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20 THINGS #56:
SNOW & ICE



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20 THINGS #56: SNOW & ICE

Are you a busy GM? Does session prep take too long? Do you never have time to work on the cool little details that can bring your session to life? Well fear not! That's where the 20 Things line comes in. This short, focused compilation gives you, the time-crunched GM, the tools to effortlessly add verisimilitude and detail to your adventure. Use the material herein either before or during play and bask in your players' adulation.

This instalment provides five pages of material compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game and is designed to help you flesh out and bring to life the snowy, icy lands in your campaign.

CREDITS

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USING THIS BOOK

You can use these system neutral tables either during session prep or "on the fly" during the actual session. Roll on the desired table and describe the result. Remember:

- Some players may assume because you describe something it is important. This may slow down the party's progress through the adventure. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- Modify any result so it fit with your game.
- Ignore or re-roll inappropriate results.
- Have fun!

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I: CAMPING & CAMPSITES

Travellers in a land of snow and ice would be wise to seek a good campsite, to escape the elements.

1. A narrow cleft in the rock enables access to a cave buried deep in a craggy hill. Wind-blown snow covers the ground in the entrance way, but the rest of the cave is dry. In the cave, the air temperature is much warmer than outside. The cave can accommodate eight travellers.
2. A stand of trees, their boughs laden with snow, provide a sheltered campsite. Much deadfall lies about the ground, making gathering fuel for a fire easy. A hibernating bear slumbers in a small den in the middle of the wood.
3. The grey ruin of a crumbling building stands stark amid the heaped snow. The building's thatched roof is long-gone, but its jagged stone walls remain.
4. A steep-sided valley provides shelter from the wind. A dusting of snow covers the ground and hides an iced-over stream. Unwary travellers could fall through the ice into the stream's deep, chill waters.
5. Three part-buried tents stand on the windward side of a low hill. Swamped by snow, the tents are almost invisible. Each tent is big enough for four people, and could easily be re-pitched. Perceptive characters might find some forgotten gear amid the ruined camp.

6. A jumbled field of boulders stretches for several hundred feet. The largest stones provide shelter from the biting wind, but are spread among their smaller brethren. If the party use the large boulders as shelter, they will be more spread out than normal.
7. A tangle of snow-shrouded low trees and thick bushes hide a disused wolf den. The dense, tangled vegetation keeps the worst of the snow at bay and provides a modicum of insulation. Gnawed bones and clumps of fur dot the ground, in the den.
8. A high and wide cairn of piled stone juts through the snow. Someone has camped here before, and has excavated a large hollow in the cairn's leeward side. The hollow is big enough for the party, but not their mounts. This cairn could be the source of a mini-adventure. Whoever excavated the hollow almost reached the mouth of a deep shaft under the cairn. Far below lie the unquiet dead of an elder civilisation. If the characters dislodge a few key stones, they discover the shaft (perhaps by falling into it).



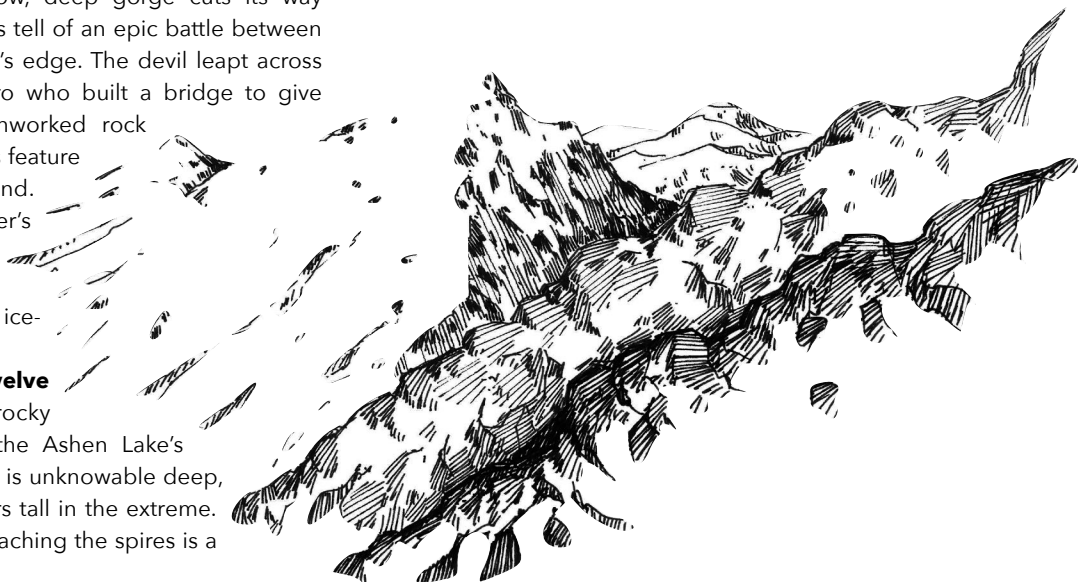
2: LOCAL LANDMARKS

Much of a frozen wilderness's landscape is unremarkable and mundane. Some features become local landmarks and serve as waymarkers or meeting places.

1. **The Frozen Tower:** This glistening icy pillar thrusts skyward like the tusk of some gigantic, fantastical monster. At the pillar's heart stands a slender, frozen wizard's tower. Unimaginative locals name the place the Frozen Tower. During the summer months, when the sun burns bright, melt water runs down the pillar's flanks. If the sun is intense enough, the upper part of the pillar melts away to reveal the Frozen Tower's roof. Rumours tell of adventuring parties exploring the tower during such times. None emerged before the tower refroze.
2. **The Pallid Forest:** Pale and sickly elm trees fill this narrow, snow-choked valley. Even the wind seems to shun this place. Here, explorers find few animal tracks in the soft, powdery snow. Dense freezing fog lingers amid the boles. The Pallid Forest is not a place for ill-equipped or inexperienced parties to explore. Rumours of a huge white serpent of unknown, but doubtless horrible, origin dwelling in the forest refuse to die, among locals.
3. **The Frigid Falls:** Tumbling over a frozen cliff, the Frigid Falls scintillate in the morning sun. Almost 100-foot high the falls and the frozen pool at their base are an impressive sight. A tunnel and cave behind the waterfall burrows deep into the hills, and within a passable camp can be set. The tunnel and spacious cave are warmer than the surrounds and a well-known camping spot.
4. **The Hoary Old Man:** Erected centuries ago, this huge statue of a warrior king stands atop a high domed hill. The statue is old and weather-worn. Various rumours identify the statue as a golem and whisper of burial chambers buried deep beneath its feet. Wreathed in frost and snow, the statue resembles a frost giant warrior.
5. **The Devil's Leap:** This narrow, deep gorge cuts its way through the land. Ancient tales tell of an epic battle between a hero and devil at the gorge's edge. The devil leapt across the gorge to escape the hero who built a bridge to give chase. A narrow span of unworked rock crosses the gorge and it is this feature that gave rise to the legend. When the wind howls in winter's depths only an idiot, or someone truly desperate to cross, would use the narrow, ice-slick bridge.
6. **The Ashen Lake and the Twelve Sisters:** A dozen slender rocky spires thrust upwards from the Ashen Lake's frozen waters. The Ashen Lake is unknowable deep, which makes the Twelve Sisters tall in the extreme. With the lake's water frozen reaching the spires is a

simple matter for determined explorers. The sisters appear of natural origin to casual viewers. Perceptive dwarves examining them report marks in the rocks suggestive of ancient artifice.

7. **The White Wyrn:** Viewed from a certain angle this icy, snow-dusted rock resembles a rearing dragon frozen as it breathes on its foes. A legion of legends clusters about the White Wyrn. Most such stories deal with the dragon returning to life to ravage the surrounding lands. Sometimes treasure hunters dig below the White Wyrn. Some do not return.
8. **The Boiling Pools of Krorz:** Lying in a shallow depression, these three pools boil and steam no matter the surrounding temperature. Fed by deep, warm springs the pools are a magnet for travellers and wildlife. The steam given off by the pools is visible for miles, making them easy to find.
9. **The Black Keep:** This tumbled and ruined shell keep overlooks an old trade route. Little remains of the keep's internal structure, but its outer walls yet keep the wind and snow at bay. The keep's blackened, scorched stones tell of a ferocious fire that destroyed the place years ago. Travellers often camp at the keep, but vague rumours of murder and a cult keep casual visitors away.
10. **Bleak Hill:** The surrounding hills and rugged uplands channel the prevailing winds over Bleak Hill. Standing stark and grey above the surrounding snow Bleak Hill is a cold, bitter place. The winds tearing at the hill blow away fallen snow, and leave nothing but bare rock and patches of lichen and moss.
11. **The Nose:** A shelf of bare rock juts outwards from a low hill. Twin caves pierce the shelf's base and give the feature its name. The caves are deep and offer shelter from the wind. Deep snowdrifts often block the cave's entrances. Travellers should beware: hibernating bears and wolf packs often lair in the caves.
12. **The Serpent's Way:** Worn by countless feet, the Serpent's Way takes a circuitous route. Following the land's natural folds, the path is wide enough for donkeys and horses, but not carts and the like. Although sheltered from the wind, heavy snow fall can still block the path.



3: MINOR DAYTIME EVENTS

Few journeys in a snowy, icy waste are wholly without incident.

1. The far off howling of wolves reaches the characters' ears. The sporadic howling continues for hours, and takes on a mournful tone. The wolves get no nearer to the party.
2. Dark low-hanging clouds unleash a burst of heavy snow. The snow obscures the party's vision, and slows their progress. Party members wandering away from the group could become separated.
3. The party discover fresh tracks in the snow. A tracker can identify the tracks as a single human-sized humanoid leading a horse. Occasional flecks of bright red blood on the white snow shows at least one of the two is injured.
4. The frozen corpse of a naked man lies face-down in the snow. The body bears no obvious injuries.
5. A frozen waterfall and stream lie astride the party's path. An ice-slick clapper-style bridge crosses the stream. Although an incautious party member could slip from the bridge, there is no real danger here. The stream is only two-foot deep, and almost completely frozen.
6. Gusts of wind birth snow devils that dance and weave across the snow. Several of the devils blow toward the party, but the wind pushes them away at the last moment. When the wind dies, the snow devils settle to the ground.
7. A small herd of reindeer graze amid the snow. The beasts are skinny, and hungry, but yet alert for danger. If approached—except by a druid, ranger or elf—the herd bolts. Bolting animals disappear over a nearby rise.
8. The party discovers a line of gigantic footsteps pushed deep into the snow. Made by a giant humanoid the tracks disappear over a hill. Some drifting snow has settled in the tracks, suggesting they aren't freshly made.
9. A puddle of frozen blood mars the snow. Standing in stark contrast to the snow, the crimson puddle is visible from a far distance. The snow around the frozen blood is churned up, suggesting a battle. Judging by the amount of blood, someone or something died here.
10. As the party pass a frozen, tree-shrouded stand of trees the creaking of wood fills the air. As they watch, a tree collapses under the weight of the snow covering its crown. Investigation reveals the tree was diseased.
11. Without warning, the ground bucks violently as a minor earthquake strikes. Stones are smashed and trees dashed to the ground. Birds take wing and other animals scatter. The shaking lasts only moments, but leaves an unnatural silence in its aftermath.
12. A white hare hops through the snow. Unconcerned by the party, it is hunting for food, and ignores anyone more than 20 feet away. The hare could make a tasty addition to the party's rations, and a tracker could follow its trail back to its warren.

4: MINOR NIGHTTIME EVENTS

Few folk travel the snowy wastes in the dead of night, but that doesn't mean nothing happens to those camping under the stars.

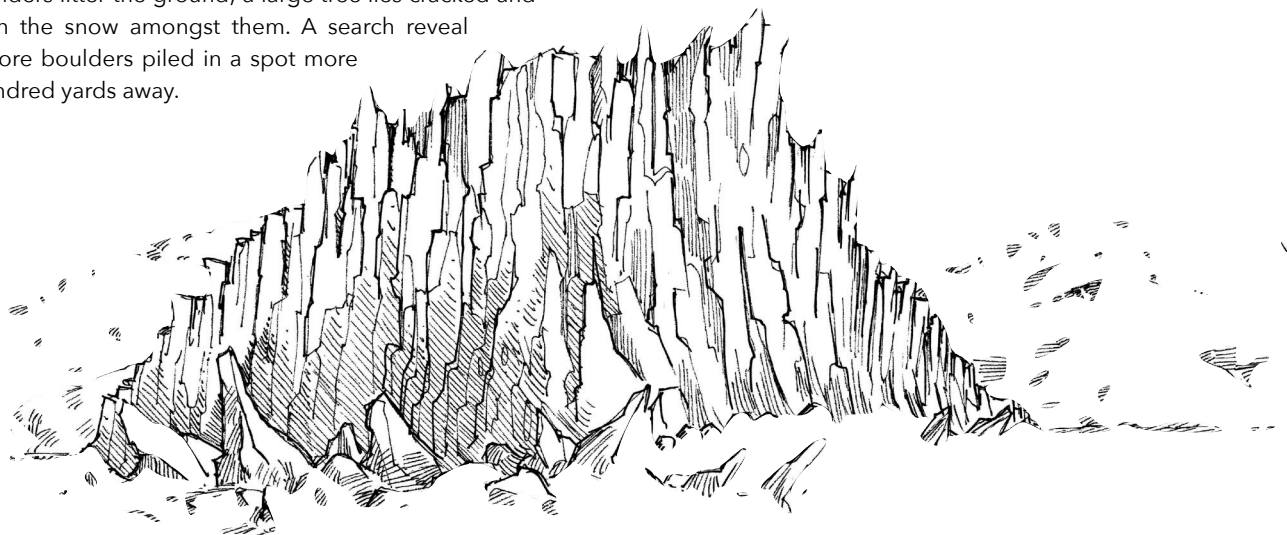
1. A scintillating array of vivid colours plays across the sky. The display is breathtaking. The intertwined arcs of red and yellow light are so bright, even humans can see as if it were day.
2. A distant glimmering light on the horizon marks another campsite. The light shines brightly for the first few hours but fades away as the night wears on.
3. Wind howls about the camp, plucking at the party's tents and hurling snow into the face of anyone outside. In the dead of night, the wind picks up and screams about the camp like a demented banshee. By morning, the wind drops away and the characters must dig themselves out of their tents.
4. Occasional, distant, inhuman howling reaches the party's ears. The howling sounds like the screeching of a large animal, but comes from far off. Later that night, the howling comes from the opposite direction, and is much closer.
5. A bubble of frigid air settles over the camp, and the temperature drops precipitously. The sentry's breath freezes in the air and frost forms on their eyebrows and nose.
6. The moon hangs low in the clear sky, reflecting bright light over the party's snowy camp. This light persists all night. It is hard for the party to sleep, but also hard for anyone or anything to creep up on the resting characters.
7. A white-furred fox scampers through camp looking for morsels of food. The fox is hungry, and can be hand-fed by a patient, non-threatening character.
8. The party has camped over a hares' warren. During the night, the timid creatures emerge to hunt for food buried beneath the snow. (White-furred wolves in the area may know of the warren and also make an appearance during the night. Unless they are starving, the wolves watch the camp from a distance and do not attack).
9. As dawn breaks, a flight of three white geese with black-tipped wings soars above the camp. They fly in the direction the party plan to travel. Could this be an omen?
10. Light snow falls all night, obscuring the party's tracks and covering the party's tents. At dawn the surrounds are white, pristine and pure.
11. An awesome display of scintillating colour crosses the sky. Brightening the land with an incredible rainbow of colours the lights lasts only a few minutes. The show illuminates several large shapes moving across the tundra.
12. A snowy white owl glides soundlessly above the party. If one of the heroes has a small animal companion or other pet, the owl might pounce. An attack by such a silent predator is likely to take the party by surprise.

5: WILDERNESS DRESSING

Vast swaths of a snowy land are boring and unremarkable. However, most travellers will encounter some features of minor interest, during their journey.

1. A frozen lake lies beneath a thin layer of virgin snow. The snow hides the lake's extent and the ice's thickness. An investigation may reveal holes cut in the ice, perhaps for fishing or some other purpose.
2. A lonely snowman watches over the featureless land. Charcoal shards serve as its eyes and nose, and old buttons adorn the snowman's torso. A small tattered red and orange scarf around the snowman's neck flutters in the breeze.
3. A dome of packed snow and ice stands proud amid deep drifts of snow. No obvious openings pierce the dome, but the heaped snow could hide its entrance.
4. Three hardy sheep, with thick off-white fleeces, graze on the grass buried under the snow. The sheep's massive gnarled horns look dangerous, but belie their passive nature. The animals completely ignore anyone approaching them.
5. A strange red and orange waterfall tumbles out of a cave in a high hill. The water plunges into a pitch-black hole at the hill's base. The snow around the waterfall is stained, and an odour like the smell of fresh blood fills the air.
6. A whining sound reveals a shivering dog curled up in the snow. Weeping scars from a whip are raw upon its back, and it lies on the ground as if concealing another injury. The dog has lain here for some time and is unlikely to survive for much longer without aid.
7. Patches of odd-coloured pink, green, yellow and blue snow dot the barren land. The patches are slightly iridescent and have an unpleasant taste. Nearby is a weather-worn sign, that suggests one should only eat the yellow snow.
8. Steam wafts up from a small pond covered with thick, lumpy bright-green algae. The water is warm, but the air around reeks of rotten eggs.
9. Huge boulders litter the ground; a large tree lies cracked and broken on the snow amongst them. A search reveal several more boulders piled in a spot more than a hundred yards away.

10. The deep tracks of a local predator advance through the snow, though are larger than normal. Much larger. The tracks disappear into a snowdrift. Thus, it is unclear if the creature is still nearby.
11. The air is much warmer around a pool of hot, bubbling water. The surrounding snow is slush. The source of the heat seems to be a barely visible staff or rod sunk deep in the pool.
12. The corpses of two fearsome predators lie frozen together in their death throes. There is no hint of the well-preserved bodies' age.
13. A small green and yellow leafed tree stands stark against the white of the surrounding snow. Curiously, no snow or ice rests on the tree's leaves or branches.
14. Recent rain has frozen on the icy ground, leaving a myriad of strange pillars reaching up towards the sky. One of these pillars is more than five feet in height, stretching upwards like a titan's finger.
15. The remains of a camp sprawl in the snow. Several low tunnels have been dug into the snow, offering shelter from the elements. The entrances all face a single extinguished campfire whose ashes are still warm to the touch.
16. A field of frozen flowers spreads across the snow, creating a bright spray of colour. The flowers' beauty is fragile, and they shatter if touched. The extreme cold has frozen the flowers to their cores.
17. An enormous humanoid skull lies amid a field of ice-covered stones. Rotting wooden planks block some of the holes piercing the skull. Soot and graffiti suggest the skull has served as a shelter in the past.
18. An array of well-camouflaged holes dot the snow. They resemble rabbit holes, but scraps of skin and small bones suggest something less benign lurks within.
19. A cache of hunting equipment waits here for its owner to reclaim it. Freshly skinned hides fill an oiled sack, and both the crossbow and traps bear signs of recent use.
20. A pile of a half-dozen tree trunks lie in the shelter of a stand of trees. A well-used iron axe is embedded in a stump, and sledge tracks scar the ground.

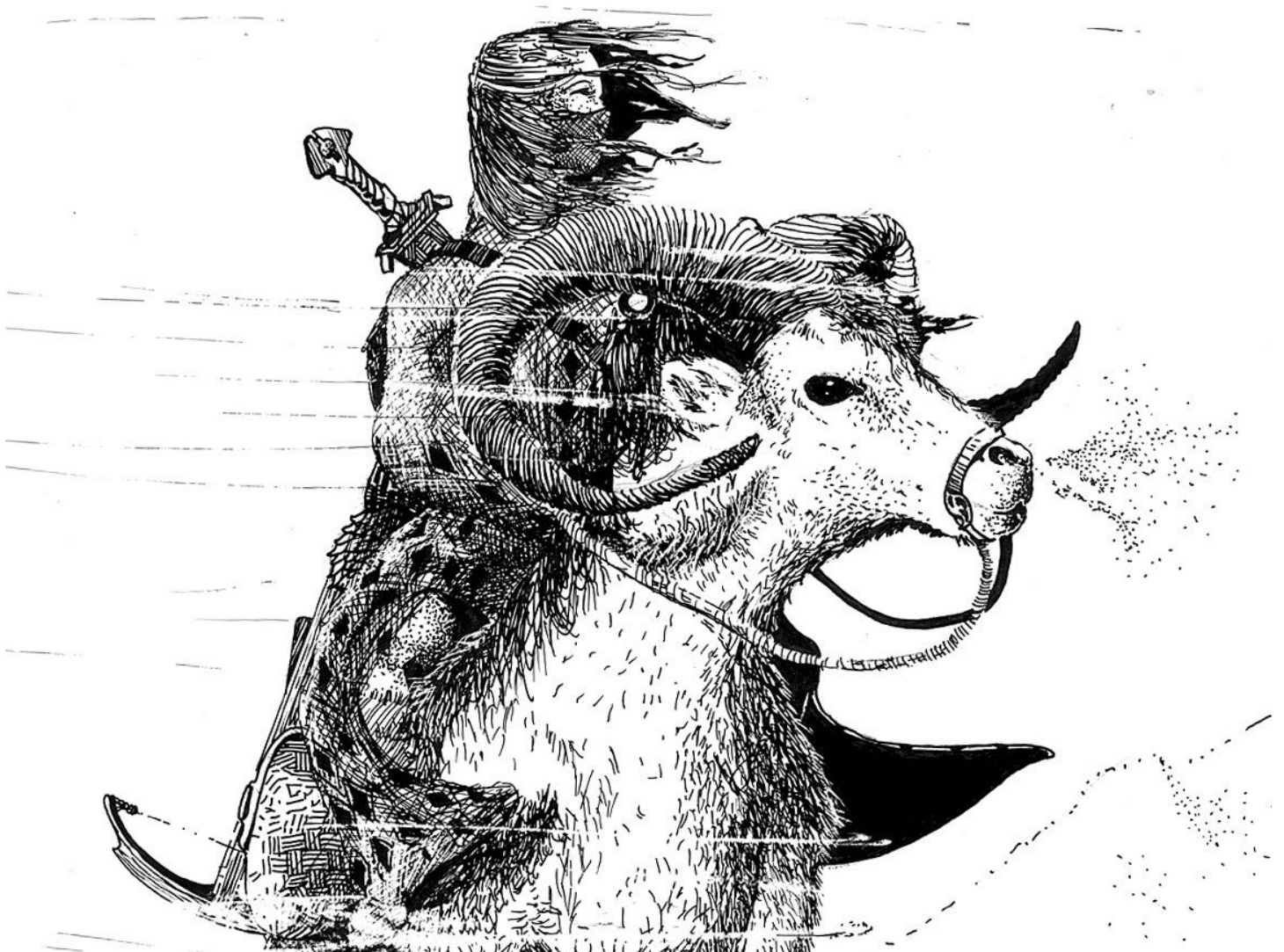


6: UNEVENTFUL TRAVEL

Some days, an adventurer's life is full of danger and excitement. Many other days are boring and uneventful.

1. The day is cold and clear. A light breeze blows into the characters' faces for much of the morning. The wind dies in the afternoon before returning at dusk. The temperature plunges, when the sun goes down.
2. Light snow falls for much of the day, obscuring the party's tracks. The characters see no other travellers, but do discover a sizeable wolf pack's tracks late in the day. Of the wolves, there is sign.
3. Despite a pale, wan sun the temperature never gets above freezing. The party slog through trackless snow, all day. They see no other living things except a few birds wheeling far above. The party ends the day cold, hungry and tired.
4. A light freezing mist hugs the ground, as the party breaks camp. The mist doesn't obscure vision, but lingers all day. Dark clouds arrive in the mid-afternoon and dusk comes early.

5. A few birds wheel high up in the clear, blue sky. The birds shadow the party for several hours before something far away distracts them. Light clouds scud across the sky, but no snow falls. A light breeze begins in the late afternoon. As dusk falls, the wind picks up and hurls light snow at the party.
6. The temperature is several degrees warmer, today. By midday, some ice and snow begins to melt, and the sound of dripping water assails the party. In the late afternoon, the temperature plummets below zero.
7. At dawn, a chill wind strikes the party's camp, whipping up the fresh fallen snow. After a few hours, the wind stills. Sporadic flurries of snow strike the party during the day and as dusk falls heavy snow begins to fall. By morning, the party's tracks are wholly obscured.
8. Mist hovers over the land, in the morning. The mist seems to shimmer in the rising sun's sharp rays. The sun burns the mist away by mid-morning, but dark clouds gather in the early afternoon. Scudding by far overhead the clouds plunge the travellers into shade. The temperature drops below zero.



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