

COLD SNAP

ENCOUNTERS IN THE FRIGID WASTES

THE UNFORGIVING CHILL OF WINTER has set in, and the northern lands are buried under snow and ice. People tend to stay indoors this time of year, sitting by the burning hearth and looking at the placid snow from the safety of their homes. It is beautiful, pristine, and still.

Too still.

Within this peaceful snowscape lurk creatures that can tear a human in half with a single swipe of their paws, and shatter bones to splinters in their jaws. Creatures such as yetis, werebears, winter wolves, frost elementals, and white dragons stalk the frozen places of the world, and the common people of these places are right to fear them. Even adventurers who venture into the wastes, swaddled in furs and armed to the teeth, rarely return alive. Perhaps your adventuring party will be different?



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The following combat encounters, exploration encounters, and interaction encounters will help Game Masters create an engaging session of traveling the icy regions of the world—or can be used to fill out a random encounter chart to fill in the gaps of other adventures. These encounters are balanced for a party of four 6th-level characters.

AVALANCHE!

A sharp crack rings out through the icy air. Then a distant rumble. Then you feel the ground quake beneath you, the rumbling of falling snow thundering closer. An avalanche is racing down the mountains, and it is poised to swallow you whole.

Avalanches are one of the real world's most terrifying alpine hazards, with large avalanches containing well over 100,000 tons of snow and debris traveling faster than 200 miles per hour. Imparting the terror of fleeing for safety from such a deadly force of nature is crucial to presenting an avalanche as an exploration encounter.

An avalanche is almost impossible to outrun, as it accelerates every turn. A good way to define an avalanche encounter is to give the characters a clear end point, such as a safe cave to hide in or a mountain overhang to take shelter behind. High-level characters with access to incorporeality or teleportation magic need no such safeguard. Avoiding an avalanche completely is the ideal result in this scenario, even if it is done quickly through magic, as even a single character caught in the avalanche can become a rapidly compounding disaster.

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AVALANCHE SEVERITY

Severity	Area (Line)	Save DC	Damage
Minor Avalanche	30 feet long and 5 feet wide	13	1d4 cold plus 2d4 bludgeoning
Serious Avalanche	50 feet long and 10 feet wide	15	2d6 cold plus 4d6 bludgeoning
Severe Avalanche	100 feet long and 20 feet wide	17	4d8 cold plus 8d8 bludgeoning

A **minor avalanche** creates a line of snow and debris that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide, and has a saving throw DC of 13. A **serious avalanche** creates a line that is 50 feet long and 10 feet wide, and has a saving throw DC of 15. A **severe avalanche** creates a line of snow and rock that is 100 feet long and 20 feet wide and has a saving throw DC of 17.

An avalanche moves downhill by the quickest possible route on initiative count 20, moving 30 feet on the first round of initiative, and accelerating by 10 feet each subsequent round. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the avalanche's area must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity saving throw (creature's choice) or take damage as indicated on the Avalanche Severity table and be restrained as long as it is within the area. A creature restrained in this way takes that damage again at the start of each of its turns. As an action, a restrained creature can make a Dexterity check, escaping the avalanche and leaving its area on a success.

An avalanche stops moving when it can no longer move downhill. A creature restrained in the avalanche when it stops moving is buried and takes 1d4 cold damage at the start of each of its turns until it or another creature makes a successful Strength check to dig itself out.

CROSSING THE FROZEN BRIDGE

A wide and ancient bridge, its decorative statues and towers worn smooth by time and coated with frost, spans a dizzying chasm. When you are halfway across the bridge, the wind shifts. You hear the rushing of wind from beneath the bridge. Then, a shrieking roar. Hundreds of feet below you, a huge white dragon chases a smaller silver dragon through the chasm, headed towards the bridge.

The dragons pass under the bridge—and a tremor rocks the structure. The white dragon hit one of the support beams at full speed, and now the entire bridge is beginning to shudder. Two hundred feet behind you, stones begin to fall into the abyss as the bridge collapses.

In order to get to the other side of the bridge before it collapses, the characters must move 500 feet in 1 minute (10 rounds). Meanwhile, the bridge is crumbling inconsistently. At the start of each character's turn, roll a d10.

- On a result of 4 or lower, no hazard befalls the character during their turn.
- On a result of 5–7, a 10-foot-deep pitfall opens beneath the character, and the character must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the hole.
- On a result of 8–9, an icicle falls from one of the bridge's towers, and the character must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) cold damage.
- On a result of 10, an entire 30-foot radius section of the bridge falls away beneath the character, and the character must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall and catch their grasp on the ledge of the bridge. If a character fails this check by 5 or more, they do not catch the ledge and fall into the abyss below. Clambering up from the ledge takes 20 feet of movement.

If the characters do not make it to the other side of the bridge, they fall into the chasm. The ground is 200 feet below. Traversing the canyon forces the characters to take a long detour, costing them days



on the trip to their original destination, granting their enemies time to prepare for their arrival and exposing them to even more challenges on the road.

MAMMOTH WARRIORS

Lumbering towards you is a creature that shakes the ground with every step it takes. It is covered in fur, with massive tusks and a long snout—a wooly mammoth. Mounted atop it is an ugly, misshapen humanoid, nearly 12 feet tall. The ogre bellows, “Travelers, boys! Easy prey. Slaughter ‘em! Take their things!”

Four orcs spring out from behind the orc, scream a war cry, and rappel from the mammoth's back. The instant they hit the ground, they whoop again and charge towards you.

An **ogre** riding atop a **mammoth** stands 50 feet away from the characters while four **orcs** charge their position. The ogre and the mammoth do not enter combat until attacked or until the orcs have been defeated.

WINTER RIDERS

The thundering of hooves on stone echoes throughout the valley. Even the thick layer of snow on the ground can't deaden the noise. You first see them at a distance of 100 feet—and closing fast. Three riders on warhorses, surrounded by an icy blue aura. As they draw closer, you see that these riders are not human. Not anymore. Their armor is punctured and caked with blood. Beneath their helmets are frost-scarred, skeletal faces, and they ride upon horses of bone. The riders draw their crossbows.

Three skeletal **knights** riding on undead **warhorses** appear before the characters. They start combat 50 feet away from the characters and open combat with a volley of crossbow bolts as they close the distance. The knights and their horses have the undead type instead of the humanoid or beast type, have darkvision out to 60 feet, are vulnerable to bludgeoning damage, immune to poison damage, and immune to exhaustion and being poisoned. The knights understand Common but cannot speak.

A skeletal warhorse flees when its rider is killed.

WOLVES IN THE STORM

The wind howls all around, tearing at your skin and covering you in frost. What was only a passing snow flurry has turned into a raging blizzard, and you are caught in the middle of it. Somehow, the howling of the wind seems to be growing louder and harsher.

As a blizzard descends upon the party, the sudden change in weather may distract them from the pack of 4 **winter wolves** hiding in the snow nearby. The characters have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to spot the wolves because of the blizzard, and the wolves have a passive Dexterity (Stealth) of 18. (Their usual passive Stealth is 13, plus an additional 5 because of their Snow Camouflage trait.)

Two of the wolves are well fed and are only interested in fighting the characters for sport; they flee into the blizzard when reduced to half hit points. The other two are starving and fight to the death for their next meal. 🐾