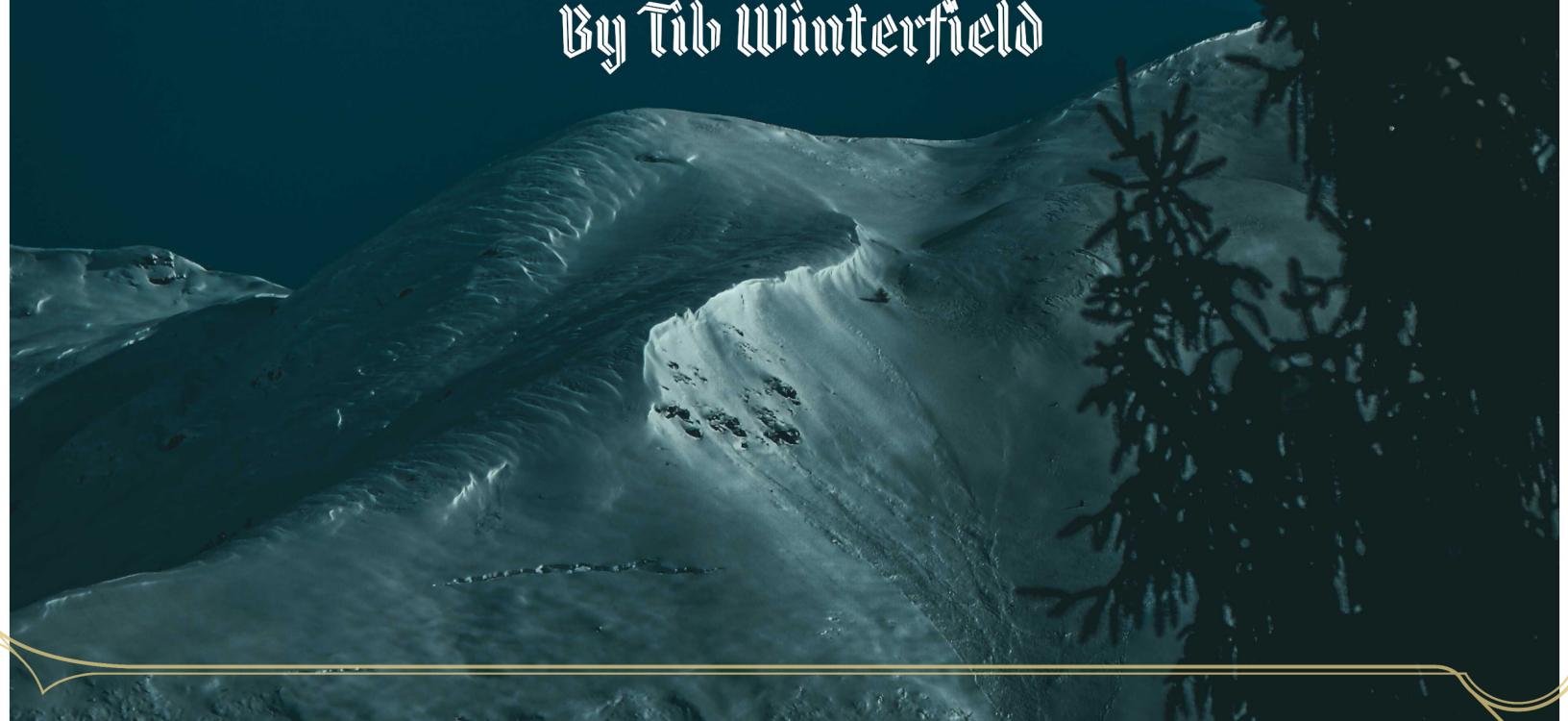


The Winter's Crest

A Christmas Survival
Adventure

By Tib Winterfield



THE WINTERS CREST



The night is dark, the snow thick about. The storm is coming and winter is creeping in through every creak and crack.

In the darkness, a scream rings out...

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The players are staying the night in a remote inn, high in the forested mountains, sent there to investigate rumours of poachers as night falls and a snow storm comes with it. But the ale is good and the fire warm with good company and hot food.

And then the Winter Elves attack.

The heroes will need to use all their cunning, their skills and magics to survive the night, and maybe see dawn...

NOTES TO THE DM

The Winters Crest is a one-shot adventure for 3-5 characters of 5th level. It is meant to be played as an ever intensifying siege, with the goal not *victory*, but **survival**. The Winter King and his minions are here to kill, but only have until dawn.

The inciting mystery will resolve to be nothing of note, Guildar having run the poachers out when he took over.

Text in quotes is to be read aloud, or adapted for your table

Bold text is for mechanic rules, skills checks and similar

THE ADVENTURE

The adventure itself is split into several stages, some to be run in order, some to be run at your discretion, based on what the players do.

1 - THE QUIET BEFORE

The first part of the story takes place in peace, in The High Inn, with your players getting to know each other, as well as the NPCs there - seeking to unravel the mystery they have been sent to investigate.

The sun has dipped below the distant hills, night has fallen and you all find yourselves safe and snug in the large taproom of The High Inn.

There have been swirling rumours of poachers and gangs using the Inn to stash their ill-gotten gains and you have been sent to investigate.

Guildar, the industrious owner and barkeep is bustling about, serving fresh mugs of ale and steaming trays of hot food. A few other patrons are seated about the room, some eating, some reading, some merely enjoying the warmth of the inn. In the corner a surly looking elf quietly strums a lyre and sings

As the scene opens, several NPCs are about for the players to interact with, and learn about. Where appropriate this guide will provide levels of history and knowledge that can be gained by skill checks.

Guildar

The dwarven owner of the inn, he is hard working and honest, doing his best to look after the inn and his guests. He had a brief history as an adventurer and will respond very badly to any attempts at **intimidation**. Successful rolls of **persuasion** or **investigation** would reveal

Difficulty

- | | |
|----|---|
| 5 | He bought the inn a few years back, when it was very run down. He poured his savings into it and it's finally turning a profit |
| 10 | There are tales of travellers going missing on the road in the winter, but most write it off as wolves or other animals hunting |
| 15 | He has a heavy crossbow stashed under the bar |
| 20 | He has his adventuring sword (+1 Longsword) stored under his bed |



Furell & Luka

A father and son travelling north together. Both are aloof to begin with, keeping themselves to themselves, but may become stalwart allies when things start to break down.

Furell is well built, with a sword over his back, short cropped grey hair and beard. **Luka** is small and quiet.

Any attempts to make conversation with them will be politely rebuffed by Furell.

15 There appears to be no family resemblance
Investigation between the two of them at all

18 Luka is the crown prince of a local kingdom
History and Furell his royal guard

Dollis

A travelling bard. He is quick with a quip and always on the lookout for a fast coin. He will be more than willing to sell out anyone in the inn, either for gold or to save his own skin. He is very talkative, and will offer any of the following with even the most gentle of nudging or offers of ale

- A whole family were lost on the roads last week, all that remained was their cart, all luggage intact but bodies gone
- Gildar has upset some local poachers who had been using the inn previously to plan their crimes

At some point during this phase of the game, Dollis will perform in the inn, singing a song telling the tales of the myths and legends of these hills:

- The tree spirits who seek vengeance on those who would fell them, hunting wood cutters to their homes
- The Winter King, who patrols these hills, seeking those he deems unworthy, to punish and to kill with abandon
- Urok, the sleeping giant who's body the mountain has been built around, and will one day arise from his slumber

Soft Hands

An elderly Tabaxi, she is happily resting by the fire, warming her old feet. Her heart is pure, but she is likely to be more of a help than hindrance. She is full of old tales and smiles, she is on the way to see her sons across the mountains.

2 - THE FIRST ATTACK

The warm atmosphere is shattered by a shuddering thump, as the main doors to the taproom are kicked open. In the doorway stand three dark shapes, tall elves with ink black skin and red eyes, their hair pulled back in red and green bandanas. With wicked grins, they draw thin shining blades and launch into an attack...

This is the first wave of the seige, with three **Winter Elves** (any variation, but ideally one of each type) breaking in through the front door. This should be a relatively easy fight for your players to defend against, with the elves choosing to withdraw as soon as they feel the fight turning against them. Guildar would make all haste to reach the crossbow at the bar to defend as well. Furell would draw his sword, but will stand guard over Luka rather than enter the fray themselves.

As the elves draw back, nursing their wounds, you all notice figures standing in the treeline, many more of these elves are waiting, watching.

As you tend to your wounds, a voice rings out from outside, a deep and boom voice,

"Children, do not fight it, do not fight me. I have come for the boy, and the boy alone. He has failed, he has sinned in my eyes. And tonight, on Winters Crest, his time is up.

You have an hour to surrender him to me or my elves, else I shall submit you all unto my judgement."

Looking out the windows, you can all see a tall broad figure, a pale white giant dressed in a robe of red autumnal leaves, a staff in his hand, stood, watching the inn with a somber look. The Winter King has come calling

Dollis can offer this knowledge too, if needed.

During this period, the motivations of the NPCs are likely to come to the fore, to help or hinder the players.

Guildar will do all he can to help, but is mostly concerned with keeping his inn intact and personally surviving the night. He'll see the players as the best way of achieving this.

Furell will, unless already known, reveal his status as the captain of the royal guard and Luka's identity as the prince. He will assist the party in any way he can

Soft Hands will mostly be scared and unnerved, but will be concerned mostly with looking after Luka. She is too old and frail to help out much with any physical labour or defense.

Dollis is certainly not dying for some kid, least of all some princely kid. He is going to try to find a way to talk the group around to turning him over.

At this point in the adventure, you are free to run any of the following sections as you see fit, depending on the actions of your Players, and the time left in your game.

The encounters can overlap, run concurrently or in a series, whatever works for your game.

Save for **Time's Up**, the goal of these encounters is to harry the players, to split them up and run down their resources - the game should feel like a desperate struggle for survival against mounting odds.

4 - A NOISE ABOVE

As you take a moment to breathe, you hear a soft tinkle of glass and padded footsteps on the floor above...

Two **Winter Elf Archers** and a **Winter Elf Arcanist** have scaled the back of the inn and broken in through the windows.

They are going to attempt to surprise the party from above.

A DC 13 perception check (or passive perception) will let a player hear the breaking of the glass above

The Elves are going to use the rooms as safe spaces as they work their way along the corridor, popping out to shoot at the players whenever they can.

3 - THE SIEGE BEGINS

With the number of elves in the trees, running is not an option. The players may barricade, prepare for the seige, or do what they wish.

A DC15 History check would let a player know about the myth of The Winter King, that the tales say he travels the hills on winter's longest night - The Winters Crest - whisking off the bad and unruly children. It is mostly thought to be a children's story, to scare bad kids into being good. They know he is banished by dawnbreak, sunrise will be their salvation.



5 – BETRAYAL FROM WITHIN

With a sudden movement, Dollis lunges for Luka, a sharp blade digging into his neck as he pulls the boy away from the party. Furell draws his sword, anger rising in his eyes.

Dollis' voice cracks with fear, "I'm not going to die out here, for this kid. Someone has got to do the smart thing here, yer all just being idiots. I'm handing this kid over, and we're getting out of here"

Dollis is a simple **commoner**, but a venal and cowardly one. He is going to do his best to drag Luka outside and hand him over to The Winter King. He will say he is doing it for the whole party, but he is really only doing it for himself.

Whilst this encounter might quickly end in violence, Dollis is at his heart a coward and it should be entirely possible to talk him down from his plan, threaten him into relenting or even convince him to join the fight

6 – IN AND UNDER

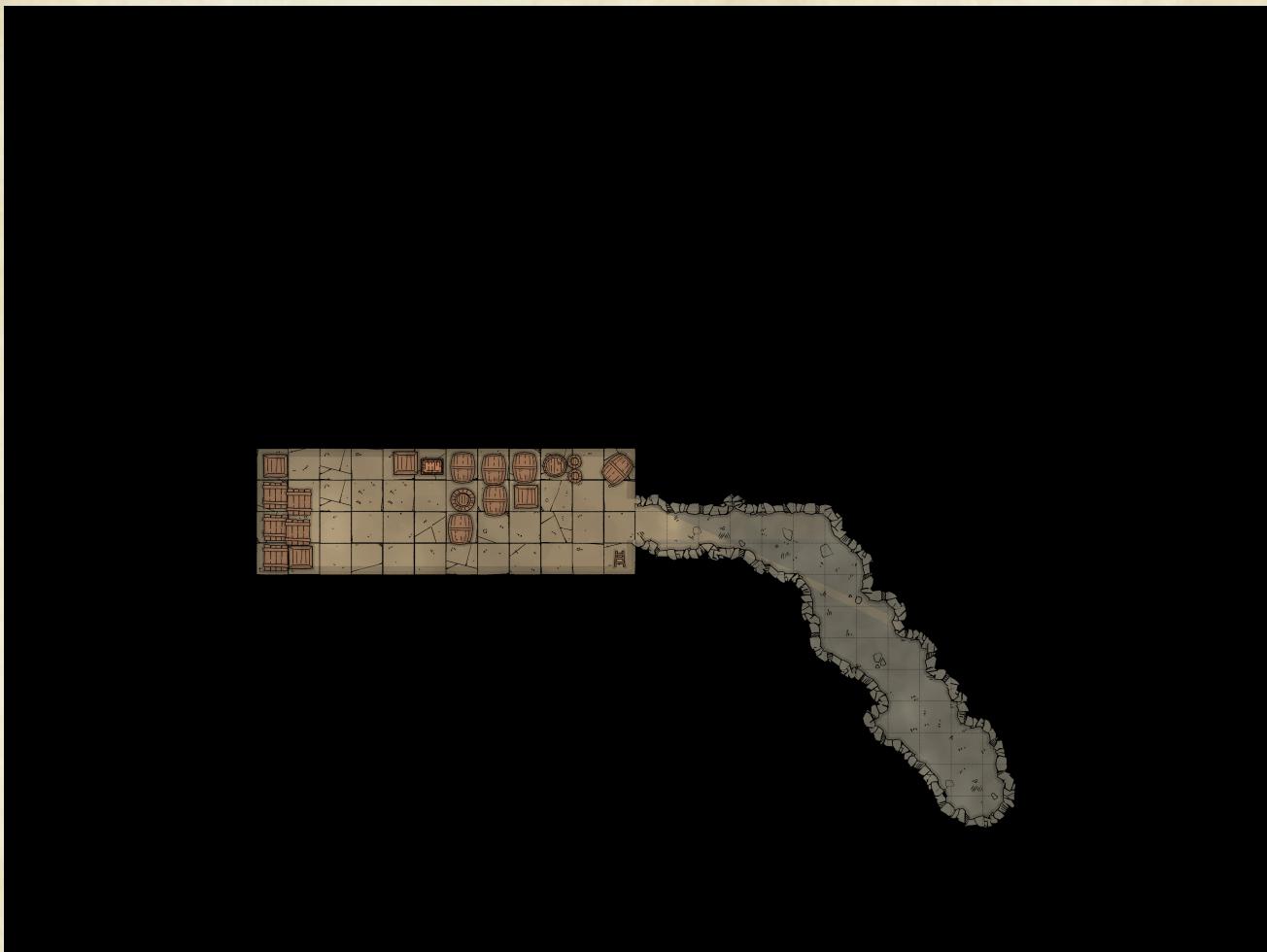
From outside the inn, you hear a sharp and sudden crack, as if something heavy smashing through old and hardened wood. From beneath your feet, the sounds of scrambling feet and drawn swords...

2 **Winter Elf Archers**, a **Winter Elf Brute** and a **Winter Elf Arcanist** have found their way into the inn's cellar, and are going to try to sneak their way in.

An optional DC15 perception check would let your players hear them enter the cellar via the outside trapdoor. This check is entirely optional on your part, feel free to run the encounter beginning with the elves already in the basement

This encounter runs one of two ways:

- The elves are waiting in hiding for the players to investigate the cellar, bows drawn and spells held. As soon as the trapdoor inside the inn is opened, combat begins with the triggered attacks on the player to open it. The players may well try to close the trapdoor again, but the brutes below will contest that, as the archers and arcanists attack through the gaps.



- The elves burst through the trapdoor, catching the players by surprise. Using the bar as cover, the ranged elves attack and hide, with the brutes ready and waiting if anyone is fool-hardy enough to try to jump into melee.

7 - SMOKE 'EM OUT

Slowly, a thin wisp of smoke starts to creep into the room, then the unmistakable crackle of burning wood, then the heat - something is burning...

The elves are going to try to burn the players out.

They have set fires and will try to use this to force the players out the relative safety of the Inn, and out into the cold of the night.

They will attempt to stealthily light a fire in one of the ground floor bedrooms. I'd suggest using passive perceptions to see how far the fire spreads before the players notice.

Difficulty

- | | |
|----|--|
| 18 | They hear the window being opened and can reach the fire before it takes hold. |
| 14 | They see the thin wisp of smoke curling up the door. The fire has engulfed the furniture but the room might be salvagable. |
| 12 | They feel the heat coming through the wall, the room is gone but the others might be saved. |
| 10 | They hear the crackle of the wood burning. The room is lost, and the fire has spread upwards and outwards. |

In addition, the Elves are likely to be lying in wait, to fire upon anyone they see enter the burning room, or running out of the Inn.

8 - ONE FOR ONE

The elves burst in, arrows firing, spells blaring, pushing you back into defensive positions, hiding under tables and behind chairs.

They grab hold of Soft Hands, being slower than the rest to hide, dragging her back outside, struggling all the way back out.

"It seems you will not give up the child willingly, but maybe this will help. You have 10 minutes until I kill this old crone, unless you bring him out"

The Winter King is getting desperate and is trying to force the players hand. He is serious - he will kill Soft Hands and it is up to the players to either mount a rescue mission or accept her as lost.

They are holding her in a small cluster by the well, southwest of the Inn - 3 **Winter Elf Brutes** - but the other elves in the trees are likely to open fire once they lay eyes on the players, or take the opportunity to attack the inn.

If he still lives, Guildar will offer his knowledge of a secret tunnel in the basement that runs to the bottom of the well, with a hidden ladder reaching up to the lip.

9 - TIME'S UP

The Winter King's patience has run out. He's coming himself to take the child, if you won't give him over.

He rouses all the elves that still live and prepare for an attack...

He's coming in. This is the last stand. Whatever the players have been planning, now is the time.

The elves will start the attack, rushing in the doors and any openings they can. They will break through unbarriered windows and climb the outside walls.

The Winter King himself is large enough and strong enough to simply crash through a wall. His frustration has grown with the party to a point where he will attack anyone he can find, sacrificing elves if need be too.

MAKING IT THROUGH THE NIGHT

The Winters Crest doesn't have a clear route to survival, as an integral part of its design. Depending on the encounters you have chosen to run and the actions of your players, different ideas may present themselves.

This list is no way exhaustive or complete, but ideas to consider for your players:

- The players surviving long enough to cast **Leomund's Tiny Hut**, to last until dawn.
- Using tunnel, as well as a distraction, to get behind the lines of elves and making a run for it.
- To injure The Winter King enough to make him rethink his plan.
- Using force to 'punch' a hole through the ring of elves
- Hiding in the basement and/or tunnel until dawn
- Sacrifice themselves to give Luka and Furell a chance to escape

Ultimately, your players will find a plan for survival, and it will be up to you to decide if it works.

THANKS

My eternal thanks to Kyle, Coral, Rose, Ben, Sky and Ells for playtesting, and Ben, Jake, Kym, Madi and Ank for editing and proof-reading.

If you like this adventure, please check out my other work at Tib Winterfield on Twitter.

For S & M

Merry Christmas!

ENEMIES

WINTER ELVES

WINTER ELF BRUTE

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The winter elf has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the Winter Elf has disadvantage on all rolls, as well as taking 1d4 fire damage per round

Pack Tactics. The winter elf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Winters Bane. If the Winter Elf Brute reduces a creature to 0 hit points, it also causes them to fail a death saving throw

Actions

Multiattack. The Winter Elf Brute makes two melee attacks.

Winters Blade. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. **Hit:** 5 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

WINTER ELF ARCHER

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +2

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The winter elf has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the Winter Elf has disadvantage on all rolls, as well as taking 1d4 fire damage per round

Actions

Shortsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Winters Bow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 100/240 ft., one target. **Hit:** 5 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target is also unconscious while poisoned in this way. The target wakes up if it takes damage or if another creature takes an action to shake it awake.

WINTER ELF ARCANIST

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +2

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The winter elf has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the Winter Elf has disadvantage on all rolls, as well as taking 1d4 fire damage per round

Spellcasting. The acolyte is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The acolyte has following cleric spells prepared:

At will: dancing lights, mending
1/day each: darkness, ice knife

Actions

Club. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

THE WINTER KING

THE WINTER KING

Large Mythical Being,

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 161 (14d12 + 70)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +9, Wis +8

Skills Arcana +6, Insight +12, Intimidation +6, Perception +12

Damage Resistances cold

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages All

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Immutable Form. The The Winter King is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Shielded Mind. The The Winter King is immune to scrying and to any effect that would sense its emotions, read its thoughts, or detect its location.

Magic Resistance. The Winter King has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting. The Winter Kings innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

Cantrips (at will): _light, message, ray of frost, frostbite
1st level (4 slots): *ice knife*, *frost fingers*, *command*
2nd level (3 slots): *rime's binding*, *ice*, *darkness*, *see invisibility*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fly*, *locate creature*
4th level (2 Slots): *freedom of movement*, *ice storm*
5th level (2 slots): *animate objects*, *mass cure wounds*
6th level (1 slot): *freezing sphere*

Actions

Winters Judgement (Recharge 5–6). The Winter King magically emits psychic energy in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 22 (4d8 + 4) psychic damage and be stunned for 1 minute. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Staff. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Legendary Actions

The monster can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The monster regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

The First Frost. A freezing frost emits from The Winter King's staff, covering every surface with ice. Every creature within 15ft of The Winter King takes 10 cold damage.

Elven Commander. The Winter King directs his elves to attack. Two *Winter Elves* that The Winter King can see within 30ft may use their reaction to make an attack.