

WINTER'S MOURNING

by Laurie O'Connel

Goddess: Auril | Level: 17

Content Warnings: Inter-family Conflict, Grief, Mass Death

SYNOPSIS

A band of heroes is drawn to Icewind Dale following rumours of strange magic and terrible deeds. Auril, the cruel goddess of Winter, has been driven to desperate acts by the death of her daughter, Nalkara. As Auril pursues brutal blood rituals to resurrect her loved one, the quest begins when one of Auril's oathsmen convinces her to enlist the characters in pursuing a less bloody solution.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Word of Auril's bloodthirstiness spreads across the world like frost on spring's first crop. Citizens are fleeing Icewind Dale, braving the dangerous journey through the ice-filled sea or over the blizzard-torn mountains. They cannot pay the characters for their services; still, they beg for aid. Less than a week ago, Auril visited the town of Caer Konig. The survivors ask the characters to investigate the now-ruined town and find out what became of those they left behind.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is specifically set in Icewind Dale, but if that doesn't suit your campaign, any frozen area can be made to work. If *Rime of the Frostmaiden* has been completed, treat Auril's encountered physical incarnations as her less powerful avatars.

Every night in Icewind Dale, Auril the Frostmaiden takes to the sky on the back of her roc and casts a spell which plunges the Dale into eternal winter. But recently, as a result of Auril's grief, this winter has become harsher—bitterly, deadly cold, with lethal magical storms and gales. The DM should show the effect that the winter has on the citizens, with food shortages, extinction of local wildlife, and extreme weather. Make it clear that the adventure is about more than Auril—lifting the curse affects the wellbeing of an entire region.

THE STORY OF AURIL AND NALKARA

Long ago, the goddess Auril was married to Thrym, the giant god of cold and ice, and together they bore a daughter, the Empyrean Nalkara. Once grown, Auril brought Nalkara to war against Akadi, the goddess of storms, seeking to claim the Tempest domain for herself. A divine war in Pandemonium was fought between the two. When Auril was close to victory, however, Akadi killed Nalkara through treachery, and Auril retreated to Icewind Dale to mourn and to search for a way to resurrect her.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Auril The Frostmaiden (she/her, god, neutral evil).
The bitter frost knows no kindness and receives no pity.

- The goddess of winter, her tenets are cruelty, preservation, endurance, and isolation.
- Auril does not inflict cruelty for its own sake, but is very willing to kill mortals if it would be useful; mercy and sympathy are unfamiliar to the goddess of unrelenting seasons.
- Her war with Akadi to claim the domain of the tempest has brought her great personal loss, but she is unrelenting in her ambitions.
- Auril's true form, which she can manifest only at her shrine on Kelvin's Cairn, is cloud-like and incorporeal. Attacks on her by anyone other than another god simply have no effect in this form. Her lesser avatars, which do her bidding in Icewind Dale, are significantly weaker and use the **Auril** statblocks from *Icewind Dale: Rime of The Frostmaiden*.

Nalkara Host-Shatterer (she/her, **empyrean**, true neutral). *A war-weary shieldmaiden of honour and renown, sacrificed to a mother's greed.*

- The daughter of Thrym and Auril.
- Formerly the general of Auril's divine armies, she was killed in the war against Akadi.
- The bearer of the legendary shield Svalinn.

Einar The Ancient (he/him, see appendix). *A warrior of ten thousand years, bound to many oaths and many lieges.*

- Nalkara's guidefather, a storm giant who achieved immortality through drinking the blood of Thrym.
- After breaking his oath to protect Nalkara's life, he lives out his days in service to Auril but finds her bloodier deeds distasteful.

CHAPTER 1.0 — THE DOOM OF CAER KONIG

ARRIVAL AT CAER KONIG

The sleepy village of Caer Konig is tucked away at the base of Kelvin's Cairn—the tallest peak in Icewind Dale. The village is completely deserted. The only thing left of interest is a pile of bodies in the market square, the victims of a sacrificial ritual. A storm giant, Einar the Ancient, is burying the bodies. Einar explains that the massacre is Auril's work, as she is attempting a

very powerful spell. If pressed for details, he hints at information in The Story of Auril and Nalkara (see sidebar), but due to his personal connection with Nalkara, is too grief-stricken to reveal much.

DEVELOPMENT

Einar explains that the Frostmaiden can't be turned from her purpose, but she might be convinced of a less murderous route. He begs the party to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Auril at the peak of Kelvin's Cairn, where they will be able to speak directly to her. He is willing to accompany the party if asked.



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CHAPTER 1.5 — THE SNOWBOUND SHRINE

The next stop for the characters is Auril's shrine at the peak of Kelvin's Cairn. The pilgrimage up the mountain requires characters to pass through three gates, which take about four hours to reach each time.

THE TABLETS

A great stone tablet marks each of the three gates through which the characters must progress in the mountains. Each tablet is engraved with a verse written in Giant (or Jotun). Characters can make history checks to interpret the information on the tablets.

Tablet I. Facing an engraving of a hunched woman with an owl's face wearing a white crown.

UNTHAWING THRONE-WIFE ||
THANE OF WINTER,
FOR THY FAVOUR || FEARFUL WE BEG.
IN SUNLESS-MONTHS' STYLE ||
SILENT THOU GOEST,
SORROW UNSATED ||
YOUR STORMS SHATTER US.
A TERRIBLE TALE ||
IN YOUR NAME WE TELL.
WORSHIP TO YOU, WINTER-QUEEN ||
WORSHIP TO THEE!

Tablet II. Facing an engraving of a young woman going into battle wielding a shield and spear, surrounded by a retinue of giants.

BOLD BATTLEMAIDEN, ||
GIANT-BORN DAUGHTER,
PROUD SHIELD-BEARER ||
OF SWORD-BREAKING SVALINN,
FATED TO FLAME ||
AND FIRE-BORNE SORROW.
FATHER'S FAIR-RULING ||
FALLS UPON HER,
GIANT-KING THRYM ||
THANE OF FROST-FALL.

FROST-MOTHER'S FAVOUR ||
FALLS UPON HER,

WOE-BRINGING WINTER-QUEEN ||
STRONG-WILLED AND UNWAVERING,

POWER-LUST DRIVEN ||
PLANS SHE PROVIDED FOR HER,

ILL-FATED AFFECTION ||
FONDNESS WISTFUL-FLOWN.

Tablet III. Facing a depiction of mourners, including a giant in a king's circlet and the same owl-faced woman, surrounding a funeral pyre.

AIR-BORNE AKADI ||
ANCIENT TEMPEST-LORD
BATTLE-BOUND WAR-WIFE ||
WIND-RIDING DEVIL.
AGAINST HER STOOD AURIL ||
ARMED AND BATTLE-READY,
BOLD NALKARA BY HER ||
HOARFROST-BORN HOST LEADER
LEFT STORM-MOTHER'S BATTLE LINES ||
BROKEN AND BLEEDING.

VICTORY NOT FAR-FLUNG ||
NIGHT FELL ON THE FIELD.
WHEN MURDER-BOUND GALE-GODDESS ||
IN WIND-GUST'S GUISE,
THROUGH WINDOW-CRACK CREEPING ||
QUIETLY ENTERED

HER FOE SHE FOUND ||
FROST-BORN NALKARA
SEEING HER SLEEPING ||
SHE SAVAGELY SET ON HER
HER WINDS FED THE HALL-FIRES ||
HER FLAMES SHE SET FEASTING,
SPEAR-BREAKING SHIELD-BEARER ||
SCORCHED DOWN TO FIRE-SAND,
CURSES TO YOU, SQUALL-KEEPER ||
CURSES TO THEE!

PILGRIMAGE CHALLENGES

The extreme magical weather on the pilgrimage is sympathetic to Auril's grief. Use the Magical Weather Table and roll every time the characters pass a gate. The phenomena last until the next gate, checks only need to be made once.

THE SECOND GATE

Just beyond the second gate, an **abominable yeti** leaps from a cliff above the group and attacks. Its pack of four **abominable yeti grunts** (use the statistics of an **abominable yeti** with 50 hp and AC 17 (shield)) attack from a hidden position (noticeable with a successful **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check**) camouflaged against the snow. The yeti are performing the same pilgrimage as the party, and are looking for an appropriate (and still living, if possible) sacrifice to offer at Auril's shrine.

THE GRAVE OF NALKARA

An hour after passing the third gate, you push through the mountain mist into a clear blue sky. The stunning panorama below is nothing compared to the grandiosity of the shrine which lies before you. A huge marble sarcophagus stands on the mountaintop. At its head is a sword the size of a grown man, half buried in the snow.

DEVELOPMENT: AURIL'S APPEARANCE

When the party reaches the gravesite, the weather calms and Auril appears, revealing that her rituals are attempts to resurrect Nalkara. On Einar's advice, she is willing to enlist help to see if there is another way to bring Nalkara back. Auril believes there is powerful resurrection magic hidden within the Athenaeum in the city of Ythryn, but she is tied up in her war against Akadi and can only send very weak avatars to the Material Plane, limiting her ability to investigate. All she can offer the PCs is a location (near the Ythryn Mythallar) and a password (*ipsa scientia potestas est*).

Auril promises to lift the winter and provide the characters with her blessing if they agree to help bring her daughter back. If they refuse Auril, Einar will appear to the party and beg them for assistance on the first day of each season for the next year. After that he will give up.

MAGICAL WEATHER TABLE

1d4	Result
1	Mountain Gale. <i>A terrible wind blows up from the valley.</i> - All movement speed is halved. - Characters must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or get blown off the precarious path up the mountainside. Characters take 10d6 bludgeoning damage as they fall from a great height, and this sets the characters back by 4 hours in their travel. A remorhaz nest blocks their route back to the main pathway.
2	Whiteout. <i>A heavy fog descends suddenly, making it impossible to see the path or tell which direction you are walking in.</i> - Characters are considered blinded. - Characters must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) or DC 20 Intelligence (Perception) check to avoid getting lost. If the check is failed by 5 or more, characters fall into a hidden crevasse, taking 6d6 bludgeoning damage, and characters discover a skeleton in the crevasse holding a <i>bag of holding</i> containing 50 gp and a <i>spell scroll</i> of Leomund's tiny hut.
3	Avalanche. <i>The mountain echoes with an eerie cry of grief, which causes a sudden snowfall from a slope above.</i> Avalanche rules can be found in <i>Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden</i>.
4	Man-Killer Frost. <i>A terrible feeling of sadness and loss falls upon the group as the temperature drops.</i> - Characters gain no benefits from a long or short rest. - Characters must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or they take a level of exhaustion for every hour spent without heat and shelter as frostbite sets in.

CHAPTER 2 — THE PRICE OF KNOWLEDGE

The city of Ythryn is an ancient Netherese city buried within the Reghed glacier in Icewind Dale. A map of Ythryn and more information about the city is found in *Rime of the Frostmaiden*. The entrance to the Athenaeum is hidden near the Ythryn mythallar in the heart of the city.

THE YTHRYN MYTHALLAR

Arcane Power of the Ancients. *Mythallar* are glowing spheres of pure magical energy which kept the floating cities of Netheril aloft. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that these *mythallar* are products of decades of labour by Netheril's most powerful archmages and are capable of powering magical rituals which break the normal boundaries of magic.

The *mythallar* can be *teleported* (as per the spell), but only by a creature attuned to it. Alternatively, an attuned creature can move the *mythallar* as allowed in the item's description.

YTHRYN ATHENAEUM

The door appears near the mythallar when the passphrase is uttered. The location in which the entrance appears is marked by an obvious stone carving of a door.

The Athenaeum has been perfectly preserved by the Reghed Glacier. Before Ythryn fell, it functioned as a library and school for fostered children seeking adoption into Netheril's magocratic ruling class.

AREA 1: ENTRANCE

A stone entrance hall decorated with bright panels depicting the eight schools of magic. Before each panel is a gem in a bracket, glowing with magical light. A door to the east leads to Area 2.

The door at the end is locked and does not open to any mundane or magical means. Eight small hollows large enough to hold the gems are carved into the locked door alongside an inscription in Loross, which can also be read by characters who understand Draconic. To the left of the door are carvings of Netherese archmages in study, while to the right are depictions of the goddess Mysteryl hiding arcane knowledge from them. The inscription reads:

THE SCHOOL OF TRANSMUTATION
HOLDS CHAOS IN ITS WAKE,
ITS EVER CHANGING FACE ALLOWS IT ANY
PLACE TO TAKE.
EVOCATION AND NECROMANCY HAVE
ONLY ONE BESIDE THEM;
BETWEEN THE TWO, NECROMANCY MUST
HAVE MYSTERYL BEHIND THEM.
THE SCHOOL OF CONJURATION MANY
VARIED PATHS MAY WEND,
SOMEWHERE TWIXT FIRE AND CHAOS
MUST BE WHERE ITS JOURNEY ENDS.
AND FINALLY THE SIBLING SCHOOLS
MUST HAND IN HAND RESIDE;
BUT DIVINATION CANNOT THE
DECEPTIVE TWINS ABIDE;
AND WARDING AND ILLUSION MUST
HAVE DEATH OR FLAME BESIDE.

SOLVING THE PUZZLE

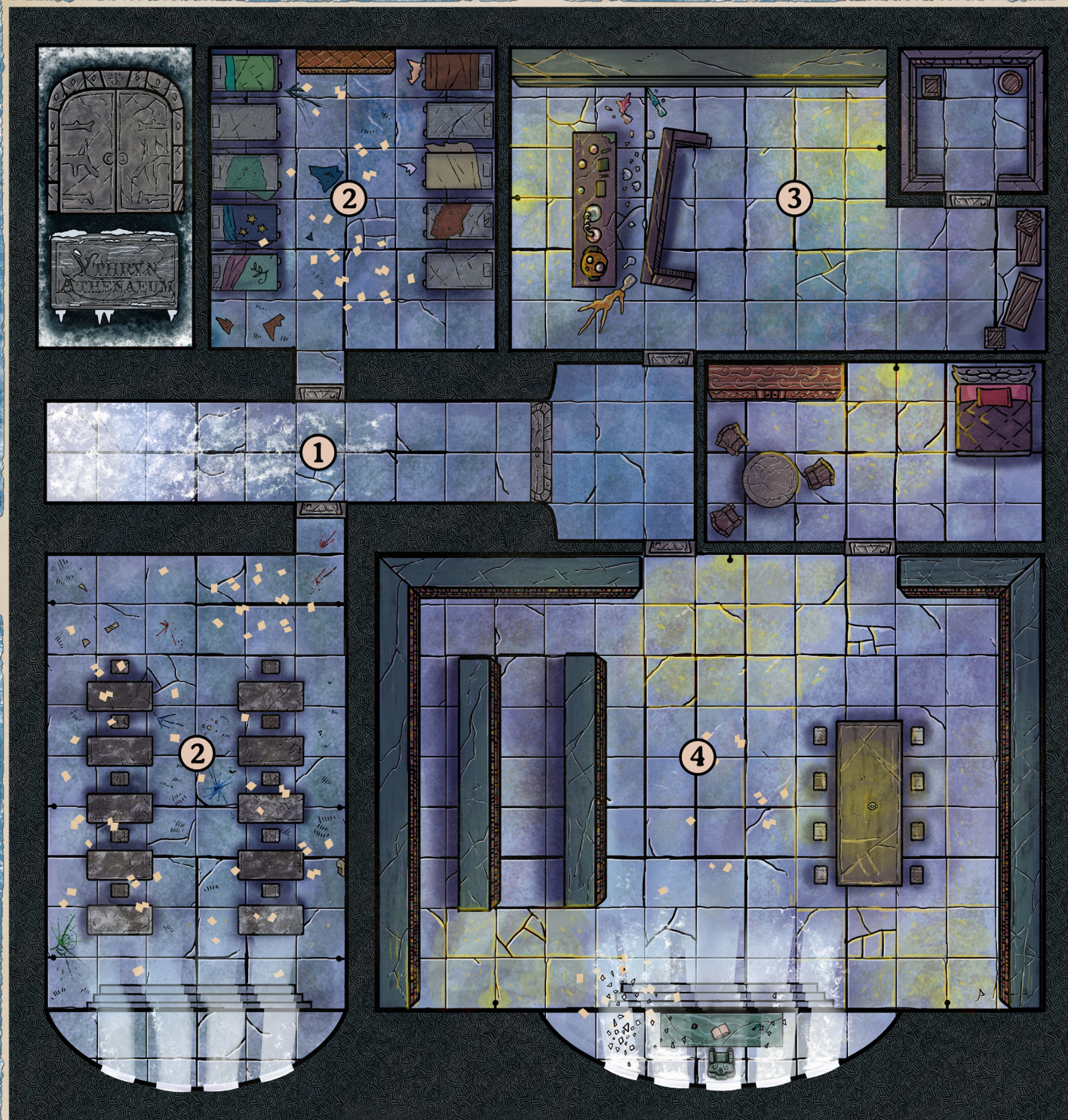
A character who succeeds on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check** knows the following: Within the eight schools of magic, certain pairs are known as "sibling schools". Conjuration and Abjuration are considered to be "siblings", as are Illusion and Enchantment.

In order to solve the puzzle, the gems which correspond to each school of magic must be placed in the following order: Evocation, Abjuration, Conjuration, Divination, Transmutation, Enchantment, Illusion, Necromancy. If the gems are placed in the wrong order, nothing happens.

If your group has a high number of casters, consider requiring them to "power" each gem with their own spells from the different schools, rather than the gems already being enchanted.

AREA 2: THE HALL OF THE FOSTERLINGS

A large hall with stone beds and desks. The room is infested with ten **nothics**, who were once students here. They can perform one random cantrip from the wizard list each. Painful echoes of a lost past, the nothic students reenact the events of their last day. They can use their Weird Insight ability to discover the characters' goals in the Athenaeum, and will trade the following information for sweets or interesting facts.



- The Athenaeum was once a school for young mages, but had a second, secret function as a place to store knowledge the Netherese mages wanted to hide from prying eyes.
- Scrying is impossible within the Athenaeum, as is divine intervention or intrusion. Teleportation in and out of the Athenaeum is only possible with permission from the current schoolmistress, Hateira Octavia.
- Powerful alchemical recipes are stored in the laboratory to the west. Spellbooks and other research is kept in Hateira's Sanctum to the east. Both lie through the puzzle door in the hall.

AREA 3: THE LABORATORY

An alchemical laboratory infested with living spells. Three **living blades of disaster** (RotF) and one **living Bigby's hand** (see adventure appendix) attack as soon as they see the characters. Also in the laboratory is a *Tome of Alchemical Miracles*.

ROOM 4: HATEIRA'S SANCTUM

You enter a large, open room lined with bookshelves and piled floor to ceiling with ancient tomes. Stairs lead up to a slight dais where a large, cluttered desk is illuminated by green light streaming in from a broken stained glass window. At the desk, a stout bespectacled woman, covered in golden jewelry and dressed in a mage's robes, looks up and angrily hushes you. "Can't you see I'm working on something? Be quiet and return to your own studies!"

Hateira Octavia, the librarian, is a **lich** who maintains her former appearance using a *circlet of disguise*. Hateira cares only for her library and her students. Unless the characters attacked the nothics in Room 2, she is not immediately hostile, but is unwilling to share any of the library's knowledge. She will agree to share the spell *eternal resurrection* (see "Chapter 3: Shield-Maiden's Slumber") under two conditions:

- 1) One of the characters bests her in a duel, or
- 2) The characters agree to take her least favourite student, the troublesome nothic Octavius Cassius, as an apprentice.

DUELING HATEIRA

Hateira is assisted by her swarm of **animated grimoires** (see adventure appendix). Hateira is not particularly enthused about dueling, but sees it as the quickest way to convince the characters to go away, treating it like an inconvenient chore unless her opponent proves to be worthy of the effort.

If Hateira reduces a character to 0 hit points, they are left unconscious but stable. If one character is knocked out, another may take their place. Unless the characters are actively trying to kill or incapacitate Hateira, reducing her to 0 hit points instead causes her to forfeit. She remains conscious and able to communicate with the characters.

DEVELOPMENT

Hateira Octavia shares the spell *eternal resurrection* (see the following page) with the party. The spell looks incredibly difficult, but with a bit of luck, it might just be possible...

CHAPTER 3 — SHIELD-MAIDEN'S SLUMBER

THE RITUAL

The party must now attempt to perform the ritual that will return Nalkara to life. For this, the characters must return to Nalkara's grave with the components for the ritual. Having performed the pilgrimage once, they do not have to do so again and are protected from its unusual trials. Once they begin, they will not be able to back out, so allow them sufficient time to prepare. Run the ritual in initiative order.

THE ELDER TEMPEST

Akadi attacks the group in the form of one of her lesser avatars, an **elder tempest**, as soon as the ritual begins. After five rounds pass or the ritual is complete, Auril will also appear to fight Akadi, and combat ends for the characters as they drag each other back to their battlefield in Pandemonium.

If the elder tempest is reduced to 0 hp before five rounds or the ritual is complete, have Auril appear earlier, taking advantage of Akadi's momentary weakness to teleport them both away.

ETERNAL RESURRECTION

A ritual to return a murdered immortal to eternal life.

Components:

5,000 gp worth of frankincense and myrrh.

5,000 gp worth of powdered silver.

A legendary or rarer magic item to provide power for the spell (such as the *Ythryn Mythallar*).

At least three casters.

THE RITUAL

Completing the ritual is a skill challenge which requires ten successes or six failures to complete. Whilst casting the ritual, casters are only able to perceive, react to, and act upon the ritual and their fellow ritual casters. If a caster's physical body is forcibly moved 15 or more feet away from the ritual, they perform checks with disadvantage until someone moves them back.

With every success, 1 is added to all DCs.

DC 35: full success, add a tick to the success clock.

DC 25: mixed success, add a tick to the success clock and choose one consequence.

- Add an additional tick to the failure clock
- Destroy the artifact used in the ritual (1 use).
- The land becomes barren and infertile in a radius of 33 miles (1 use).
- Permanently reduce the character's max hp by 2d10 (1 use).
- Permanently age one of the characters by 1d4 x 5 years (1 use).

Choose one of the mages casting the spell and direct their life force into the ritual. This kills the caster, who can only be resurrected with divine intervention or a wish spell, and reduces following DCs by 4.

Failure: Add a tick to the failure clock and choose a consequence from the list above.

Upon success or failure, the spell cannot be cast again for 60 years.

your party's buffing potential when setting the ritual DC. Wizards with *skill empowerment*, artificers with *Flash of Genius* and *guidance*, and bards with *Bardic Inspiration* will consistently be able to roll higher checks. For those with a little extra prep time, using a probability calculator and adjusting the DC according to your party's skills is highly recommended.

Warn the players of the high DCs of the skill checks. Don't keep the ritual rules secret from them. They should be given time to prepare to give themselves the highest possible chance of success.

SUGGESTED ADJUSTMENTS TABLE

Party Size	Number of Casters	Success Clock	Failure Clock
1-3	2+	6	4
4	2+	8	5
5	3+	10	6

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DM Advice. In order to hit the sweet spot of "possible but difficult" you may wish to adjust the DCs and requirements for your party. For example, in a smaller party, smaller clocks may be required. Similarly, consider

Party Expertise	Mixed Success DC	Full Success DC
Low-magic (lacking buffs, expertise, or sources of advantage)	15	25
High-magic (access to buffs and expertise, but not deliberately min-maxed)	25	35
High-magic, min-maxed (for players who like to get numbers as high as possible)	30	40

CASTERS & NON-CASTERS

The ritual requires at least three spellcasters. If there are not enough in the party, an NPC such as Hateira Octavia or an ally from a previous game can assist. Auril is also capable of sending one of her minor avatars to assist in the ritual if she is asked. Those not participating in the ritual have a twofold job—buff the casters to improve their skill checks, and defend them from the elder tempest.

Whilst the challenge requires skill checks, the checks need not be solely Arcana—a charismatic sorcerer could intimidate the Weave into obedience, while a cunning warlock could attempt to deceive Death itself. Have the players describe what they are doing to make the check. A ritual of this power can grant players all sorts of prophetic visions of Nalkara's death or her soul trapped in the afterlife. Use the opportunity to foreshadow future games, encourage revelations, or force characters to come to terms with their past.

CONCLUSION

SUCCESS

If the party succeeds, Nalkara is returned to life. However, Nalkara loves her mother but does not want to return to fighting in her war. Nalkara requests that the characters allow her and Einar (if he is with the group) to leave the Material Plane and return to her father, Thrym, before Auril returns from her battle with Akadi.

If the characters force a weakened Nalkara to remain, seeking Auril's favour, Auril thanks them on her return, offering them the *Blessing of the Frostmaiden* (RotF). If the characters help Nalkara leave, the disobedience of both her daughter and mortal servants displeases her and she warns them not to seek further favours from her. Nalkara, on the other hand, rewards the characters with a 64 year-long loan of her legendary shield, *Svalinn*.

In either case, an oathbound Auril keeps her promise to lift the curse of winter.

FAILURE

If the party fails the ritual, Nalkara appears to them in a vision. She tells them she does not wish to return to a life of war and desires to pass on. If Einar is told of this, he gives the group one of his own possessions, the *Belt of the Huskarl*, in thanks for respecting Nalkara's wishes. Communicating Nalkara's wishes to Auril will grieve her—but there's still a chance that the characters can persuade her to end the winter, knowing Nalkara does not wish to return.

ADVENTURE APPENDIX

ITEMS AND BOONS

BELT OF THE HUSKARL

Wondrous item, very rare, requires attunement

An ornate leather belt given to Einar the Ancient by Thrym the Giant Lord, it allows him to momentarily lend his strength to his allies.

Once per day, the wearer can use a free action to activate the belt by speaking the command word 'comrade'. Doing so calls on Einar's strength, setting the wearer's Strength score to 29 for the next 10 minutes.

BLESSING OF THE FROSTMAIDEN

Divine Boon

Your eyes become as cold as ice. You gain immunity to cold damage. In addition, you can cast the *cone of cold* spell (save DC 15) once. You regain the ability to cast this spell when you finish a long rest.

SVALINN

Wondrous artifact, legendary, requires attunement

The legendary shield of the Empyrean Nalkara, inscribed with the name Svalinn, written in Giant. Ancient Giant poetry suggests that Svalinn is in fact older than the Jotun civilization, dating its make back to the time of the ancient Ostorians.

Aspect of the Protector. While holding this shield, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and spell attacks have disadvantage against you.

Aspect of the Giant. Once per long rest, while holding this shield, you can use a bonus action to enlarge yourself for 1 hour. Whilst enlarged: