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THE BEACON AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

A 5E WARLOCK ADVENTURE
BY MIKE WELHAM

THE BEACON AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Adventure Background

As with Midgard's many death cults, the Children of Surtur seek the extinction of most life on the world while either surviving through to the new age wrought by their actions or dying in a simultaneous and glorious extinction. The Children of Surtur's plan is to engulf the world in flames. Their leaders determined the most effective first step was to melt the hated ice at the top of the world. This would create an apocalyptic flood to devastate the Northlands and much of northern Midgard.

To this end, the cult has quietly stationed itself at Midgard's north polar region, where the cultists perform powerful rituals to draw heat from the core of Midgard to the surface. Cult seers have been watching the heavens for a conjunction between the night sky's brightest star and the "Demon Star" only they could locate. As the conjunction draws nigh, the cultists prepare to bring their demon lord into the world.

The Children of Surtur's activities have not gone unnoticed. Their rituals create a bright aurora in the night sky that many in the Northlands have witnessed. In isolation, this hadn't aroused suspicion. Coupled with incidents of arson and self-immolation—perpetrated by an allied group of lycanthropes known as the Pack of the Howling Sun—the cult's presence no longer remains secret. As the border between Midgard and the fiery realm inhabited by their demonic patron thins, heat and light have increased, making the orange-red aurora visible during the day. With mere days remaining before they enact their final ritual, the cultists believe they will succeed in the face of any interference.

Jarl Uffi Toothless of Trollheim has dealt with many death cults in his years as jarl. Other than the persistent and expansive Cult of Ragnarok, many of them are too disorganized to pose a real threat. However, the Children of Surtur cult has him worried, and the recent display of light from the polar region disturbed him enough to send an armed contingent to deal with the problem. Damage to the glaciers caused by the terrible heat doomed the patrol, as one of the glaciers calved and killed all but a pair of survivors.

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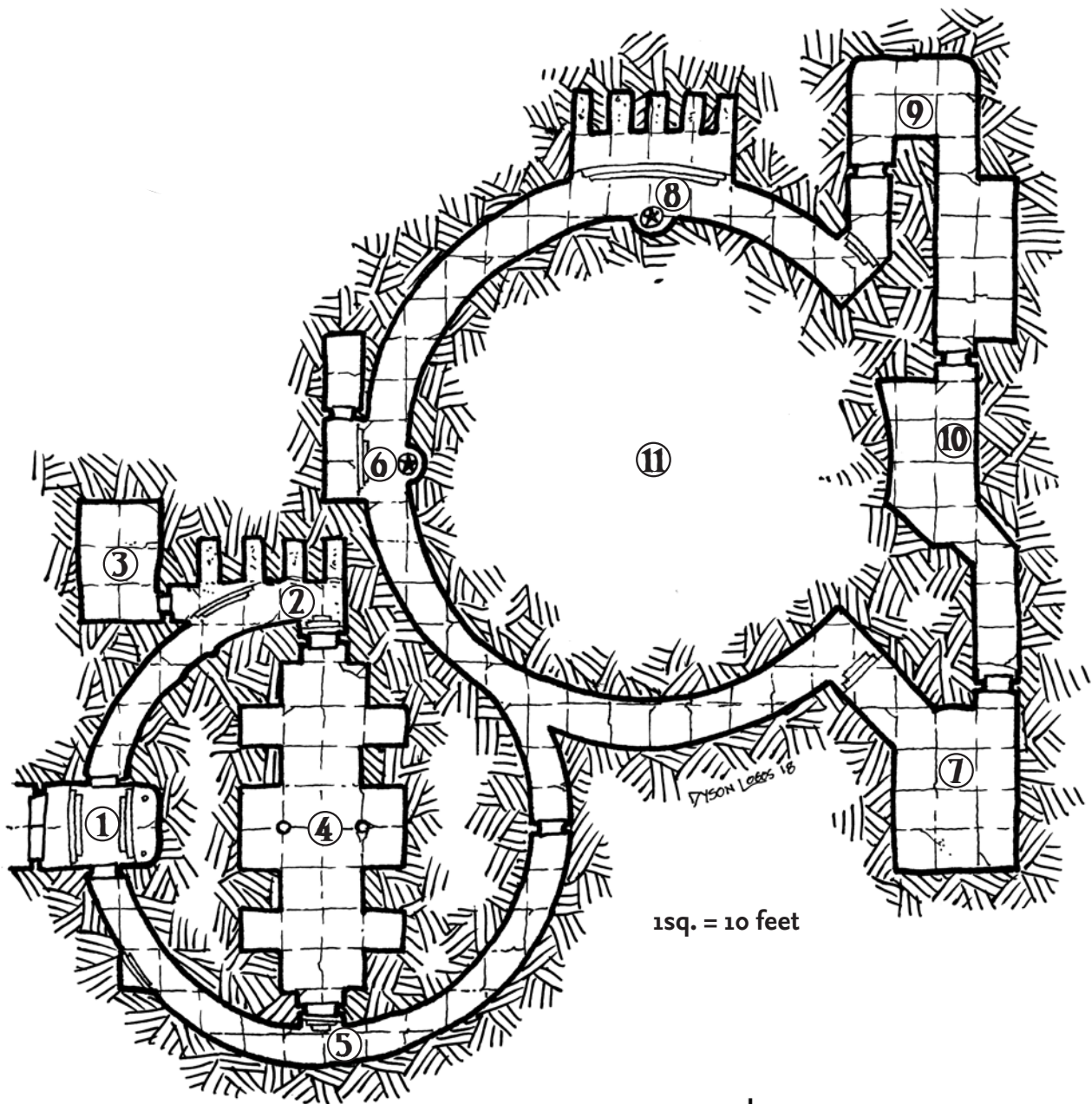
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Adventure Hooks

The PCs may have impressed Uffi Toothless from previous exploits, particularly during *The Empty Village* (Warlock Lair #27) or *The Wilding Call* (Warlock Lair #28), so he knows them as capable adventurers. He offers them a total of 5,000 gp to investigate the strange lights and heat originating from the pole. He pays half of it before the PCs leave Trollheim and the rest if they successfully thwart the cult's ultimate goals, which are unknown to him. Alternatively, the PCs might notice that the illumination from the north is visible even during the day and decide to investigate. Finally, the PCs may know one of the people taken by the cult as a sacrifice to fuel the summoning of the portal to the demon lord's dread domain.

Preparing for the Trip

If the PCs spend time in Noatun obtaining information about the Children of Surtur, especially if Uffi Toothless has hired them, they learn about the doomed expedition to the pole and the treacherous terrain resulting from the increased underground temperature. If the PCs speak to the expedition's survivors, they learn the group spotted werewolves and fire giants traveling toward the source of the light.

Uffi Toothless does not have anyone experienced enough to send with the PCs. Given the fate of the previous group he sent to investigate the temple, he eschews sending another large group. However, he gives the PCs a *scroll of sending*, so they can alert him if the cult's activity gets out of hand and starts to spill into Trollheim. He is hopeful the PCs, as a smaller group, can take care of the cult and spare him the loss of dozens or more able-bodied men and women.

Inhospitable Weather and Treacherous Terrain

The journey to the Children of Surtur's temple takes five days through the Bleak Expanse, unless the PCs use magic to decrease the travel time. The Bleak Expanse is a windswept white tundra that stretches north of the Reaching Mountains to the edge of the world. In addition to the hazards normally found when traveling through a desert of snow and ice, the Bleak Expanse holds new dangers brought about by the Children of Surtur's recent activities.

Avalanche. Though mostly devoid of mountains, the Bleak Expanse is dotted with hills and glaciers with the potential to unleash tons of snow on the unsuspecting. The PCs have a cumulative 10% chance per day of travel to encounter

an avalanche (this can happen only once during the trip). A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the rumbling sound associated with an avalanche. If the PCs hear the noise preceding the sliding snow and rocks, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check allows the PCs to find places to avoid the bulk of the avalanche. Each creature in an area with an avalanche must make a DC 18 Strength saving throw, taking 12d10 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A character that fails the saving throw is also knocked prone and buried. A buried creature is restrained, unable to breathe or stand up, and takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage each round. A creature, including the buried creature, can take an action to make a DC 15 Strength check, ending the buried state on a success.

A creature that heard the avalanche coming has advantage on the saving throw. A creature that succeeds on the Wisdom (Survival) check to seek shelter takes no damage from the avalanche if it succeeds on its saving throw.

Soft Snow. Because of the underground heat emanating from the Children of Surtur's temple, formerly deep, hard-packed tundra snow has become soft and gives away easily. The PCs have a cumulative 25% chance per day of travel to traverse patches of this snow. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check notices the thin patch of snow in time for all characters to avoid the hazard.

When a Medium or larger creature crosses a patch of soft snow, the snow collapses and each creature within 20 feet of the patch of soft snow must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall 1d6x10 feet and be knocked prone and buried in snow. A buried creature is restrained, is unable to breathe or stand up, and takes 1d6 cold damage after each minute of being buried. A creature, including the buried creature, can take an action to make a DC 10 Strength check, ending the buried state on a success.

UNEXPECTED ALLIES

If the PCs are on good terms with Ariaira from *The Empty Village*, the cheshirian finds them in the Bleak Expanse on the trail of the cult and offers to help them. While she initially refuses to engage in combat, a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check plays to her burgeoning heroism and convinces her that saving the world is more important than preserving her life.

If the PCs are on good terms with Esben Frosttuft from *The Wilding Call*, they find her in the Bleak Expanse on their way to the cult's temple. Esben has been tracking werewolf activity and noticed it picking up in this region. She has come to investigate the increased activity and the strange lights in the sky. She gladly joins the PCs in their fight against the cult and its werewolves.

Polar Temple

The Children of Surtur uncovered this site after signs and portents led them to the polar region. Ancient and weathered, yet well-preserved, the temple gave them the impression it had been used for a similar purpose in the distant past.

Due to the temple's connection to Surtur's realm, a creature that takes fire damage while within the temple takes an extra 50% fire damage. Each hour that a creature stays in the heat of the temple, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or have vulnerability to fire damage for 1 hour. This vulnerability replaces the 50% increase to fire damage that a creature takes when in the temple. Creatures that have been blessed by Surtur, such as the members of the Children of Surtur cult, automatically succeed on this saving throw. Creatures with resistance or immunity to fire automatically succeed on the saving throw.

Unless otherwise noted, all rooms and corridors have 20-foot-tall ceilings. Many of the doors throughout the area are locked to prevent any interruptions to the ritual. Hildur Blisterhand, the fire giant high priestess in Area 10, carries keys capable of unlocking all the doors.

Areas 6, 7, 8, 10, and the walkways between them (with the exception of the hallways leading into Area 10) are open to the lava-filled pit in Area 11. A portal in the pool of lava bathes those areas in bright light. Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 are brightly lit by torches enchanted with *continual flame* spells.

Areas 6 and 8 are 20 feet above the pit of lava in Area 11 while Area 10 is 60 feet above the lava. The smooth walls of the pit are difficult to climb, requiring a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to avoid sliding toward the lava. A creature pushed from a ledge into the pit must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to catch itself on a section of wall and avoid falling into the lava below. A creature in the lava takes 55 (10d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

COUNTDOWN CLOCK OR LEISURELY ASSAULT?

The time of the ritual's completion is left abstract up until the final encounter to allow you to decide the pace of your game. If you want to add pressure to the PCs' assault on the temple, then the ritual completes within 1 hour of the PCs entering the temple. If you want to allow the PCs some time to rest, the ritual could complete within the next several hours or later the next day.

If you deny your PCs any chance to rest in the temple, then remove one creature from Areas 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 9. This should keep the fights challenging without draining the PCs of every resource before the final encounter in Area 10.

1. ENTRYWAY

The Cult of Ragnarok, upon hearing of the Children of Surtur's activities, demanded frost giants be present for the ritual. If the Children of Surtur manage to call their demon lord forth, the Cult of Ragnarok believes this may portend the end of the world. The Cult of Ragnarok refuses to give all the glory of initiating Ragnarok to a usurper cult.

The pair of **frost giants** in this chamber cannot bear to go further within the temple. They stand here uncomfortable and bored, waiting for something to happen. If one of the giants dies, the surviving giant surrenders when it is reduced to fewer than 30 hit points. It has no vested interest in the ritual succeeding, and it has no problem allowing enemies of the Children of Surtur a chance to stop the ritual. While the giant doesn't go so far as to help the PCs, a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the giant to reveal the creatures in Area 2 and Area 5. It has no knowledge of the creatures in the other areas. If the PCs let the giant go, it waits outside the temple to determine the outcome of the cult's ritual or the PCs' actions, and then it returns to the Tower of the North Wind to report the events.

Locked Door. The door to Area 5 is locked. A successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock, but the creature picking the lock must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage from prolonged contact with the heated iron door.

2. NORTHERN HALLWAY AND ALCOVES

Five **werewolves**, remnants of the Pack of the Howling Sun, patrol this hallway. As payment for their assistance, they received a *wand of fireballs* from the cult. The lead **werewolf** is a recent convert to the cult and has been trained to cast some spells (use the statistics of a werewolf, except it also has a Wisdom of 13 and the **cult fanatic's** Spellcasting trait). This werewolf also holds the wand and has already used 2 charges, leaving it with 5 at the beginning of combat.

Locked Door. The door to Area 4 is locked. A successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock, but the creature picking the lock must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage from prolonged contact with the heated iron door. The lead thursir giant has a key to the door.

3. VESTRY

This room contains three embroidered, red and orange robes sized for a fire giant. The robes are far too large for a Medium creature, but a Large creature can cinch up the robes and use them as impromptu disguises. A robed figure must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check to fool the inhabitants of the outer temple (Areas 1 through 5), but it has disadvantage on the check when interacting with the creatures in the inner temple (Areas 6 through 10).

4. SACRIFICIAL ALTAR

Six **thursir giants** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 227) watch over the eleven **commoners** slated for sacrifice at the culmination of the ritual. If the giants hear the PCs in battle in Area 2 or Area 5, they inscribe their warhammers with the thurs rune. The giants attack obvious spellcasters in preference to other characters to preserve the sacrifices from damaging spells. If combat breaks out here and the werewolves in Area 2 are still alive, the werewolves break down the door in two rounds to aid the thursir. The efreeti in Area 5 holds to the letter of its agreement—to prevent intruders from accessing the inner sanctum—and it does not come to the giants' aid.

The thursir forged the chains and manacles binding the captives to a pair of pillars in the middle of this chamber. A successful DC 22 Strength check breaks the chains, or a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock holding the manacles to the pillar. The giants surrendered their keys to the cult's leaders in Area 10. If freed, the survivors thank the PCs, but they are in no fit state to fight their captors. If Ariaira is with the PCs, she offers to bring the survivors to her realm where they can recuperate in safety. If Esben Frosttuft is with the PCs, she offers to stand guard over the survivors.

Pipes feed from the lava pool in Area 11 through the wall near the easternmost column. When the ritual ends, the lava fills this chamber. While the captives are unaware of the particulars of their sacrifice, a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check realizes this chamber is a dangerous place to stay.

5. SOUTHERN HALLWAY

Hildur Blisterhand recently won the service of an **efreeti** and charged it to prevent intruders from reaching the temple's inner sanctum. Unless the PCs dispatched the frost giants in Area 1 quietly, the efreeti is aware of their presence. It begins to cast *conjure elemental* when it hears them. The efreeti does not need to maintain concentration upon conjuring the fire elemental, since it faithfully serves the efreeti. If the efreeti successfully conjures the elemental, or if it hears the PCs attempting to unlock the door to the hallway, it casts *invisibility*.

Locked Door. The door to Area 6 is locked. A successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock, but the creature picking the lock must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage from prolonged contact with the heated iron door.

Ice Spray Trap. The cultists set a devious trap for interlopers expecting to exclusively deal with fiery hazards. When a creature opens the door to Area 6 without the key, ice sprays in a 30-foot cone from the door. Each creature in the ice spray must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Prevention. A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices the faint outline of a *Hagalaz* rune. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check knows that inscribing a *Kaunan* rune over the existing rune suppresses the trap. A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) or Dexterity check inscribes the *Kaunan* rune. Unsuccessfully attempting to inscribe the rune triggers the trap. Alternatively, a successful *dispel magic* (DC 15) cast on the door destroys the trap.

6. EASTERN OVERLOOK

Two **fire giants** watch over Area 11 and pay little attention to other activity. Creatures have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks when trying to move unnoticed past the giants. The giants are infused with fiery might from their proximity to the portal and deal an extra 2d6 fire damage when they hit with any weapon.

TREASURE

An iron statue of Surtur, a stylized fire giant with demonic features, stands on the ledge overlooking the lava pool in Area 11. The statue weighs 3,000 pounds. If removed intact, it is worth 2,500 gp to a collector.

7. WICKED WINGS

Glaurvistus, the Smoking Scourge and mother of all flame dragons, is curious about the Children of Surtur and their desire to summon the demon lord of fire. She sent a pair **young flame dragons** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 130) to watch and assist the cult, where necessary, in bringing about a fiery apocalypse. Hildur Blisterhand knows flame dragons can be fickle and is uncertain of how long Glaurvistus' goals will align with the Children of Surtur's. Not trusting the dragons yet not wanting to appear ungrateful for the Smoking Scourge's gift, Hildur assigned the dragons to this area to prevent intruders from interrupting her ritual and to prevent the dragons from getting too close to the portal in Area 11.

The dragons fly about this section, bored and waiting for something "exciting" to happen. If they are aware of the PCs' presence, they hide near the ceiling, hoping to ambush the PCs.

Locked Door. The door to Area 10 is locked. A successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock, but the creature picking the lock must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage from prolonged contact with the heated iron door.

TREASURE

The dragons keep several gems and jewels worth a total of 3,000 gp. One of the dragons took a *ring of fire resistance* from a victim and wears it on a claw because it believes the garnet set in the ring complements its fiery scales.

8. SHRINE TO SURTUR

A **malakbel demon** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 78) in service to Surtur guards the shrine. While it watches the ritual's proceedings with interest, it is aware of events going on around it. If at least one of the fire giants in Area 6 falls in battle to the PCs, the demon uses an action to teleport as close as possible to the PCs to aid the giants.

A statue similar to the one in Area 6 faces the ritual chamber in Area 10. A magical effect emanates from the statue, pointing upwards at the high ledge of Area 10. While the statue stands, each member of the Children of Surtur in Area 10 has immunity to fire damage and deals an extra 1d4 fire damage when it hits with any weapon attack. While the statue stands, each non-member of the Children of Surtur that enters Area 10 for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in Area 10 must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or have vulnerability to fire damage until the end of its next turn. A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check recognizes the statue's magical properties and that destroying the statue will destroy the magic. A successful DC 20 Strength check topples the statue, destroying it and ending the effect. However, the creature that topples the statue must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or become cursed. While cursed, the creature has vulnerability to fire damage. Hildur Blisterhand knows when the magic of the statue ends.

9. FANATIC GUARDS

Two **fire giants** are stationed here to prevent any interruptions to the ritual in the chamber beyond. The giants are infused with fiery might from their proximity to the portal and deal an extra 2d6 fire damage when they hit with any weapon. They fight to the death to keep intruders from entering the ritual chamber in Area 10.

Locked Door. The door to Area 10 is locked. A successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock, but the creature picking the lock must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage from prolonged contact with the heated iron door.

10. THE FINAL RITUAL

This chamber is higher in the temple than the others, and its ledge sits 60 feet above the lava pit in Area 11. **Hildur Blisterhand**, one **fire giant cultist** (use the statistics of a fire giant, except it also has the **cult fanatic's** Spellcasting trait), and four **cult fanatics** work to finish the ritual, ignoring any commotion outside the chamber. If the PCs gain access to the chamber, the fire giant cultist and the cult fanatics attempt to hold off the intruders while Hildur completes the ritual.

Hildur must stand in place on the western edge of the chamber overlooking the lava pit and use her bonus action each turn to maintain the ritual. If she maintains the ritual

for 5 turns after the PCs enter, the ritual completes. If something prevents her from using her bonus action to maintain the ritual, she can use her action and bonus action on her next turn to recover and continue maintaining the ritual. If she is prevented from maintaining the ritual for two consecutive turns, the ritual fails to complete.

If the fire giants from Area 9 are still alive, they batter down the door in two rounds to join the combat. The flame dragons in Area 7 are curious about the battle's outcome but do not intercede on the cultists' behalf.

If the PCs managed to free the sacrifices in Area 4, a fact Hildur guesses when she sees the PCs enter her chamber, two of the cultists throw themselves into the pit of lava to activate the portal when Hildur completes the ritual. If there are fewer than two cultists remaining, the portal partially opens (see Area 11).

DEVELOPMENT

If Ariaira is with the PCs and the battle is going poorly for them, she takes this moment to make her heroic stand. She attempts to spirit the cultists away to the Forlorn Roads, heedless of the danger to herself, as long as she hasn't already taken the captives from Area 4 to her realm.

11. SURTUR'S PIT

If Hildur succeeds in her ritual and fully opens the portal to Surtur's realm, Surtur emerges in the center of Area 11 on initiative count 20 the round after Hildur opens the portal. The nascent demon lord uses the statistics of a **balor** for purposes of combat. If the PCs manage to defeat the demon, they have five rounds to close the portal before the demon rises again, fully healed.

If the portal is only partially open (see Area 10), the demon has difficulty emerging from the portal. It takes 10 rounds for the demon lord to squeeze through the portal. While it works to free itself, its arms flail about and threaten to strike any creature in Areas 6, 8, and 10. Each arm makes a melee attack with a +12 bonus against a random target in Areas 6, 8, or 10 (vision is irrelevant to this attack roll). If there are no targets in the area, the arms don't hit anything. A target that is hit takes 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage and 11 (2d10) fire damage. In addition, the target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. Each arm has Armor Class 17 and 52 hit points. If an arm is reduced to 0 hit points, it retreats into the portal and reemerges 10 rounds later.

If fully opened, the portal also spews fire elementals into Areas 6, 8, and 10. On initiative count 20, roll a d6. On a result of 5 or 6, a fire elemental appears in a random space in one of those areas.

Closing the Portal. A PC attempting to close the portal must use its action and succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check while in Area 10 each turn for 1 minute.

Each PC that helps the first in closing the portal reduces the DC by 1 and the time required to close the portal by half. Alternatively, the portal can be attacked (AC 10) and destroyed if it takes 100 cold damage. If Surtur is alive when the portal closes, Surtur is pulled through the portal back into its realm, vowing vengeance on the PCs.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs stop the cult from bringing Surtur into Midgard, the damage to the northern lands eventually repairs itself as the cold reclaims the temple. After the PCs return to Noatun, word of their deeds spreads, and they gain a +4 Status change in the Northlands. Uffi Toothless pays the PCs 5,000 gp, even if he didn't hire them at the beginning of the adventure.

If Ariaira or Esben Frosttuft helped the PCs and the PCs include either's actions in the recounting of their time in the temple, each one is treated as a hero. Ariaira continues carrying out heroic deeds throughout the Northlands, though she returns to Fjellgard at least once a year. Whether her deeds are recounted publically or not, Esben Frosttuft returns to Bjeornheim and retires, satisfied that her actions helped save the Northlands and her people from a great threat.

The Cult of Ragnarok regards the Children of Surtur's failure as a lesson for their own activities. They are wary of the PCs and assign spies to keep eyes on the PCs, ready to strike should the PCs appear to interfere with any of the cult's plans.

If the PCs failed to stop the cultists from bringing the demon lord into Midgard, the demon lord instigates the polar snowmelt, which results in catastrophic flooding for the Northlands within a year. This emboldens the Cult of Ragnarok to initiate their plans to bring about the end of the world.

Hildur Blisterhand

This female fire giant wears plate mail like her kin, but her right hand is unprotected by a gauntlet. The hand is scarred as if she somehow suffered a terrible burn years ago.

Hildur heard Surtur's voice calling to her at a young age. She quickly learned not to discuss hearing the demon lord, as many other fire giants regarded such talk as a sign of insanity. However, an elder giant regarded as a witch by the clan secretly took Hildur under her wing and indoctrinated the young fire giant into the Children of Surtur cult. The witch foresaw greatness in Hildur, realizing she would lead the cult at the time of the conjunction between the brightest

star and the unseen "Demon Star." When Hildur reached adulthood, the witch invoked a ritual of cleansing to bind Hildur to the demon lord, permanently scarring the younger fire giant's right hand. Hildur has spent her time building the cult in anticipation of bringing Surtur into Midgard, quietly delighting in welcoming members of her former clan into the cult.

HILDUR BLISTERHAND

Huge giant, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 187 (15d12 + 90)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	9 (-1)	23 (+6)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +10, Cha +5

Skills Athletics +11, Perception +8

Damage Immunities fire

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Abyssal, Giant, Ignan

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Blessed by Surtur. Hildur Blisterhand's weapon attacks are magical. When she hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 2d6 fire damage (included in the attack).

Spellcasting. Hildur Blisterhand is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Hildur has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, resistance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, command, inflict wounds, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, hold person, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, dispel magic, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *freedom of movement, guardian of faith*

5th level (1 slot): *flame strike*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Hildur makes two greatsword attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (6d6 + 7) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.



Ariaira the Cheshirian

This bipedal creature's broad, disarming smile counters its misshapen appearance.

The cheshirian is a carnivorous fey creature with the unique ability to hop back and forth between the Material Plane and a seldom-traveled section of the Shadow Realm known as the Forlorn Roads. The Forlorn Roads are tied to the Northlands and the cheshirians rarely travel beyond the Northlands for fear of losing their connection to their realm. Their peculiar magic allows them to snatch unsuspecting prey from one realm and deposit it into the other. When a cheshirian is out of phase in either realm, it often displays its disembodied smile to unnerve its disoriented prey. All cheshirians have palindromic names.

Ariaira is a cheshirian who unexpectedly had the strong desire for companionship and heroism after witnessing heroic acts by some adventurers she captured. A blundered attempt to save the remote human village of Fjellgard from the Children of Surtur's machinations brought Ariaira face-to-face with heroes of the Northlands. After helping them right her wrong, she vowed to learn from them and become a true hero. She has since helped the village rebuild and has protected it from numerous threats. However, many people still see her as a monster and as a threat to the safety of the people of Trollheim. Ever eager to prove her good heart and to become a hero, she ventures across the Northlands, aiding those in need and foiling the Children of Surtur's plans where she can.

ARIAIRA

Small fey, chaotic good

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 66 (12d6 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5

Skills Deception +7, Stealth +6, Survival +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Claim Territory (1/Day). Ariaira spends 1 hour out of phase attuning herself to a section of the Forlorn Roads up to 1 square mile in size. This section becomes her territory until she dies or she designates another area as her territory. She also attunes herself to a similarly-sized

swath of land on the Material Plane in the Northlands as part of this process. More than one cheshirian can claim the same territory, though this overlap often ends with one of the cheshirians slain by the other or moving on to a different area.

Out of Phase. As a bonus action, Ariaira can magically exist on the Material Plane and the Forlorn Roads simultaneously. While she is out of phase in this way, she is invisible in both realms (though she can choose for her mouth and teeth to remain visible), and she has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. A creature that she hits with her claw attack while out of phase has resistance to her claw's damage. As a bonus action on a subsequent turn, Ariaira can choose to fully manifest on the Material Plane or the Forlorn Roads.

Sound Mimicry. Ariaira can mimic humanoid voices. A creature that hears the voices can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ariaira makes two claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 11). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and Ariaira can't use her claw on another target.

Drag to the Forlorn Roads. Ariaira teleports herself to her claimed territory in the Forlorn Roads, her claimed territory in the Northlands, or to an area of the Forlorn Roads with which she is familiar. If she is grappling a creature, the grappled creature must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw (a creature can willingly fail this saving throw). On a failure, the grappled creature teleports with Ariaira to the chosen location. A creature that is in the Forlorn Roads and not native to the Shadow Realm can attempt a new Wisdom saving throw at the end of each hour, reappearing in the space it left (or in the nearest unoccupied space if that space is occupied) on a success. A creature can choose to fail this saving throw. If a creature fails this saving throw each hour for 48 hours, it is permanently stuck in the Forlorn Roads and must find a different way out. A fey creature or a creature native to the Shadow Realm can choose to permanently remain in the Forlorn Roads or not at the end of the first hour.

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