

THE FOREST OWLBEAR



estled between the snow-capped peaks of the Galdor Mountains and the dense, whispering pines of Merwood Forest, lies the quaint village of Frosthaven. This serene hamlet, known for its hearty folk and bountiful harvests, faces an unforeseen peril as winter's icy grip tightens. A rare creature, an owlbear, fierce and unpredictable, has made its lair in a cavern near the town. Recently, it has begun to attack travelers and hunters, leaving the villagers in fear and confusion. None now how to approach this danger.

It all began when a merchant caravan that passed near Merwood Forest was attacked by the owlbear. It came from the snowy thicket and viciously attacked the caravan guards and then the merchants. A guard and a merchant were the only survivors. They reached Frosthaven with frostbite wounds and a terrible story to tell. Since that day, the two roads that pass near the woods have been guarded by the hungry beast. Sir Marin, Frosthaven's constable, already considers spending some from the winter coffers to hire outsiders to help them overcome this terrible threat during the deep winter.

Unbeknown to the villagers of Frosthaven, this owlbear is not driven by mere bloodlust. Deep within the shadowy recesses of its cavern, the beast has adopted four orphaned, regular bear cubs; their mother slain by heartless trophy hunters. This unprecedented act of maternal instinct heightens the owlbear's territorial aggression, as it seeks to protect its newfound family at all costs.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Rescue. The characters arrive in Frosthaven looking for shelter for the season just as the town is abuzz with tales of the owlbear's latest attack. The village elders and Sir Marin, the constable, desperate to protect their people and restore peace, offer a reward to valiant sellswords enough to venture into the snowy wilderness and deal with the monster. In a self-aggrandizing display of bravery and ego, Sir Marin (**knight**) offers to accompany the characters. He sees an opportunity to become relevant and to be reelected for his position as constable.

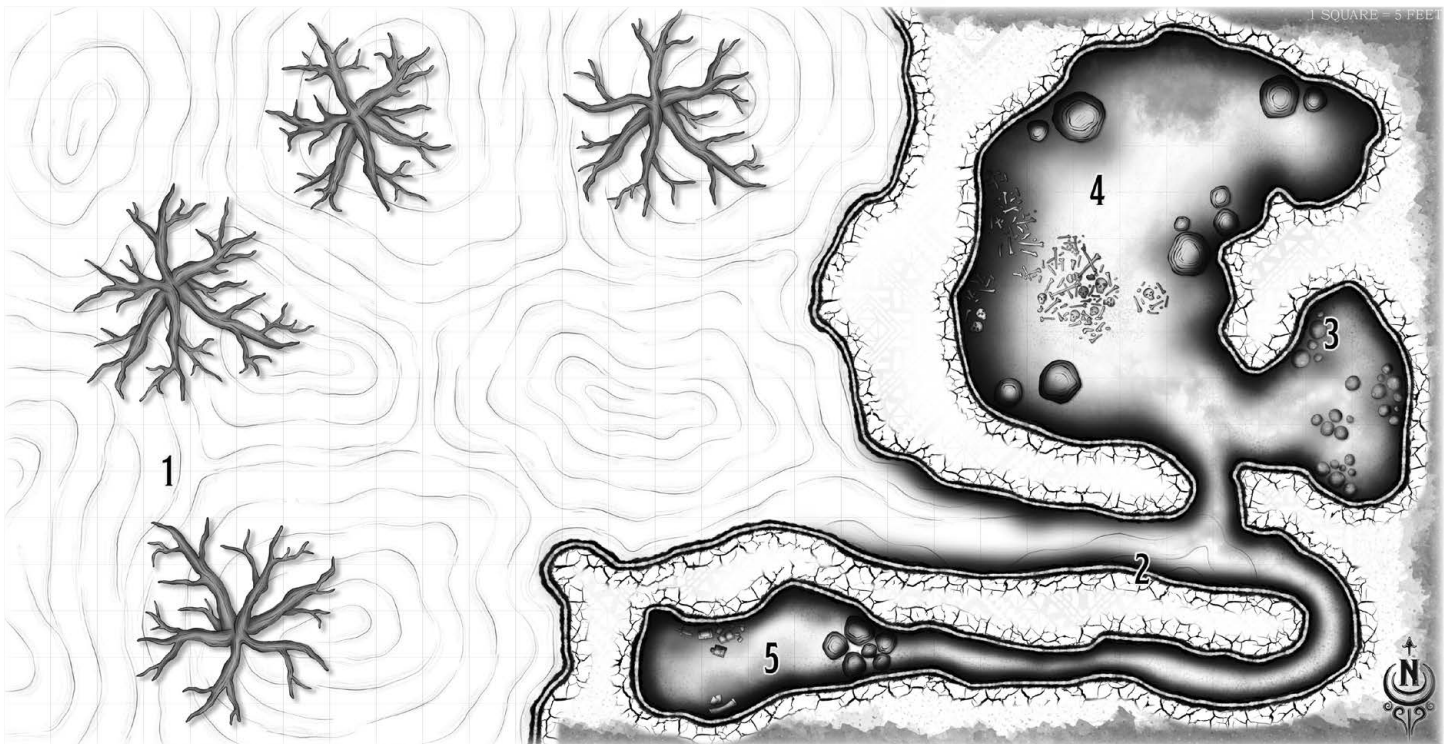
Sir Marin fights bravely but lacks compassion, which may be relevant if the characters want to find a non-violent solution to this situation (4 XP, 500 gp).

Level 3 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Encounter** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** During the day, visibility outdoors is impaired due to the snow glare. Characters without protective gear cannot see further than 15 feet and have disadvantage on visual checks. The owlbear is **dark-adapted**.

► **Nature's Mind.** The owlbear's maternal guarding of the bears has caused Merwood Forest to react in sympathy. There is a heightened amount of fauna near the cave. These creatures may come to the owlbear's aid as described in the areas below and random encounters.



RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d6 Details

- 1 Four **orcs** and a snow **ape** battle over deer meat. Their clash spills over by the owlbear's territory.
- 2 A murderous fur trader (**thief**) on the run tries to sell pelts stolen from an attacked caravan (DC 12 WIS).
- 3 1d6 **will-o'-wisps** made of arcane ice float around a frozen pond within eyesight of the owlbear's cavern.
- 4 Two hungry **giant frogs** from area 3 leap out from under the snow and attempt to swallow a character.
- 5 An opportunistic **swarm of scarabs** emerges from cracks in the cavern wall to attack trespassers.
- 6 A lone rancher (**guard**), thinking wolves stole his cattle, has come seeking to take revenge on the forest beasts.

1. THE OWLBEAR'S CAVE

On a squat, rocky hillside, the cavern entrance is marked by towering icicles and the footprints of many woodland creatures. Around the entrance, several leafless oaks stand; their branches reaching up to the sky like fingers. The coming-and-going owlbear tracks can be found nearby. However, smaller sets of tracks are there too. These belong to the four bear cubs in the cave (DC 13 WIS).

2. THE LONG TUNNEL

There are ancient cave paintings on the natural cavern walls. Most are faded beyond recognition but a few still show hunters-gathers in their way of life. Some show the worship of the stars and strange deities. Characters with a fine nose detect the sour stench that comes from area 3 and identify it as fungal spores (DC 14 WIS).

3. MUSHROOM GROVE

A dangerous variety of mushrooms grows in this cavern. They produce dense spore-saturated clouds that burn the lungs and eyes when a person is exposed to them. Characters in the area are temporarily blinded and suffer from coughing (DC 16 CON check). Two **giant frogs** live among the fungi. They are immune to the spores.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** Among the farthest patch of mushrooms lies a sheathed *+1 dagger* with a ruby handle.

4. THE BEARS

Beyond a bed of bones in the chamber's center, a large creature looms closer. Its body that of a brown bear. Its head that of a shrewd owl. Behind it cower four common bear cubs no larger than a dog.

This is a perilous situation. However, astute characters may see the opportunity to avoid bloodshed.

► **The Remains.** The deep bed of bones in the cavern belongs to all kinds of beings. Most of them are from woodland creatures but a few recent ones belong to the hapless merchants and travelers attacked on the road.

► **The Mother.** The **owlbear's** protective instincts cause it to fight to the death if necessary to protect the cubs. It puts their welfare above its own. The owlbear, exalted by the very Merwood Forest, can speak Sylvan. The owlbear is wary of humanoids from past experiences but it may accept the following terms (**Reaction**): To remain in the forest as long as it stays away from the roads. To keep from attacking travelers. And that no further retaliation befalls the owlbear or the cubs from the human settlements. The owlbear mother promises to hunt only in the faraway depths of Merwood Forest.

► **Sir Marin.** He does not trust the owlbear and recommends the characters attack at once to slay it. If antagonized, Sir Marin charges the owlbear valiantly.

5. FROZEN BONES

Removing the boulders in the tunnel requires two hours of continuous work and the use of spades and pickaxes. Within, there are papers, tattered clothing, and bones.

The Remains. A skeleton is half-buried among the remains, there is no way to tell how long it has been here.

Treasure (2 XP). One bag contains 90 gp and a scroll with a map that leads to an uncharted tomb.

