

WINTER'S WRATH

A 5E ONE-SHOT ADVENTURE
FOR 2-6 HEROES OF 3RD LEVEL

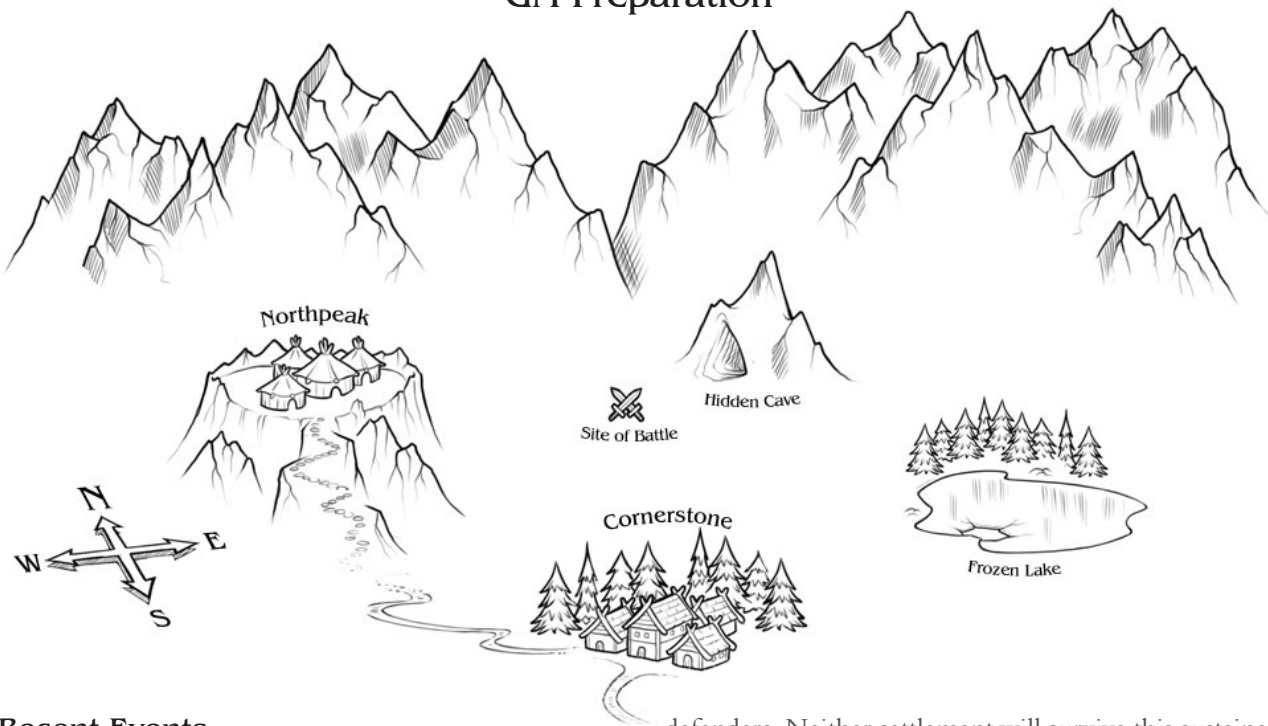


As the approach of spring warms the land, something foul has been freed from winter's icy grip. Can the heroes discover and deal with the source of this scourge before it wipes out the vulnerable settlements nearby?

Estimated play time: 4 hours.

Written & Illustrated by Joe Nittoly
JOE · NITTOLY · CA

GM Preparation



Recent Events

The townspeople of Cornerstone and the the Frostborn of Northpeak have long quarrelled with each other, sometimes violently. Last fall, a vicious skirmish broke out between the rivals over nearby hunting grounds in the foothills of the mountains.

Unbeknownst to the warring parties, the blood spilled that day awoke a fae spirit laying dormant beneath the soil. The spirit took up residence in an enchanted cave hidden in the nearby mountains, where its malevolence and power slowly grew over the quiet winter months.

Mara, a druid of Cornerstone, and Augrim, the shaman of Northpeak – both attuned to the land's energy – began to sense the angry spirit's presence. Setting out to investigate, they met in the foothills, formed an alliance, and discovered the enchanted cave together.

But by this time, the fae spirit was strong enough to overwhelm and imprison both mystics. They have been missing from their home settlements ever since. Their whereabouts unknown, each of the rival settlements blames the other for the disappearance of their priest.

As icy winter gave way to the spring thaw, the fae spirit had become strong enough to raise long dead warriors from their graves beneath a frozen lake. Driven by the same blind fury that had awoken it, the dark fae directed the undead to attack Cornerstone and Northpeak both.

And so, for the past three days, as the sun sets, a wave of undead warriors lay siege to both settlements, terrorizing the people and wearing down their

defenders. Neither settlement will survive this sustained onslaught for more than a day or two more.

Ignorant of the cause of these horrific attacks, the people of each settlement blame the other for the calamity. It is into this situation that your players' characters – the heroes of this adventure – are about to stumble.

About the Setting

The landscape is defined by largely untouched forests, lakes and rivers in the shadow of a high mountain range. This is frontier territory, where only two settlements – Cornerstone and Northpeak – have been established.

A trader road leads north from the more populous lands in the south, to Cornerstone. It is on this road that our heroes travel, in search of adventure.

Cornerstone

As the last northward settlement reachable by a proper road, Cornerstone is a small walled town populated mostly by humans, with a few dwarves, gnomes and half-elves thrown into the mix. Hunting, farming and sporadic mining in the nearby mountains are its main industries.

Northpeak

A narrow trail leads north-west from Cornerstone into the foothills to Northpeak, a primitive settlement of semi-permanent structures and a wooden palisade for defence. The rustic Frostborn who live there (mostly humans with a few half-orcs and half-elves among them) survive by hunting and farming the land.

The Adventure Begins

0. Introduction

You've been travelling the snow-covered landscape for the past week, having ventured north from the populated southlands to this frontier wilderness. The approach of spring is slowly releasing the land from winter's icy grip.

You walk a trader road through this unclaimed wilderness, hemmed in by silent dark forest to either side of you as you make your way.

Here, have the players introduce their characters, such as by giving their names, a brief description, and one key talent or skill they are known for.

1. Cornerstone

You've been walking all day. The sun sinks low in the horizon and the sky grows dark. Just as you think about looking for a place to camp, rounding a bend in the road, the gates of a walled town about a quarter mile ahead come into view.



a. Signs of Trouble

A thin column of black smoke rises ominously over the town. As you draw closer, you can see that portions of the wooden palisade have been hastily repaired after sustaining recent damage.

b. The Town Gates

A pair of haggard guards stand on the ramparts over the closed gates. They wear blood smeared gambesons and hold crossbows. They eye you warily as you approach, their breath steaming in the cold.

These guards are fatigued and tense, but otherwise bear neutral attitudes toward the heroes. As long as the heroes conduct themselves civilly, they'll be allowed in. Speaking with the guards may reveal the following:

Where are we? This is the town of Cornerstone, the only settlement of its kind within a week's travel.

What happened here? Undead warriors, risen from the grave, have attacked each night for the past three nights. Last night, they breached the wall, set alight several homes, and killed a dozen townspeople.

How bad is it? The first night there were two undead; the second night there were three, and last night there were four of the foul fiends. The wall is still being repaired, so if they attack again tonight, they'll waltz right in. Without help, the town is doomed.

Hook: "If you're of a mind to help, speak to Hoster Lott at the Inn. He's both innkeeper *and* mayor."

How to use this document

8. Location/Event Heading

Text written in this style is meant for your players to be told during the encounter. It can be read aloud to your players, paraphrased, expanded upon or replaced entirely with your own narrative however you, as the GM, see fit.

The text in this box is for the GM's eyes only. It provides behind-the-scenes context to the GM to help narrate the encounter based on the players' decisions, actions and questions.

A table is provided for each combat encounter as a convenient way to record your adversaries' initiative scores and track their hit points, as in the below example. You can write in your adversaries' hit points ahead of time and add their initiative scores when combat starts.

Adversaries	Init.	Hit Points
1: Banshee (CR 4)	16	58 42 36
2: Ghoul (CR 1)	12	22 18 7
3: Skeleton (CR 1/4)	8	13
4: Skeleton (CR 1/4)	8	13 6 7
5: Skeleton (CR 1/4)	8	13

2. Inside Cornerstone

Cornerstone is a small town of stone and timber buildings enclosed by a wall. Most of the town is intact, but smouldering ruins here and there tell of recent tragedy. The beleaguered townspeople eye you with wary curiosity.

The main thoroughfare leads to a central town square where stand several prominent structures:

- a. Inn.** A large two-story timber-framed structure with a sign out front reading “The Fool's Rest Inn.”
- b. Smithy.** A stone building from within which the ring of a hammer on steel can be heard. The sign out front reads “Ironchimes Smithy.”
- c. Trader.** A simple wooden building with a porch, its sign reading “Twiddlethin's Trade Goods.”
- d. Temple.** Set back from the main square, among a grove of trees, a small stone building with the symbol of an oak leaf carved over the archway.

a. The Fool's Rest Inn

The warm interior hosts a collection of weary occupants hunched over mugs of ale, whispering quietly to one other.

A robust man of middle-age, with black beard and bushy eyebrows, leans wearily on the bar, rubbing his temples. He straightens as he catches sight of you.

“Welcome, travellers, to the town of Cornerstone. My name is Hoster, your host and mayor. Would that we could meet under happier circumstances.”

Hoster Lott, Innkeeper (human male)

Hoster can share the following:

History. “The undead began attacking as the snows melted, as though the thawing ground released them from their icy graves.”

Opinion. “The Frostborn – those savages living in the highlands to the north of us – are surly to blame for this calamity. They've always resented our having settled here.”

Request. If the heroes agree to halt the undead attacks at the source, Hoster will reward them.

Lead. Hoster may suggest the heroes seek out Rahara, at the Temple of Silvanus, for more information.

Provisions. The Fool's Rest Inn provides “modest” food, drink and lodging.

b. Ironchimes Smithy

A stout, burly dwarf with a bald head and a long red beard toils at a forge. A few fine steel weapons and bits of armour line the mostly empty walls. He pauses to wipe sweat from his brow as you enter.

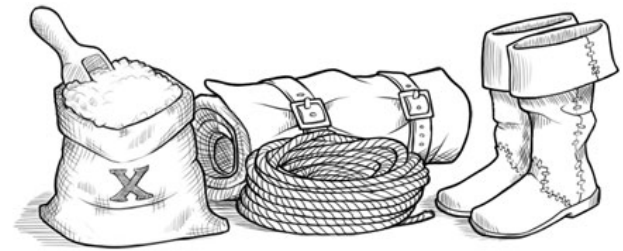
Cleggan Ironchimes, blacksmith (dwarf male)

Cleggan is a curt fellow with no patience for small talk. However, he can share the following:

History. “I lost my brother to the Frostborn last fall, his blood spilled in the Foothills where we fought those Frostborn savages of Northpeak.”

Opinion. “The Frostborn claimed the foothills as theirs alone, but everyone knows those woods lay within the domain of Cornerstone. Have done from the start!”

Provisions. Cleggan has some weapons and armour, but his stock is much depleted in the wake of the recent attacks. There is only a 50% chance he has any item listed on pages 145 and 149 of the PHB.



c. Twiddlethin's Trade Goods

A small fellow – barely three feet tall – with big ears and a pair of spectacles perched on his large nose, climbs onto a stool behind the counter to greet you:

“Welcome, gentles. How may I serve in these trying times?”

Seamus Twiddlethins (gnome male trader)

Seamus is talkative and amiable, but the gravity of the situation weighs on him. He can share the following:

Opinion. “Something foul is afoot out there – has been all winter. I can feel it in my gnomish bones and the fae blood coursing through these veins. And I don't just mean the bags of bones breaking down the gates. Something *else* has awoken – and I'm sure it was the Frostborn who woke it up!”

Provisions. Seamus sells most adventuring gear found on page 150 of the PHB.

d. Shrine of Silvanus

You approach a round stone building brushed with moss and an oak leaf sigil hanging over the archway.

Inside, the shrine is sombre but peaceful. Faint light filters through small high windows and a raised pool of water stands in the centre.

A woman in green robes, with long moss-coloured hair and slightly pointed ears, turns to face you as you enter:

“The Oakfather welcomes you, strangers.”

Rahara, Acolyte of Silvanus (half-elf female)

Rahara is an apprentice to the missing druid, Mara. She can share the following information:

History. “My mentor, the Archdruid Mara, has been missing since midwinter. She'd set out secretly to investigate a stirring of darkness in the foothills. I do not know her fate.”

Opinion. “Most believe the Frostborn responsible for the restless dead, but I'm not so certain. Surly, such foul magic is as hateful to them as it is to us.”

Religion. “Silvanus is guardian of all that mortals have yet to touch – the wild forests, the raging rivers, the high mountains. He teaches us to live in harmony with the wild spaces of the world.”

Mara. “Should you meet Mara, you will know her by her bright red hair and the oak leaf topped staff she carries.”

Provisions. If asked, Rahara may be persuaded to part with a sprig of 1d6 goodberries (PHB 246), depending, of course, on the heroes' conduct and their demonstrated reverence for her deity.

3. Undead Attack

This attack can occur at any point after sunset while the heroes explore Cornerstone.

The sudden, ominous ringing of a bell sounds within the town, followed by shouts of alarm: “Movement in the forest, due east! The undead approach! To arms! Defend the breach!”

The heroes will be implored to help defend the breach in the wall and defeat the undead.

a. At the Breach in the Wall

Beyond the gaping hole in the palisade wall, there is a 50 ft. clearing between the town and the forest surrounding it. A carpet of mist creeps from the forest. With a creak of leather and the clink of iron, crooked silhouettes take shape in the forest gloom. Shambling figures emerge, then, moonlight gleaming off rusted helmets and grinning skulls. They pause but briefly to note your presence, then raise weapons and charge!

This fight is meant to let the players try out their heroes' abilities, and so is slightly easier than normal. To make it more challenging, choose an adversary set corresponding to more players than are present.

2 Players – 2 Skeletons

3 Players – 1 Ghoul, 2 Skeletons

4 Players – 1 Ghoul, 4 Skeletons

5 Players – 1 Ghoul, 6 Skeletons

6 Players – 2 Ghouls, 4 Skeletons

Adjust the adversaries involved based on the number of players. Cross out any unused adversaries below.

Adversaries	Init.	Hit Points
1: Ghoul (CR 1)		
2: Ghoul (CR 1)		
3: Skeleton (CR ¼)		
4: Skeleton (CR ¼)		
5: Skeleton (CR ¼)		
6: Skeleton (CR ¼)		
7: Skeleton (CR ¼)		

Treasure

Taking the time to pick through the carnage turns up 4d6 gold pieces (from a long-ago age) and a cloudy glass vial (containing a Potion of Healing).

Perception (DC 12). A gleam of moonlight off metal reveals a tarnished silver tin buried in the snow near one of the fallen undead, containing Oil of Sharpness.

Clues & Leads

Survival (DC 12). The tracks left by the undead lead north-east into the woods. (Following them leads to **4. The Frozen Lake.**)

Perception (DC 12). The undead warriors' garments are waterlogged and caked in silt and their weapons rusted and draped in seaweed, suggesting they'd been submerged for a long time in water.

4. The Frozen Lake

The tracks are easily followed, left as they are in deep snow, therefore requiring no Survival check.

Over the next several hours, the tracks lead you into the foothills where snow still covers the land. The forest is cold and quiet, and the snow still quite deep here.

Eventually, you emerge from the forest to an expansive flat clearing – which you realize is a frozen lake.

Ice at the lake's edge has been shattered, and the frozen mud torn up as though something dragged itself free from its icy depths.

Clues & Leads

The obvious tracks left by the undead emerging from this spot show that they divided into *two* groups – one trudging south-west towards Cornerstone, and the other heading north-west to Northpeak.

Detect Magic. There is an aura of necromancy simmering beneath the ice which is slowly – almost imperceptibly – growing in strength.

Perception (DC 12). Through the translucent ice, the gleam of a metal helmets, swords and skulls can be seen – more undead are waiting to break free.

Nature or Survival (DC 12). The frozen lake is fed by an underground river flowing out of mountains to the north.

Players may want to wait at this location to fight the next undead to emerge. If you wish to stay within the 4-hour time frame, however, consider reminding them that a larger force of undead emerges each night (such that the next wave may be too powerful to defeat) and suggest that their time is better spent learning why the undead are rising in the first place.

Treasure

Among the scraps of armour and other detritus left behind by the freed undead, there lies a rotted leather satchel containing a cloudy glass vial, which is a potion of Resistance to Lightning. (If there are only 2 players, this is a Potion of Healing instead.)

Perception (DC 12). Something gleams in the murky water at the lake's edge – a glass vial on a chain around the neck of an ancient corpse half-buried in the silt contains a potion of Truesight (which works exactly as the True Seeing spell).

Tip: A fun way for players to identify newfound potions is for one of them to take a sip and have you describe a hint of the full effect experienced by that volunteer. If time is short, however, just declare that the potion is conveniently labelled.

5. Northpeak

The heroes can find Northpeak either by following the foot path north from Cornerstone or by following the second set of undead tracks leading north-west from the frozen lake.

The track leads you higher into the foothills where snow still covers the ground. The trees gradually thin out, making way for open, snow-swept plains.

In the distance, atop a rocky summit, you see a walled settlement, its gates shut tight. A red pennant flies from a central mast above a large yurt within. Black smoke rises ominously from beyond the gates.

As the heroes draw closer, they'll notice that...

The village is surrounded by a wall of rough-hewn timbers with evenly spaced arrow slits, but there are several gaps in the wall where it has been hastily repaired. Blood stains the snow-covered ground around those gaps, along with piles of decrepit bones, tarnished armour and rusty weapons.



a. The Closed Gates

If the heroes approach the gates...

You hear the strain of bowstrings drawn taught as arrows poke through slits in the wall, aimed at you...

The Frostborn sentries, who now take aim on the heroes, will demand to know their intentions. So long as a spirit of cooperation is demonstrated, the heroes will be admitted, albeit under watchful gazes.

6. Inside Northpeak

Northpeak is comprised of small hide tents and rotund yurts arranged around a communal circle at the settlement's centre. However, many of these structures lay in smouldering ruins.

The Frostborn are a tall, athletic people adorned with tattoos and dressed in fine hides and furs. Most are human, with a few half-elves and half-orcs among them.

From the village centre you make note of:

a. Chieftain's Tent. A large yurt – the largest in the settlement – with a red pennant flying from a central mast and a pair of massive antlers over its doorway.

b. Shrine. A dome-shaped tent of mottled greens and blues with a carved oak leaf over the opening.

a. Chieftain's Tent

As you enter, several Frostborn who'd been seated slowly rise, fingering weapons, eyeing you warily.

At the far end of the longhouse sits an old but robust man with a mane of silver hair, a long braided beard, and a crown of stag's antlers.

Drogeda, Trueborn Chieftain (human male)

Drogeda carries the weight of his peoples' suffering and is desperate to find relief for them, but will not tolerate any hint of insolence or disrespect.

He knows the following:

History. “The restless dead rose with the melting of the snow and have set upon our village for the past three nights. Many of our brave warriors and innocents alike have been struck down by this evil.”

Opinion. “Only the people of Cornerstone would be so malevolent as to unleash this curse upon us, for they covet our lands so.”

Reward. “If you would rid us of this undead plague, the Frostborn would reward you handsomely and sing of your worthiness forevermore.”

c. Shrine to Silvanus

Inside is a private forest glen, with greenery sprouting from the ground and vines climbing the inside of the tent walls in defiance of the wintry cold outside. A raised pool stands in the centre.

A young man wearing robes of blue and green nods to you. He has emerald green eyes, slightly pointed ears, and vine-motif tattoos covering his face and arms.

Rubane, Acolyte of Silvanus (half-elf male)

Unlike his testier Frostborn kin, Rubane is thoughtful and patient (perhaps on account of his elvish blood).

Opinion. “My brethren blame the people of Cornerstone for the walking nightmares who attack us. But I am doubtful. Like us, they honour Silvanus, to whom such foul magic is anathema.”

History. “Our Shaman, Augrim, met secretly with a druid from Cornerstone a few times over the winter. Together, they sensed a malevolent force stirring in the Foothills at the site of the battle between our peoples. Augrim confided in me that he and the druid planned to investigate an odd cave near that battleground on their next outing. That was midwinter. He has not been seen since.”

Augrim. “You will know Augrim by the vine tattoos – not dissimilar to my own – adorning his arms and face.”

Lead. Rubane can give directions to the site of the battle, which is but a few hours east of Northpeak.

7. Site of the Battle

The snow barely conceals signs of battle from the previous fall – torn up soil, discarded weaponry, and bits of armour and hide.

a. Circle of Black Stones

A depression in the snow-covered area reveals a shallow excavation: a circle of flat black stones engraved with odd sigils, situated in the middle of where the fighting occurred.

Clues & Leads

The odd sigils are inscribed in Sylvan, and therefore readable by a hero who speaks that language or one aided by the Comprehend Languages spell. The inscriptions identify a being named “Nula Nén of the Dark Water” followed by a ritual blessing meant to sooth its volatile nature by keeping it dormant.

Arcana or Religion (DC 15). Nula Nén is a fae water spirit. As such, she is susceptible to extremes of mortal emotion, such as the fury unleashed by the fighting between the Frostborn and the people of Cornerstone over her lands. The blood spilled here by their fighting awoke Nula Nén and infected her with malevolence. Destroying Nula Nén will cause her to be reborn into her naturally calm state.

b. Hidden Mountain Path

This path leads to **8. Enchanted Cave**. To keep things moving, it can be spotted automatically by any ranger, druid or barbarian in the party; any hero with the Outlander background; or, failing that, the hero with the highest passive Perception score.

You spot a narrow path, all but hidden by the snow, leading higher into the mountains.

8. Enchanted Cave

The narrow rocky path leads to the mouth of a cave. Curiously, the snow and ice around the cave mouth have melted. A faint green glow emerges from the darkness within.

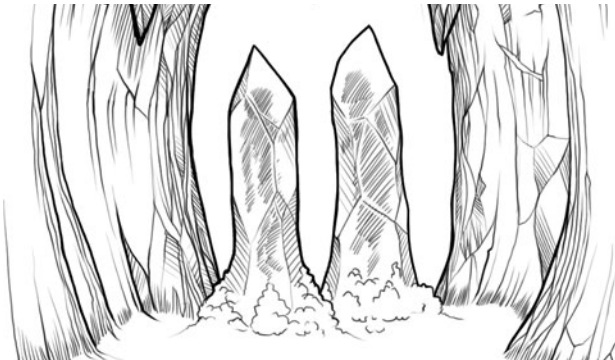
b. Tunnel

As you proceed through the narrow passage, a warm summer breeze suddenly wafts over you, the air growing warmer the deeper you go.

b. Cave Interior

The rocky passage leads to a large chamber filled – amazingly – with a vibrant forest! Sprawling undergrowth covers the ground, vines climb the cave walls, and trees tower above you. A hazy, sourceless illumination casts a dreamlike quality over all of it.

Detect Magic. An ancient fae magic infuses this place with light, life and perpetual summertime warmth.



c. Ice Columns

Near the rear of the cave stand two giant columns of ice, wisps of steam rising from them. Encased in each column is a hazy silhouette.

Perception (DC 15). Encased in one ice column is a red-haired female wearing green robes and clutching a staff. In the other is a dark-haired, fur-cloaked male with vine tattoos snaking up his bare arms.



d. Confronting the Dark Fae Spirit

Nula Nén is a recontextualized Will-o-wisp. She is invisible, watching the intruding heroes. Her corrupted dryad and blight minions lay hidden among the forest.

Any attempt to tamper with the ice columns triggers their attack. Nula Nén will hold back to direct her minions, but will use Consume Life on the first hero to fall in battle.

This fight is intended to be tougher than normal. To make it less challenging, choose an adversary set corresponding to fewer players than are present.

2 Players – 1 Dryad, 4 Needle Blights (in this case, Nula Nén is in the form of a Dryad)

3 Players – Nula Nén, 4 Needle Blights

4 Players – Nula Nén, 1 Dryad, 4 Needle Blights

5 Players – Nula Nén, 2 Dryads, 4 Needle Blights

6 Players – Nula Nén, 3 Dryads, 4 Needle Blights

Adjust the adversaries involved based on the number of players. Cross out any unused adversaries below.

Adversaries	Init.	HP
1: Nula Nén Will-o-wisp (CR 2)		
2: Dryad (CR 1)		
3: Dryad (CR 1)		
4: Dryad (CR 1)		
5: Needle Blight (CR 1/4)		
6: Needle Blight (CR 1/4)		
7: Needle Blight (CR 1/4)		
8: Needle Blight (CR 1/4)		

e. Upon Defeat of the Dark Fae

Upon Nula Nén's defeat, the dark fae spirit fades with a hollow sigh and the ice columns melt, freeing the captives inside.

Mara, Druid of Silvanus. This woman is human, with long red hair, green robes, and wearing a carved wooden oak leaf medallion.

Augrim, Shaman of Silvanus. This man is human, with long dark hair, a long braided beard, and vine tattoos across his face and arms.

Lore

Either Augrim or Mara can explain that the blood spilled by their people on the Foothills battleground awoke a malevolent fae spirit, which grew in power over the winter until finally freeing wave upon wave of undead from the frozen lake to attack both peoples in maniacal revenge.

Augrim or Mara: "You've accomplished a great deed this day. Had we died, the truth would have died with us – that the malevolence spread by this fae spirit was fed by the hatred our peoples bore each other. But now, we will return to our people and teach them to celebrate that which binds us, not what divides us. And this we can do, thanks to you."

Treasure

Augrim can revive one fallen hero.

8. Epilogue

Failure?

After defeating the heroes, Nula Nén corrupted the minds of Augrim and Mara, making of them dark lords of an undead horde that laid waste to Northpeak and Cornerstone alike.

The Dark Fae spirit continued to grow in power as her terrible influence spread, and whose undead forces eventually marched on the southlands.

The southern kingdoms raised an army to repel this scourge born of a hatred between two peoples. The battle continues still, awaiting new heroes to secure victory over the Dark Fae's horde.

Success!

Thanks to the heroes' freeing of Mara and Augrim, thereby allowing the truth of their stories to reach their respective kin, a new peace formed between Cornerstone and Northpeak.

Cleansing the enchanted cave of its corrupt fae spirit purified the river feeding the frozen lake, granting peaceful rest to its submerged fallen once more.

A gathering place was built at the lake's edge to host regular meetings between the people of Northpeak and Cornerstone. The most prominent feature of this gathering place is a grand monument to the heroes.

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About Joe

Besides being a lifelong fan of tabletop roleplaying games, Joe is an artist, illustrator and graphic designer with a passion for the mythical and the fantastic. He's been running homebrew adventures for over 30 years.

You'll find Joe's art – and free TTRPG stuff – at

Joe.Nittoly.ca



LoreFolke

Joe is writing, designing and illustrating his own tabletop roleplaying game entitled *LoreFolke: Epic-sized Adventures for Faery-sized Heroes*, including an original fantasy setting and a new d20-based system. You can learn more and subscribe by email for updates at

LoreFolke.GamingGeek.ca

