

White Midwinter

A one-shot D&D 5e adventure of 3-6 hours, intended for a single gaming session.

With thanks & festive wishes to members of *A Traveler's Venture*

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Midwinter, also known as Deadwinter Day, is celebrated across Faerun (the world of the Forgotten Realms) to mark the shortest day of winter. It is traditionally a day of making and renewing of bonds and alliances, making it a grand day of formal celebrations and feasting amongst nobles and courtiers, where gifts and vows are given. The common folk have come to copy this tradition with their own feasts, where they toast to friendship and the renewing of the seasons, and take a day to light fires and gather together at a time when the weather is bleak. In rural villages and smallholdings they know it as Deadwinter Day, when the spare livestock are slaughtered ahead of the cold months. The bloody day of slaughter is spent hanging dripping joints to smoke up in the rafters, then roasting, grinding and salting fatty mince into pots to preserve it. A day of joy and feasting, but also a day of blood and death. A day of power and significance.

This Midwinter, our adventurers find themselves hosted at a small fortified manor house, the remote home of aging Sir Elwick Frontell, a knight of fading renown whose household provides a safe haven a short half hour journey off the main trading road hereabouts, set along a rutted track through the patchy forest and rugged heath.

At least two of the adventurers, perhaps all if appropriate, should have a reasonably strong and warm connection to Sir Elwick, with the following given as suggestions, though you are very welcome to come up with your own:

- A shared Knightly order, having met on a number of formal occasions
- A warm letter of recommendation from the character's mentor, or temple
- An open invitation following a chance adventure with Sir Elwick in the past

As the story progresses, the adventurers will witness a powerful affliction beset the area, and hopefully best the dread creatures responsible before the end of Midwinter's Day.

The story is intended for a group of D&D 5e characters around level 3-5, but could be easily adjusted as required. It is however *not recommended* for level 1 5e characters; they are *especially* vulnerable to the whims of chance and would face disproportionate levels of risk.

This adventure will occasionally reference some of the three core D&D 5e game books, both suggesting specific stat blocks for certain NPCs/monsters, and referencing pages for key rules. The following D&D 5e abbreviations are used throughout: PHB = Players Handbook, DMG = Dungeon Masters Guide, MM = Monster Manual.

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ENCOUNTER 1: MIDWINTER GUESTS

READ THIS TO START THE ENCOUNTER AND SET THE SCENE:

“Sir Elwick Frontell was absent on your arrival at his fortified manor this Midwinter’s Eve, but his Steward proved attentive in seeing to your needs. The manor guards hurry to offer stable space for the service of mounts or pack animals, and fresh fires are lit to warm the tiny but well-appointed guest bedchambers. Warm and dry after traveling the day through patchy rain and drizzle, you now find yourselves seated in comfortable, cushioned armchairs around the great hearth of the wood-paneled drawing room, enjoying a mulled ale in the company of another guest, a flamboyantly-dressed dwarven merchant named Hudstal.”

The DM should encourage the characters to imagine themselves in this relaxed and safe situation, and ask them to describe themselves; their appearance, whether they carry any weapons, and gently encourage them to think how they might act in a safe and guarded social situation.

An unassuming and respectful servant will discreetly pop into the room from time to time, and the characters should effortlessly be furnished with cold food, warm mulled ale, and otherwise catered to in a reasonable fashion.

Hudstal should be an animated and gregarious companion, ideally someone the characters come to find engaging and friendly. He is slow to take offense, and eager to welcome whatever the players offer in terms of news, stories or entertainment. Here are a few conversation gambits to try to open things up to the characters, or you can improvise your own by sharing a bit of information, then turning it into a question for the characters:

Hudstal: “I heard a riotous ballad at the tavern a couple of days back along the road, about this big floating eye monster and his pet goldfish. Hilarious. Poor bard should have given the monster another name though, his rhymes just got more and more tenuous as the song went on. Whole thing’s a load of old cobblers, of course. More ridiculous than that shanty about underground elves. Any of you know a good tune or story?”

Hudstal: “You’re all looking a lot dryer than when you arrived. Worst thing about traveling, rain. My old grandfather, he spent most of his life underground. Said that a dwarf shouldn’t have to grease up the outside of his clothing to prevent rust you know, just the inside. Mind you, bit of a traditionalist my old grandpa, I tell him we live in more enlightened days now. Any of you in touch with your elders still?”

Hudstal: “You know, you remind me of ... what do they call them up north? Adventurers! My cousin Rollenbal went adventuring once. These days he sells pastries over in Waterdeep. Can’t say the word owl-bear around him even now, just goes all pale. I saw an ogre once; never knew my cart horse could move that fast I tell you. What’s the scariest thing you’ve encountered out there on your travels?”

After exchanging some cheerful conversation, Hudstal will raise a question, designed to provoke an alarmed reaction from your players:

Hudstal: "So, are you all set for the Midwinter Feast tomorrow? You may not know you shouldn't wrap your gifts to our host, the tradition hereabouts is to present the gift on its own merits."

Did the characters remember gifts? Well 5e D&D doesn't really have a social etiquette ability, so after giving them a few moments to react, the DM should guide the players through a moderately challenging **DC 16 Saving Throw** of their choice: either **WISDOM** (ie: exceptional good sense) or **CHARISMA** (exceptional social awareness) – this is to see if the character has each thought ahead to prepare for the eventuality of being here on Midwinter's Day, or are the kind of socially aware person who has a gift stashed just in case.

Characters who PASS: The character has already procured a thoughtful and personal gift, of a value of up to around 30gp (which they should now add to their character sheets without any deduction to their recorded funds). Encourage your players to come up with something creatively. If they need ideas, how about a small piece of ornamental heraldry, a decorated dagger or a small book of philosophy might be appropriate suggestions?

Characters who FAIL: No problem, this makes for a different kind of role-play opportunity. They either hadn't considered a gift in time, or weren't familiar with the social formalities of the noble class. If this is the case and they admit it, Hudstal will grin and continue:

Hudstal: "Well it's lucky for you that I'm here. I have a few samples of my trade wares with me. I'm sure I can find something that'll set you back a handful of coin; silver if you like, or gold if you want to make more of an impression. Shall I bring a few things down?"

If they accept, he may fetch and present items such as:

- "One of my nice lined belt pouches, fur lined; I have a box of them", 5sp
- "A fine writing quill, in its own ornamental box" (nicely made, nibbed in silver), 1gp
- "A reliquary box, good steel with gilded decorations", 5gp
- "A flask of lavender water, made from oil with alchemical skill", 5gp
- "My finest: a potent tonic that eases pain and settles the gut" (actually a Common Healing Potion, as per the PHB), 50gp

Alternatively, the characters could go through their inventories to select a gift. If asked about it, Hudstal's own intended gift to his host is a fine wool cloak, waxed on the outer side, and lined richly inside with rabbit pelts for warmth; its value is around 15gp.

After exchanging stories and organising their Midwinter Gifts, Hudstal will retire for the night, and other than a patrolling night watchman and his hound, the household will do the same. *Should* the characters be tempted to explore the house, remind them they are guests, but let them have a look around the public areas and see a few swords and tapestries on display. The Frontell private rooms are protected by **LOCKED DOORS** (DC 14 to pick) with **POISON DART TRAPS** (*DMG, p123*) (Sleeping Poison, Save DC 15, 1d4 piercing damage and DC 15 Con Save or fall deeply *Unconscious* (*PHB, p192*) for 3d20 minutes. The watchman will check around every half an hour). It's time for good adventurers to go to bed now... zzzz....

ENCOUNTER 2: A CHILL AWAKENING

READ THIS TO START THE ENCOUNTER AND SET THE SCENE:

“It is dark when you wake, and you feel chill even under your thick blankets. The only light in the small guest room is the dim glow of orange embers in the fireplace, by which even those without Darkvision can make out your own breath as you exhale. Before your eyes, a patina of frost spreads along the walls and surfaces, evident by the reflected glow of the hearth. The walls sparkle a reflected twinkling orange colour for a few seconds before the fire is abruptly snuffed out. The cold intensifies, and the room plunges into darkness.”

As the characters react, perhaps light torches, grabbing weapons, donning armour (PHB, p 146), or exploring, they will quickly hear sounds of sporadic fighting within the manor, as guards and staff alike are accosted by *Ice Mephits*, which have appeared both in the manor and outside. At this point, a servant in their night robe should race past the end of the corridor, fleeing some of these little monsters; you can substitute Hudstal if he was popular.

RUN A COMBAT ENCOUNTER with *Ice Mephits* (MM, p215); around two waves suggested, approximately equal number to the party, subject to character level and equipment.

READ THIS ONCE THE FIGHT IS OVER:

“As the last of these unnatural icy beings is vanquished, the first rays of dawn filter in through the small manor windows, brighter than you might expect. An alarum of voices and horses arriving is audible in the courtyard outside.”

EXPLORING INSIDE: If the characters decide to walk around the manor some more, they will find a number of injured household guards and servants seeking help, and signs of several small fights with *Ice Mephits*. It's evident that Sir Elwick's guards are a competent and disciplined force of men and women. Any assistance, reassurance or healing the party provide will be appreciated, and carrying arms will be considered common sense. The manor has grown unnaturally cold. Only the largest hearths can be tempted into life, the adventurers will see they burn fitfully and fail to properly warm the manor's chambers.

EXPLORING OUTSIDE: When the characters next look or venture outside, they will see that snow is falling steadily, has already settled across the ground, and is deepening. *Ice Mephits* occasionally caper close to the manor, where they are swiftly peppered with crossbow bolts.

Proceed to the **Encounter 3** once the characters meet Sir Elwick, who has returned with his close companions. This might take place if the characters head immediately to the courtyard to investigate the alarum, or later when they end up at the manor's great hall after securing the manor. Sir Elwick will gather everyone by the fitful fire in the great hall if they are willing.

ENCOUNTER 3: MEETING SIR ELWICK

Here the adventurers finally meet old mid-sixties Sir Elwick together with his late-twenties daughter the sorceress Constance Frontell, his Sergeant-of-Guards the warrior Alice Mortimer, as well as his Steward Golbard who met the adventurers the night before and can make introductions. Sir Elwick, Constance and Alice are still wearing traveling clothes and armour, having returned to the manor on horseback not long before, and Sir Elwick in particular looks chilled and bone-weary.

DM NOTE ON EXHAUSTION: Remind yourself of the *Exhaustion* rules (PHB, p291). After their 24 hour ordeal, the NPCs are suffering the following levels of Exhaustion:

- Sir Elwick: Four levels
- Alice: Two levels
- Constance: One level

DM NOTE ON CON STANCE: From now on you will also need to be aware of the *Possession* rules relating to *Ghosts* (MM, p147), and note that since late last night, Constance has been Possessed by an unpleasant Ghost. Significantly this means (among other things) that Constance does not have access to her spells or memories, and the Ghost will detect as Undead. However, the Ghost that possesses her is cunning and intelligent, and as DM you should aim to be extremely evasive in avoiding discovery as long as possible! If and when Constance is revealed, refer to **TRIGGERED ENCOUNTER: CONSTANCE AND THE GHOST.**

READ THIS TO INTRODUCE SIR ELWICK AND HEAR HIS TALE:

Sir Elwick Frontell: "My friends, you are most welcome at my manor, on this ill Midwinter morning. I thank the Gods for the gift of your presence, for I sorely need your help. We are not long returned from investigating a strange report from the charcoal burners' encampment to the north of here, and I fear a terrible force has been unwittingly unleashed. For the past seven nights, the great mound of the charcoal kiln has burned lower and lower, its caretakers reporting strange chills and unnatural wailing sounds on the wind as they worked to keep the kiln lit. Last night, as we looked on, the kiln went out, and from within burst a great and terrible creature, with a form of frost and jagged ice talons. We attempted battle, but were driven off. As we traveled here to regroup, the storm has worsened, and now there are all manner of unpleasant creatures abroad."

HERE IS SOME INFORMATION FROM SIR ELWICK AND THE NPC'S PERSPECTIVE:

- The past week, the charcoal burners have been reporting strange dampening of their kiln fire at night times. It has been worsening, and they fear a curse.
- Sir Elwick decided to investigate because he sees it as his duty to protect his tenants. He awaited the return of his daughter Constance, who has been traveling, as she is a capable adventurer in her own right and understands matters of the arcane.
- The charcoal burners moved their kiln here around three or four weeks ago. They picked the site for an apparently natural dip in the ground. The kiln has been burning continuously for around three weeks.

- They spoke of strange wailing sounds on the wind, which Sir Elwick and his people also experienced last night. Sir Elwick thinks he picked out elven words for “Winter” and “Despair” but he isn’t sure. He speaks Elvish & Dwarvish as well as Common.
- When the kiln erupted, the “ice demon” appeared from the top of the kiln, and the air was suddenly filled with swirling snow and frozen winds. The fight was chaotic; Sir Elwick fought defensively to help cover the charcoal burners as they fled. His shield was dented, and he took some wounds for which he drank a Healing Potion.
- They remember Constance cast some fire magic, small balls of magical flame, but he didn’t really see the impact.
- Alice charged the “ice demon” on horseback but was driven off. She struck it several times with her sword, and she thinks she damaged it, but didn’t see it bleed.

HERE IS WHAT HAS REALLY HAPPENED, FOR THE DM’S INFORMATION:

- Long ago, there was a great rivalry between two elementalists, an elven woman and a human man. They turned to greater and greater magical risks and bargains to outdo one another.
- Ultimately the woman, a Frost Mage named Elshalelle, attempted to create a potent arcane focus using the blood of a White Dragon. Her efforts went disastrously wrong, and instead of creating the item, she was frozen in a suspension of life for hundreds of years in a block of ice. Her resting place, once a natural glade tended by her followers, was now just a dip in the ground.
- The unfinished artifact’s magic cycles around Midwinter where it becomes vulnerable to fire. As it happens, the human charcoal burners lit a great kiln right above the artifact, and Elshalelle began to thaw.
- As Elshalelle thawed, life preserved, but trapped in a small underground chamber, she began to stir. Elshalelle is actually quite ok, given everything that’s befallen her.
- At this vulnerable time, he long-dead rival Ombren the fire elemental’s Ghost came back into being. Crazy and confused, Ombren’s Ghost possessed Elshalelle, and with his own arcane fire knowledge has “broken” Elshalelle’s unfinished artifact, rupturing a great flow of frost power as it depletes.
- When Sir Elwick arrived, he and his companions battled an initial elemental manifestation of the artifact’s icy power, which has since dissipated.
- During the fight, Ombren’s Ghost directed the Ghost of his Familiar (once a very intelligent and experienced magical raven by the name of Beek) to possess the intruding spell-caster and stop anyone from disturbing his work. Beek is a far more sane Ghost than Ombren, but is bound to serve its Master.
- So you now have the Ghost of a long dead Fire Elementalist, possessing the body of a recently awoken elven Frost Elementalist, and using it to destroy a dangerous artifact of ancient power so that it may finally rest. The second Ghost, the raven, is its minion.

NPC HELP: Sir Elwick is cold, shocked and bone weary. He will need encouragement from the characters to provide much aid, but will freely give 4 Common Healing Potions, warm clothes, 2 vials of Alchemical Fire, crossbows and bolts, provisions, flint & steel, etc. Constance (Possessed by Beek) will insist on accompanying or following the adventurers.

TRIGGERED ENCOUNTER: CONSTANCE AND THE GHOST OF BEEK

Note that from this point on, Beek, the Intelligent Raven Ghost possessing Constance, may be discovered by canny characters at any time, and this is likely to prompt a fight. If this happens, the Ghost will attempt to defeat the characters. If the characters haven't clocked this as they near the Charcoal Kiln, then you may want to invite **DC 16 Insight Tests** to spot that Constance/Beek is looking very jumpy and provoke a conversation. It will try to maintain Possession of Constance, who Beek believes the adventurers won't wish to kill. He is very unlikely to be convinced otherwise.

It will aim to avoid revealing itself, preferring to use Constance's limited physical attack options, which as a default means Attacking with a staff, two handed. Assuming Constance is using the Spy, MM p347 profile for convenience, her main attack will be replaced with: **Staff (2 handed):** *Melee Weapon Attack*, +4 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. Hit: 6 (1d8+2) bludgeoning damage. He also has access to the Ghost's *Withering Touch* attack. Remember that he doesn't have access to Constance's own abilities as a Sorcerer, just her body.

If surrounded, Beek will trigger his *Horriifying Visage* to try to even the odds, a deformed and malevolent bird-head suddenly popping out of the front of Constance's head. (DM, go and re-watch the library ghost scene in the original Ghostbusters film for homework. :)).

When driven out of Constance's body, Beek will appear as a large and evil-looking ghostly raven. He may then attempt another *Possession* when his Recharge permits, but will certainly take full use of the Ghost's *flight* movement to try to outmaneuver the adventurers. Beek will fight to the second death if need be.

OPTIONAL: TYPICAL BEEK CHATTER WHEN REVEALED TO BE A BADDIE:

- "Squawk. You have no conception of my Master's power!"
- "I have witnessed the ages, mortals. You shall not defeat me. Ark!"
- "The elfling did this, you know. Kind Master is the victim here; the victim!"
- "You shall not disturb my Master at his great work. Akakakak."
- "I can't feel this cold at all. HahaSquawk. How is it for you, mortal?"

CONSTANCE FREED: Constance herself will be very angry at Beek when freed/healed and will certainly focus her rage on Beek by casting the *Fire Bolt* cantrip at him a lot. Don't forget the Ghost's *Resistances* (ie: 50% damage reduction) in this context.

BEING A KIND DM; IF IT IS ALL GOING VERY BAD FOR THE ADVENTURERS:

This can happen if Beek is triggered whilst everyone is low on hit points from another Encounter. The easiest get-out-of-jail trick you can employ is for Beek to decide he needs to Possess someone stronger than Constance, and secretly fudge it as a fail. Constance is thereby released, can pass some Sneak/Hide checks, and can turn out to have some well-concealed Healing Potions to drop into nearby characters. Alternatively, Beek can fly off to serve his Master's next insane whim at any time.

ENCOUNTER 4: A TESTING JOURNEY

The charcoal burners are a good half hour's ride away (about 12 miles) along a rutted track in the wilderness, and the conditions are increasing inches of snow, ongoing snowfall and freezing winds, with poor visibility and the chance of getting lost. As DM you may find it helpful to write on a board or a bit of paper or use tokens to keep track of the characters' progress and make it all a bit more visual.

The characters are going to have to take tests every 1 mile until they have made it 12 miles! Every time the group finishes a Travel Test, add a Snow Token until there are a maximum of 10 Snow Tokens... these Snow Tokens make some of the Tests get harder...

TEST ONE: TRAVEL TEST

Roll **Animal Handling** if mounted on a horse or driving a cart, otherwise it's **Athletics**.

The DC starts at just 5, but the DC increases by 1 per Snow Token.

Consequences:

	Mounted	Driving Cart	On Foot
Test Passed	Proceed 1 mile.	Proceed 1 mile. All cart occupants take 1d4 Cold damage.	Proceed 1 mile.
Test Failed	Proceed 1 mile. Mount takes 2d4 Cold damage.	Proceed 1 mile. Cart is stuck or damaged beyond repair and must be abandoned along with the animals pulling it. All occupants take 1d4 Cold damage.	Proceed 1 mile. Traveller takes 1d4 Cold damage.
Test Roll = 1 (OR modified Test outcome is 1 or less)	Proceed 1 mile. Mount takes 2d4 Cold damage, and 5 levels of Exhaustion.	Do <u>not</u> proceed 1 mile, but still add 1 Snow Token, as the Cart keeps getting stuck. All occupants take 1d4 Cold damage.	Proceed 1 mile. Traveller takes 1d4 Cold damage.

TEST TWO: EXPOSURE TEST (Once the Snow Tokens reach 5 or more)

Once the Snow Tokens reach 5 or more, its getting to be very tough going.

Roll a **Survival** after your Travel Test, with **Disadvantage** if you are not dressed warmly!

The DC is 5 plus the number of Snow Tokens (ie: it will start at DC 10).

Consequences:

	Some adventurers pass, some adventurers fail.	All adventurers fail.
Character Test Passed	No effect. The character keeps on going, undaunted.	Not Applicable
Character Test Failed	Character's maximum Hit Points are reduced by 1 temporarily, unless they are Immune to Cold.	Do <u>not</u> proceed 1 mile, but still add 1 Snow Token. Character's maximum Hit Points are reduced by 1 temporarily, unless they are Immune to Cold.
Character Test Roll = 1 (OR modified Test outcome is 1 or less)	Character's maximum Hit Points are reduced by 1 temporarily, unless they are Immune to Cold. Character also slips and falls badly, taking d6 Bludgeoning damage.	Do <u>not</u> proceed 1 mile, but still add 1 Snow Token. Character's maximum Hit Points are reduced by 1 temporarily, unless they are Immune to Cold. Character also makes so much noise it attracts an angry <i>Yeti</i> , MM p305!

This sequence is intended to present a challenging narrative for the characters, and sap party resources in what is an otherwise short game where a fully rested party risks being overpowered. It should be run fast and as fun as you can make it.

DO REWARD clever and inventive play. Eg: If the characters want to build a shelter and take a Short Rest inside, sure let them make a Survival Roll for example. But be sure to make it tough on their mounts, and increase the Snow Token pot by 1 for the time taken.

In the event that the party end up getting bogged down or are taking too much damage:

- a) Simply skip ahead and have them reach the Charcoal Burners encampment now. This is meant to be fun, after all, and everyone just dying of exposure in the wilds isn't much fun.
- b) Introduce some trappers heading for the manor, who can point them back to the right trail and boost their progress 2 miles without Tests.
- c) Introduce a friendly nature spirit, in the form of a talking animal or tree, around whom the snow does not settle. The curious fey could be talked into guiding them close to their destination, but requires some kind of substantial bargain or payment.

Keep emphasizing to the players that this snowstorm keeps getting stronger and retreating before dealing with the source is likely to be disastrous. They must press on like heroes!

ENCOUNTER 5: GHOST OF MIDWINTER PAST

READ TO SET THE SCENE AS THE ADVENTURERS REACH THE CHARCOAL KILN:

“After a long and hazardous ordeal, through sometimes blinding snow, the charcoal burners’ encampment emerges from the white haze ahead of you. Snow covered shapes indicate a couple of huts and perhaps some long stacks of felled trees, but the great mound of the charcoal kiln is unmistakable. Whereas everything else here seems frozen, the kiln is steaming with great heat, even as a continual column of magically-charged frost and ice pours from a jagged hole in the kiln’s center, up into the sky, crackling with savage power.”

So what’s happening? Ombren is channeling the unmaking of Elshalelle's ruined artifact as fast as he can, to volatile effect in the region. As the characters arrive, he will cease his focus on the artifact, and the magical energy release will slow to a steadier trickle that simply means gentle snow for the surrounding area for a handful of weeks.

READ TO INTRODUCE OMBREN AS THE CHARACTERS APPROACH:

As you approach the kiln, a beautiful elf-woman steps out from the blaze of the doorway, her slight robes untouched by frost or fire, but her eyes unnaturally crazed. She gestures behind herself at the kiln, and the blaze within seems to follow her out, rising into the towering form of a massive fiery elemental, burning with unnatural heat. “You would dare to stop me at my great work?” she shrieks, trembling with rage, “Minion, destroy them!” Obediently, the elemental surges forward.

INSANE OMBREN CHATTER AS HE FIGHTS

- “Ahaha you can not stop me, I am the Ombren, Supreme Master of Flame!”
- “I challenge to a battle of Wits.” #make attack roll “Not so bright are you?”
- “Elshalelle’s foolish servants can be no match for my powerful minion.”
- “It is too late, the artifact is unmade and her power shall never surpass mine!”
- “She used to taunt me that elves outlive humans. I guess the last laugh is mine!”
- “Ahahahahahahaha Hahahahah Hahaha Aha Ahahahaha.”

Ombren will stay Possessing Elshalelle as long as he is able, as truly he fears her power. He will try to avoid fighting whilst his Fire Elemental, MM p125 is still up, but bear in mind that more than about 10 feet from the kiln, the Fire Elemental will be taking 1 hit point of damage per round per 5 feet moving through the snow, plus I’d suggest a further 1 hit point per round from the ambient falling snow when it’s not within the kiln. You can perhaps describe the hissing and sizzling of snow landing on its towering form as you track damage.

IF AND WHEN ELSHALELLE IS RELEASED – SHE WILL MAGICALLY FLEE, IF ABLE

Elshalelle will automatically Crit a Death Save, restoring her to 1HP. The next round unless subdued, she will cast *Teleport* and vanish. If you are running a Campaign, of course, she may prove an interesting NPC to have return...

AFTERMATH: A MIDWINTER FEAST

As the second Ghost is dispatched and Elshalle vanishes, we cut away to a later scene:

Minstrel: "...and that, good friends and honoured guests, is how the evil was defeated.' The minstrel bows as Sir Elwick's hall explodes in riotous applause and cheering. From your place of honour at the old knight's high table, which is of course loaded with roast meat and steaming vegetables for the Midwinter Feast, you raise your tankards to acknowledge the entire household's acclaim. Sir Elwick himself, looking weary but in good spirits, finally lifts a hand for calm and speaks: 'Now, at this time of renewal and thanksgiving, it is our custom to present gifts to those we owe our appreciation. It is therefore my wish and great honour to present our guests and new friends with some measure of my household's appreciation. I hope these tokens shall serve them well.'

Sir Elwick will provide the characters with some gracious and generous gifts, to thank them for dispatching enemies on his land. He is likely to be more generous if:

- a) The characters have treated his household respectfully.
- b) The characters have provided him with suitable gifts.
- c) His daughter has survived to tell her story, and is free of Possession.
- d) His household has not suffered casualties.

OPTION A: REWARD FOR EXEMPLARY SUCCESS: If you are building this into a Campaign setting, and they have done well I'd suggest tailoring the gifts generously and consider using this as a good opportunity to give characters some low level items eg: +1 Magic Weapon or +1 Magic Armour, or some good consumables eg: Greater Healing Potions or Potions of Resistance. If you prefer a more random gift, I would suggest successful players get to roll a *d20 modified by Charisma* (accounting for individual likability) and on a 14+ roll they get a roll on *Magic Item Table F, DMG p 146*, otherwise a roll on *Magic Item Table B, DMG p144* for anything less.

OPTION B: REWARD FOR REASONABLE SUCCESS: If the characters have done a serviceable job, but perhaps made some major blunders – in particular if Lady Constance has been slain (whoops, at least Sir Elwick will consider this a remediable situation, so long as her body can be swiftly retrieved) - then perhaps a roll on *Magic Item Table A, DMG p144* is sufficient recognition.

SUGGESTED FESTIVE BONUS: In addition, if any of the adventurers have been significantly aged by a Ghost using Horrifying Visage, I'd suggest the mysterious icy happenings will have drawn a local notable and his entourage; a 9th level Cleric (Temple of Chauntea is suggested, PHB p294) called Roland Demetra will be present and can cast ONE *Greater Restoration* (5th level spell) now, and if he prays overnight, potentially ONE tomorrow, each spell costing 100gp worth of diamond dust, which Sir Elwick will compensate him for out of goodwill. He can also cast *Raise Dead* (5th level spell) though 500gp diamonds are few and far between; Sir Elwick may offer one for his daughter or in place of a reward (above).

ALSO: Why not crack open a pack of festive mince pies for your players during this bit? :)

KEY REFERENCES:

Assuming you are running this around the level intended, these are good stat blocks to use.

The following are recommended profiles to use for the main NPCs/monsters:

- Hudstal, the Merchant: use *Commoner*, MM p 345.
- Sir Elwick Frontell, aged Knight: use *Knight*, MM p347
- Lady Constance Frontell, the Sorceress, use *Spy* MM p349; improvise Sorcerer *Spells* if required and she's not Possessed at the time. It's unlikely Lady Constance will ever have access to more than cantrips in game, as she used most of her spell slots.
- Alice, Sergeant-Of-Guards: use *Veteran*, MM p 350.
- Household Guards, use *Scout*, MM p349 but add Shield and substitute a *Crossbow* for *Longbow*.
- Guard Dog: use *Mastiff*, PHB p 307. Note the *Keen Hearing & Smell*.
- Riding Horse: MM p 336.
- Ice Mephit, MM p 215.
- Ghost, MM p147.
- Fire Elemental, MM p125.
- Elshallele, in her weakened state use *Archmage*, MM p342 at 50% hit points; she does have access to further higher level Wizard spells and abilities.

If you're less experienced with D&D 5e, make sure you have some grasp of this stuff in particular; if you're not really sure, read it again before you run and scribble a couple of notes for yourself so you're not looking up the basics during play:

- Skills Tests and Saving Throws
- Exhaustion and Exhaustion Levels
- The *Ghost* profile (especially Possession)
- Combat Rules, especially Initiative, Actions and Cover
- Resistance and Immunity
- Hit Points, falling to 0 Hit Points and Death Saves
- Long and Short Rests (and what you get on each)
- Hiding and Spotting People
- Spotting and Disarming Traps
- Whatever abilities and spells your player characters have

APPENDICES, MUSINGS AND FAQ:

“WTF, GET REAL. I DON’T WANT THIS TO BE A CAMPAIGN GAME / REGULAR GROUP.”

Well you can easily use pre-gen characters you make yourself or generate using one of the many weird and wonderful technological tools out there. I’d suggest you go for a mixed group of fighters and combat casters, probably level 4, and give them a couple of Antidotes, several Common Healing Potions, a good bit of Gold, and Horses if they want them, plus a roll on *Magic Item Table B*, DMG p144 before the game starts. Then completely ditch the fancy reward sequence in the Aftermath, and replace it with something more sentimental; I’d suggest the Knight Sir Elwick symbolically handing out parts of his old magical adventuring gear/armour to those he sees as picking up the baton. Giving your players mince pies is an extra nice touch though, if they aren’t actually getting campaign lewts; make them feel triumphant!

“AGH MY REGULAR GAMING GROUP ARE TOO HIGH LEVEL. HELP!”

Baddies not big enough for you? Well if you have a level 7-9 group, here’s some very simple tweaks you could consider to make this a bit less of a steamroller over a few rapidly dissolving *Ice Mephit* corpses. I’d suggest you ditch the *Ice Mephits* completely, and have a single pack of *Yeti*, MM p 305 invading the manor instead. These are more problematic for the Guards, who will have taken a lot more casualties and be in full defensive retreat until the adventurers step in. Put wounded Guards and Servants in danger, so the characters have to work harder to save NPCs as well as their own skins... see how many NPCs you can track Death Saves for at once, that’s a good mini-game. Remember that even in fortified wooden buildings, an angry Strength 18 Yeti can make their own doors pretty much wherever they like, so have fun and add more Yeti if you need them. The *Ghosts* hold their threat pretty well, though they may be spotted/eliminated much faster, but to make her a tougher opponent whilst Possessed by Beek, I’d suggest making Constance a multiclass Sorcerer/Rogue who’s come back home for Midwinter and switch to the *Assassin* profile MM, p343 as a base – sure, the Ghost can’t use her class abilities, but this way it can coat her blades in poison and try to Surprise someone unfortunate using the Assassin’s decent base physique. For Encounter 5, Elshallele may be more effective using the *Drow Priestess of Lolth* profile at 100% hit points MM, p129, plus replace or support Ombren’s single *Fire Elemental* with a pair of less vulnerable *Salamanders* MM, p266. I’d probably keep Encounter 4 the same, but you could add 1d4 automatic Cold damage for everyone per mile traveled if they are cruising their way through. If I felt nasty and they hadn’t thought to check, then I might also give any non-Fire potions a 50% chance of having frozen solid when they come to un-stopper them. If your group is above level 9, you will need to get inventive!

WHAT HAPPENS THEN IF THE PLAYERS JUST PLAIN LOSE?

Ok, this possibility shouldn’t really come to pass for it to be a satisfying and cheery festive adventure, and of course the answer is “whatever you like”, but in case you want to run this option, or run divine visions of possible disaster, this is what the author imagines: By Encounter 5, Ombren has effectively accomplished his purpose as a Ghost, and if he were to be left alone, he would vanish in a couple of days time. However, the freezing energies he has recklessly unleashed peak around midnight on Midwinter's Day, the crescendo of which destroys Elshallele and Ombren and the resulting vortex of magical, spiritual and temporal energy manifests as a newly formed Shadow Dragon. The whole region will be permanently

cursed with the elemental power of frost, and in the moment of the Shadow Dragon's formation a great surge of creatures from the Elemental Plane of Frost will transfer into being here, all bound as minions in the service of the Shadow Dragon. So, uh... let's hope that outcome is averted, shall we?

MY PLAYERS NEED MORE CLOSURE

Well, if they want to know more about what happened rather than enjoy speculating based on whatever they have learned, you can give them a bit of history about Elshalle and Ombren, perhaps either from a dusty local history book back at the manor, or from Constance's knowledge combined with recollections of things that Beek said and did whilst possessing her body.

WHAT OTHER ADVICE CAN THE AUTHOR ADD FOR A DM RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE?

Be sure to have fun, say yes to your players a lot, play everything big and theatrical, and take the story wherever your heart tells you it belongs, even if (perhaps *especially if*) that's totally different to what the adventure or the rule book says.

Stay awesome & run more D&D. :) Alastair.