destroyed, the tiny bodies seemed to dissipate, steaming off weapons like sublimating ice, leaving no identifiable traces behind other than a few pieces of gossamer-thin, discarded cloth.

Exploring the remainder of the cavern, the PCs might easily find two old and broken chests and a couple dozen bodies, mostly commoners and caravan guards (See also Keyed Map: Icy Lair, for detailed rewards found in each of these locations).

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE

As the PCs finish gathering their rewards, they hear an echoing tapping sound slowly growing louder. Whether the PCs investigate or attempt to flee, read or paraphrase the following:

The noise relentlessly approaches down the back steps of the cavern, and as it does it more clearly takes on the rhythmic tapping of a cane. A voice, raspy with age, calls out around the curve in the stairs, “Here, here, my tiny darlings. What have you brought your nanna-dearest? Any young ones, this time, needing a tender embrace?...Huh, what’s this? I can’t...WHO TREADS HERE UNINVITED?!”

With a final roar, a ferocious gust of wind blows down into the main cavern, coating everything in the vicinity in a fresh layer of hoarfrost and causing a maelstrom of snow and sleet to swirl through the air. The cavern walls start to tremble as ice shards fall from the unseen ceiling overhead, and a few tumbling rocks can be heard crashing down near the cavern’s only exit.

A Bheur Hag is descending the back stairs, and the PCs have only a few moments to flee (See also *Volo’s Guide to Monsters*: Bheur Hag). The DM might offer an easy skills challenge, perhaps starting with a Dexterity saving throw to retain their footing on the fresh, slippery ice that coats the cavern floor, or they may simply allow the PCs to flee.

CONCLUSION

After the PCs exit the cavern, read or paraphrase the following text:

As the final buttressing timbers collapse, the tumbling rocks grind to a stop. The raspy voice – along with the frigid, foul wind – seems to be similarly cut off. And the intense snowstorm that has been buffeting through the pass all evening is now nothing more than a few swirling flakes, gently settling down upon your shoulders.

From nearby, the lynx-like creature bounds forward and starts entwining itself between your legs. And as it does, you find the surrounding snow has taken on almost a warm glow. Looking up, you find that the sun is struggling to rise over the ravine’s edge, and it oddly seems to be approaching dawn.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: MEMORY LOSS

PCs might immediately perform a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or else find themselves unable to remember anything since they had entered the cavern at close to midnight, which may feel to them like just moments ago. Those who succeed retain their memories, though the details are indistinct. PCs who have the Fey Ancestry trait, such as elves, automatically succeed (See also DMG Chapter 2: Feywild).

Regardless of how the PCs realize the time distortion, they may find it unnerving. If appropriate, with an Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check, a PC might have heard about such time warps occurring when crossing between the material plane and the Feywild. They may suspect that the cavern entrance was merely a thin veil between the planes. At any rate, the collapse of the entrance seems to have sealed off this side from any immediate threats, perhaps somehow strengthening the veil for a time. At the very least, as the sun breaks momentarily from behind the clouds, their actions have clearly had the impact on the weather.

NEARLY DEPARTED

ADAPTATION FOR RIME OF THE FROSTMAIDEN (RotF)

As appropriate, the DM may make the effects of dawn, and the description of daylight, align to the RotF setting.

If using this adventure within a normal wintery setting, the glow of dawn, above, might be a warm orange.

But if the DM is using this adventure within RotF, the dawn might instead be merely vestiges of twilight, given Auril’s continued influence.

Similarly, references to sunlight in the boxed text, below, might be substituted out for the little hope offered by the short break in the ever-present darkness around Ten Towns, the slight dim light provided by twilight between 10am and 2pm every day.

When they arrive back at camp, Nal and Joselyn are just finishing packing and are eager to get underway. They might briefly relate that when the PCs didn’t return, they assumed the worst. With the sudden break in the storm

this morning, they intend to get as much distance as possible between themselves and this *skit* cope.

If any PCs who recall their time in the Feywild wish to relate their tale, Joselyn shows a keen interest and might fill the PCs in on some additional lore about the fey and the strange time-altering and memory effects that can occur when passing between the Feywild and the material plane.

Upon seeing Sha'vere, all sense of calm leaves Kar'lai as she eagerly runs up to check on her sister and to thank the PCs. Nal excuses himself to get the wagons underway, and Joselyn joins Kar'lai in the back of one of the wagons as she begins fretting over and trying to warm up the still unconscious Sha'vere. At the DM's discretion, this may be a good opportunity to seed the next adventure with a story-hook based on Sha'vere's necklace and the note that fell out.

A RENEWED CALM

If a particular player took a shine to the lynxal, read or paraphrase the following text as a means of providing a final closing:

The going is slow as the caravan gets underway, as almost everyone is feeling some level of exhaustion from the previous night. But eventually the troubles from the previous night seem to recede as the rocking of the cart lulls many of you to sleep.

[*Relevant PC*], with the reassuring weight of the strange lynx-like creature nestled up against you and the now-steady sunlight warming your face, you in particular find yourself drifting off into a well-deserved rest. And yet, in what couldn't have been more than a handful of minutes, you awake with a slight jostling of the cart's bench. It takes you a moment of searching, but you find the lynx-like creature as it scrambles up the canyon's southern ridge.

As it crests the top, it turns to sit calmly amidst the powdery snow, and it seems to blend in perfectly with the serene landscape. With a slight tilt to its head, it seems to pick you out again in the caravan passing below.

Its serene bearing seems reassuring, and while you are clearly too far away to feel any effects of its self-defensive trait, you nevertheless find a measure of calm pass over you. Surprisingly, though you only slept for a span of minutes, you find you are filled with sense a renewed energy, perhaps even hope, for the journey that lies ahead.

Alternatively, for a more general closing, read or paraphrase the following:

The going is still slow as the caravan gets underway, as almost everyone is feeling some level of exhaustion, perhaps even sorrow, from the previous night. But at least for now, with the sunlight poking out here and there around the few remaining clouds, everyone's nerves are a little less frayed.

Eventually, as the caravan turns the final bend before the promised waypoint, the lynx-like creature diverges from the path. It scrambles up the rocky slope and onto the ravine's southern ridge. As it looks down at the passing caravan, it calmly sits down amidst the powdery snow. Almost perfectly still, it seems to blend in with the serene landscape. The only thing that might catch your attention is the slight movement, a slight tilt to its head, as it seems to make eye contact with you. Its serene expression seems reassuring, and while you are clearly out of range of whatever self-defense trait the creature had employed, you might still find some measure of calm at having made it through the night's horrors. With that, and with the now-steady sunlight warming your face, you drift off into a deep and well-deserved rest.

OPTIONAL MECHANIC: CATNAP SPELL

The PC spotlighted above might also receive a parting boon from the fey feline companion, gaining a limited ability to cast the Catnap spell: Perhaps limited to just the PC, or else up to three willing creatures, the target(s) of this spell fall unconscious for 10 minutes. If their sleep is uninterrupted for the spell's duration, the target(s) gain the benefits of a short rest. The PC cannot cast this spell again until after finishing a long rest (See also *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* Chapter 3: Spells).

APPENDIX A: STAT BLOCKS

LYNXAL

Small fey, neutral

Armor Class 14 Natural Armor

Hit Points 18 (4d6+4)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances Cold

Condition Immunities Charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 14

Languages Understands but cannot speak or write Common and Sylvan.

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Senses. The lynxal has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight, hearing, and smell.

Sovereign Presence. The lynxal exudes an innate sense of belonging, and while other creatures notice its presence and may find its behavior curious, they otherwise defer to lynxal's natural ownership over its environment.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, and any targets medium or smaller must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Emotional Suppression. The lynxal targets all non-lynxal creatures within 30 feet that are exhibiting strong emotions. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be treated as charmed against all enemies and dangers for 1 minute. A charmed 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 the lynxal's Emotional Suppression for the next 24 hours. A creature has advantage on the saving throw if it suffers any harm while charmed.

LYNXAL

Lynxals resemble the common lynx which inhabit the material plane but for two distinctive features: they have a prominent ruff along their chest and they have retained long, bushy tails. They tend to have coats that blend naturally with the environment in which they are found, whether snowy whites, mottled mountain tans, or more vibrant colors seen only deep within the Feywild. While by no means domesticated, some lynxals are known to form long-standing bonds with humanoid families in more remote areas, often times mistaken for very large household cats.

Regal Barring. Lynxals often appear aloof. Their motives can be enigmatic as they are seemingly indifferent towards the world around them. However, relying on keen senses and an ability to suppress instinctual desires and dangers, a lynxal has no trouble feeling at ease within – and perhaps even a sense of ownership over – its environment.

Inadvertent Power. The lynxal's natural calming ability erases any strong emotions, whether a creature's desires are to cause or to avoid harm. This serves the lynxal well both offensively for its hunting and defensively against more dangerous predators of the Feywild. However, its Emotional Suppression is indiscriminate, acting upon any creature within its vicinity whose emotions are currently aroused: once charmed by a lynxal, one might unwittingly be willing to face harm and even death while accepting such outcomes with a calm, placid demeanor.

Familial Bonds. Lynxal are prized companions in more remote areas, which is to say they occasionally adopt a humanoid family as their own. In addition to being skilled hunters and offering some measure of protection, they innately provide relief from the stress and worries of the world for their adopted families, all while benefiting from the comforts of more a civilized life, themselves.

SWARM OF ICE SPRITES

Ice sprites resemble a typical sprite – even one of the snow fairies or “frosts” of lore – only in appearance. They may be a familial offshoot that has turned feral in the more brutal Feywild Winter. However, most scholars believe they are nothing more than a simulacrum, having no real life of their own but created by hags or evil fey merely to advance the destructive, wild forces of Winter.

Frigid Defense. Rather than armor, ice sprites wear only a few wisps of clothing. They are indifferent to the cold and have naturally ice-hardened skin. And while they lack the invisibility of their summer cousins, they rely heavily on an uncanny stealth within the fierce winter weather of their natural habitat.

SMALL SWARM OF ICE SPRITES

Small fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 Natural Armor

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +5

Damage Resistances Cold; Piercing

Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Prone, Restrained, Stunned

Damage Vulnerabilities Bludgeoning; Fire

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

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 fey. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Frosty Stealth. While within a snowy or icy environment, the ice sprites can take the Hide action as a bonus action, even when within line of sight.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the ice sprite swarm has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Chill Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. Hit: 7 (2d6) cold damage or 3 (1d6) cold damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. The target must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be unable to regain hit points. An affected creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a successful save. The effect can also be ended with a greater restoration spell or comparable magic.

Brutal Damage. The sprites savagery extends to their fighting style, foregoing weapons for their sickle-shaped claws. As the claws sink in, they leave no mark, merely seeming to consume all warmth and life from their victims. And in a perversion of their summer cousins, rather than the sprites knowing the emotional states of those they touch, a victim of an ice sprite is said to hear the sprites' cruel intentions as the victim's lifeblood is drained of all warmth.

Comfort in Numbers. These tiny, cruel fey are rarely seen alone. Whether due to their natural camouflage or their unprincipled disposition, they prefer to ambush unsuspecting prey, fleeing at the first sign of aggression. However, they remain formidable in even a small swarm. In larger swarms, their innate magical resistance is accumulative, making them even more difficult to disperse, much less dispatch.

SWARM OF ICE SPRITES

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 Natural Armor

Hit Points 54 (12d8)

Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +5

Damage Resistances Cold; Piercing; Non-magical Bludgeoning and Slashing

Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Prone, Restrained, Stunned

Damage Vulnerabilities Fire

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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 fey. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Frosty Stealth. While within a snowy or icy environment, the ice sprites can take the Hide action as a bonus action, even when within line of sight.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the ice sprite swarm has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Chill Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. Hit: 28 (8d6) cold damage or 14 (4d6) cold damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. The target must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be unable to regain hit points. An affected creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a successful save. The effect can also be ended with a greater restoration spell or comparable magic.

APPENDIX B: PLAYER MAPS

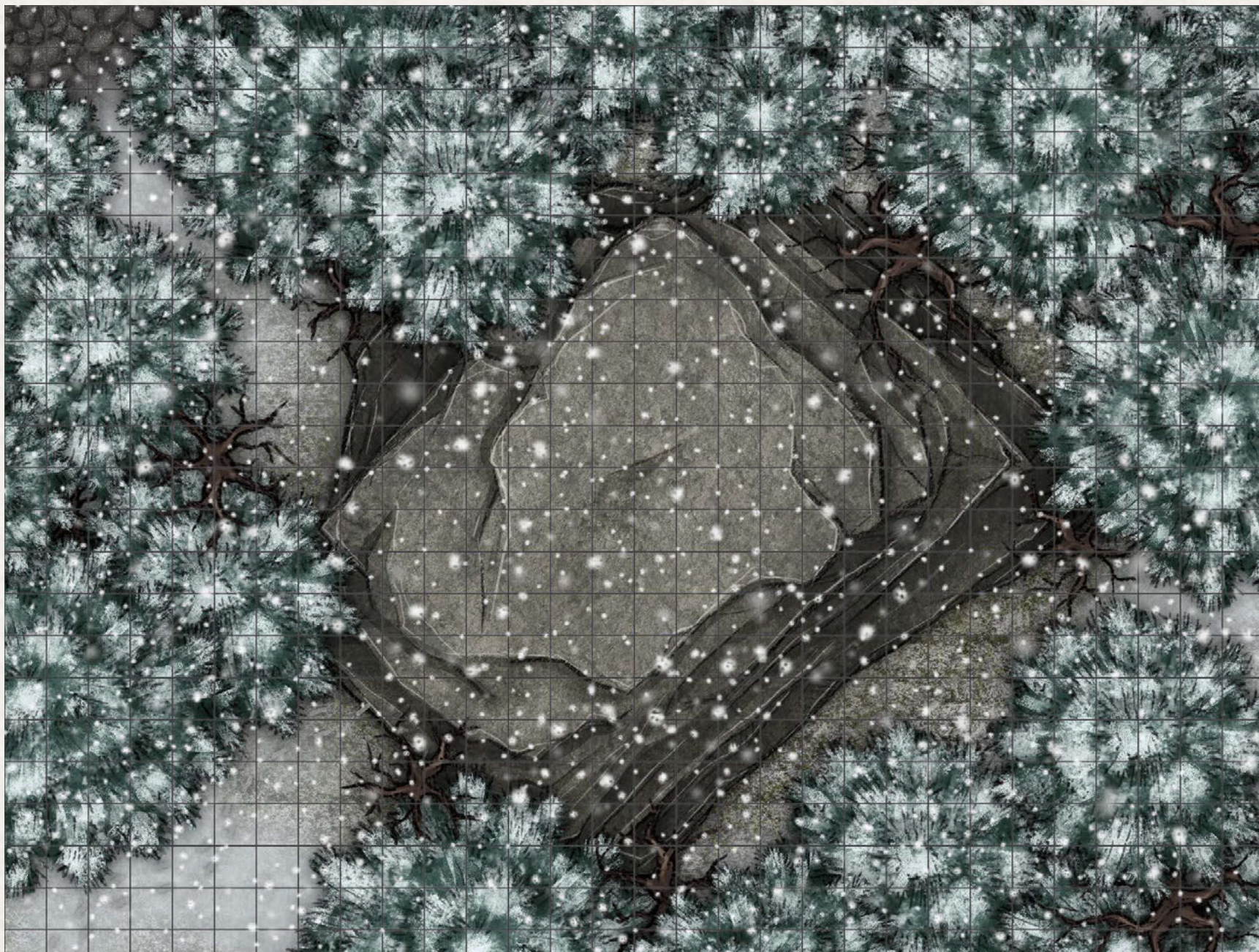
RIVERBEND



CAMPSITE



HILLTOP



ICY LAIR



CAN HOPE BE FOUND IN THE LONG, BLEAK NIGHT?

Accompanying a caravan through a wintery mountain pass, local heroes find that their travel is severely impeded by a gathering snowstorm. Hope of making it to the next waypoint is lost, but a small copse of fir might provide some shelter if they can keep the carts – and themselves – from sliding into the frozen river, first.

With exhaustion becoming a real danger and the snowstorm only strengthening, the adventurers find themselves stranded. And as dusk begins to fall upon them, so does a sense of dread. Despite the dangers, one by one the caravan crew inexplicably start losing all sense of fear, even the instinct of self-preservation.

The situation only grows more chilling. As night sets in and watches are posted, caravan members begin to go missing, leaving only the occasional frozen appendage behind to mark their passing. With warmth and resources waning, can these local heroes locate the real threat and protect both themselves, and the caravan, long enough to make it through the night?

