

The Edge of the World

Written and Game Mastered by Yiorgos Bereveskos

BACKGROUND

This campaign arc was made for Dungeons and Dragons 5th edition and was run for a level 9 party.

Length: 2 sessions

Content Warnings: Death of a Child, Body Horror, Religious Persecution, Graphic Animal Injury, Graphic Amputation

THE BACKSTORY

This story takes place in Chen'Jvas, a village at the edge of the known world. It is a cold and unforgiving place that tends to attract outcasts and lowlifes. But the people of Chen'Jvas make the best of their hard lives, never complaining and ever toiling the poor soil and hunting the bleak snow-bound forests.

Some twenty years ago, an ostracized necromancer found her way to Chen'Jvas. Chase out of the civilized world by clerics of the Temple of Light. Even here at the edge of the world, she would need to hide what she was, but at least here no one already knew. Marigold built a life for herself as a healer and medium, and she fell in love with Cantu the hunter. On a lovely spring day, the two were wed. But even on the day of their wedding, rumors had begun to grow that Marigold's abilities were not altogether natural. Cantu built Marigold a cabin deep in the woods, away from prying eyes. But even out of sight, the rumors held and spread. Word reached the Temple of Light of the possibility of necromancy in Chen'Jvas, so inquisitors were sent to the edge of the world to look into the matter.

Months later, Marigold and Cantu had a child, a baby girl born during a blizzard in the dead of winter. Unbeknownst to the couple, even as the child drew her first breath, inquisitors from the Temple of Light closed in around their cabin. Armor muffled by the howling wind and driving snow. The child had not even received a name when the inquisitors burst into the cabin, setting fire to the timbers. Cantu, not understanding what was happening, took up his ax in defense of his home, his love, and his child. He was quickly cut down where he stood. But he gave Marigold enough time to escape the burning cabin through a glass window. Exhausted, bleeding, and

clutching her crying child, Marigold stumbled through the blinding blizzard, seeking the lights of Chen'Jvas. In desperation, she hid the child in the hollow by a frozen pond and led the pursuing inquisitors into the blizzard. The child perished, nameless in the storm, and no sign of Marigold, nor the inquisitors, were seen again.

Now 20 years later, the nameless child's curse has awakened.

PARTY SETUP

The party was given the bounty to defeat a frost giant that had been terrorising the outlands. They must retrieve the giant's head as proof of their deed, and in exchange, they will be paid 750 gold pieces each. The party tracked the frost giant to an ice shelf and had been pursuing it for several days. During the night, a blizzard kicked up, and the frost giant attacked their camp. The story picks up *in media res* as the frost giant attacks.

CHARACTERS

Vadala

- Vadala is an orphan elf that was brought to Chen'Jvas at a very young age by some travelling monks who found her abandoned in a basket at sea.
- Can be found in the lighthouse

Ellnar, first victim

- A dark elf who survived an attack from a pale monster 5 days before the party arrives in Chen'Jvas. He was attacked while he was out in the woods collecting mushrooms to make his wife **Rishi's** favorite stew.
- He has a bandage covering deep lacerations to his chest and back.
- He owns a general good shop.
- If asked about the attack, he describes the attacker as small and swift. A pale white light seemed to dart all around him. He was attacked in a clearing where the mushrooms grow from the remains of burned logs.
- **DM Info: he was attacked by the Arctic fox spirit.**

Immeral, the second victim

- A human hunter who was mauled by a large black furred monster. He is missing his left foot. He was attacked 3 days ago.
- He was attacked out in the woods while trying to find Jhorm. He heard about what had happened to Ellnar and thought his skill as a hunter would aid him. His axe broke against the creature that attacked him.
- If asked, he describes the attacker as a large black mass with powerful arms that slashed. He was attacked in a grove of white aspens.
- ***DM Info: he was attacked by the black bear spirit.***

Audrey, third victim

- A halfling herbalist who saw the creature the morning after the party arrived in Chen'Jvas.
- She was collecting water from a spring at the edge of the wood when she saw a horribly disfigured wolverine crawling along the ground. It began crawling towards her. She dropped her bucket and ran. The creature chased her and delivered a few savage attacks, tearing her back. Despite the pain, she ran on until she reached the safety of the tower, where she collapsed in the street, bleeding out.
- ***DM Info: She saw the wolverine spirit.***

Isiara, master of the boarding house

- Owner of the local boarding house
- Was an inquisitor for the Temple of Light, but deserted.
- She knows the story of what happened to Cantu and assumes Marigold and the child died in the Blizzard.

Kelgar

- Isiara's son, a lad of 13

Jhorm, missing

- Jhorm is the brother of Cantu.
- He would often venture into the woods to lay flowers at the burned wreckage of his brother's house. He had always returned before nightfall.
- Nine days before the party arrived in Chen'Jvas, but he did not return from one of his visits. Night fell, and he was nowhere to be found. He has been missing ever since.

- He found where the child was hidden and awoke the monster within, thus awakening the curse on Chen'Jvas.
- He can be found unconscious inside the *Monster's Den*.
- He is the child's only living kin and must give the child a name and a proper burial to lift the curse from Chen'Jvas.
- Jhorm has been kept alive by the monster who recognizes him as kin.

Marigold, The Child's Mother

- A necromancer fell in love with the hunter Cantu.
- She has been missing for nearly 20 years. Her body was never found.
- Her body was killed in the blizzard, along with all of the inquisitors that pursued her.
- Her necromantic powers in life and her connection to her unnamed child bind her to this world and prevent her spirit from passing on to the next world.
- Her spirit takes the form of a black nine-tailed fox.

Cantu, The Child's Father

- Died defending his family from inquisitors. His brother Jhorm erected two small grave stones near where Cantu's cabin burned down.
- Jhorm never knew that the child had been born.

Nameless Child, Monster in the Woods

- The child of Marigold and Cantu
- Gifted with necromantic powers, when her body was torn apart by the beast of the wood, her power flared within them, transforming them into hideous monsters, each an aspect of herself.
- A wolverine ate her ribs
- A fox ate her leg
- A bear ate her arms
- A lynx ate her spine
- A wolf ate her head
- Each monster must be defeated, and the bones of the child reclaimed. Only then can she be laid to rest alongside her father. She only finds peace if she is given a name by one of her kin.

LOCATIONS

The Chen Ice Shelf

- A flowing river of ice that separates Chen'Jvas from the mainland. The ice flow is only safe to cross on foot in the winter. During the summer, boats can navigate the broken ice to reach the other side.

The Village of Chen'Jvas

- A small hunting village at the edge of the known world. It is largely self-sustaining with very little contact with the outside world. In recent years, it has become even more isolated after an inquisition from the Temple of Light never returned from deployment to Chen'Jvas.
- The majority of the town is situated at the base of a large rocky hill. To the west of the village is the Chen Ice Shelf, an immense frozen river slowly flowing north to the sea. To the east is the Grey Forest, a dense pine forest and the true edge of the known world. Those who dare to tread too deeply into that forest are seldom seen again. A wooden palisade wall surrounds the town with a gate in the west leading out to the ice shelf and a gate in the east leading into the forest.
- **Isiara's Boarding House**
 - A boarding house on the central market square of Chen'Jvas.
 - Run by the ex-inquisitor Isiara. She likes to keep her past as an inquisitor as secret as possible.
 - Kelgar, Isiara's son, helps out in the boarding house.
 - Isiara doesn't get much business during the winter, but she is able to make some coin in the summer from the travelling trapper that occasionally visits Chen'Jvas.
- **Ellnar's General Store and Post Office**
 - Ellnar's General Store is run by Ellnar and his wife, Rishi.
 - The general store is small but well-stocked.
 - It has not served as a post office in over a decade, but the sign has not been changed.
- **Immeral's House**
 - The small log cabin of the hunter Immeral.
- **The Lighthouse**
 - Run by Vadala, the orphan.
 - The lighthouse holds the record of the inhabitants of Chen'Jvas, living and deceased.

The Spring in the Wood

- The spring is on the side of a small rocky rise that climbs above the tree line. It bubbles out and flows southward before joining the Chen Ice Shelf.
- It is located about a quarter mile from Chen'Jvas.

Aspen Clearing

- A large area of burned forest surrounded by aspen trees about a mile from Chen'Jvas.
- Winter mushrooms are growing on the burned remains of trees.
- A large glacial boulder sits in the center of the clearing.

White Pine Grove

- A grove of tall pines roughly 2 miles from Chen'Jvas.
- The pines grow close together, blocking sightlines.

Party Camp

- A flat region of forest next to a running stream. The trees are not so dense in this area, allowing for the easy making of camp.

Monster's Den

- Found deep in the forest over a day's walk from Chen'Jvas.
- The land forms a large depression surrounded by a ring of thick, dark pine trees.
- At the base of the depression is a pool of water. Carved into the side of the depression is a large den which the monster typically inhabits.

Cantu and Marigold's Cabin

- Found past the Monster's Den.
- All that remains of Cantu and Marigold's cabin are the collapsed, blackened logs in a chaotic pile. If searched, naught can be found but wood ash.
- Nearby are two gravestones, with Cantu and Marigold's names upon them.

EVENTS

Camping on the Ice Shelf

The party awakens in the middle of the night to hear the sound of tearing canvas. The howling wind and driving snow of the blizzard outside are all around them as their tents are torn apart by a large, angry frost giant. The first giant gets a surprise round, and then combat begins. In place of rocks, the frost giant throws the party's camping supplies or blocks of ice torn up from the ice shelf.

After the frost giant is defeated and the head has been retrieved, the party finds their camp in ruin. The distant howls from a pack of winter wolves can be heard piercing above the howls of the wind. With the fall of the frost giant, the scent of blood is drawing them near. If the party remains near their camp for more than half an hour, the wolves descend upon them.

Wolves in a Storm

If the party does not break camp in time or elects to try to go back to sleep in their ruined tents, the wolves descend upon them. The wolves are in a pack of six. They start by surrounding the party before making their presence known. A DC 18 perception check is needed to notice the wolves gathering. Once they have the party surrounded, they attack. Two wolves target the same party member, giving each other an advantage on attack rolls. Once a wolf reaches half health, it flees on its next turn. Once four wolves have fled, the remaining wolves also flee regardless of health.

This second fight completely destroyed what remained of the party's camp.

Out in the Blizzard

Once the party leaves their camp, they trek out into the freezing cold blizzard. After trekking for roughly half an hour, the party spots a light on the horizon. If the party decides to make for the light, they need to all succeed three DC 16 Constitution saving throws. If a party member fails the saving throw, their body becomes frostbitten, and they take 2d8 cold damage for every 20 feet they walk. The frostbite condition can be reversed either by warming up the character using warm water, or magical restoration can be used. Lesser restoration repairs frostbite immediately and gives that character advantage on their next constitution save. Healing spells also work, but must heal a combined 16 hp to remove the frostbite effect. Once all party members have succeeded on the constitution save three times, they have made enough progress toward the light to make out that it is the light from a lighthouse atop a hill. Dimmer light below the hill indicates the shape of a village.

Entering Chen'jvas

The party arrives at the gates of Chen'jvas before daybreak. The sky is turning from black to dark grey as the dark silhouette of a pine forest looms behind the village. A watchman in a guard house atop the wooden palisade wall steps out to greet them. The wall is only about 10 feet high. The party needs to convince the watchman (name Jhelvar) that they are not winter

spirits trying to enter the town and possess its inhabitants. Jhelvar is not hard to convince since he is not terribly superstitious. He does tell the party that there have been attacks on villagers in recent days, but all of those have been done by wild beasts, not cold, lost travelers. He slowly opens the gate and ushers the party into the village. He does a brief pat down of the party, more to make sure they are corporeal than anything else.

Isiara's Boarding House

Once inside Chen'Jvas, Jhelvar escorts the party to Isiara's Boarding House. The town is small, with only about two dozen buildings. Isiara's Boarding House is situated in a central market square. Jhelvar gives the door of the house a couple of loud knocks. A few moments later, the door is thrown open, and an older woman holding a spear pointed toward Jhelvar's chest, standing in the doorway, demanding to know his business, before a look of recollection crosses her face. She lowers the spear and scolds Jhelvar for calling at such an early hour of the morning. Jhelvar shows the party to Isiara, who regards them skeptically. She brings them inside, out of the cold, where she casts detect good and evil on them. Assuming the party does not register during the casting, Isiara lets down her guard and welcomes the party to her boarding house. If a party member is detected by the spell, they have some explaining to do. Assuming they don't give a completely botched explanation or the rest of the party vouches for them, Isiara welcomes the party, though less warmly.

Isiara set the party up with warm rooms to spend the remainder of the night. She does not charge them, explaining that it wouldn't be right to charge for a half-night of sleep, but she starts charging if they spend more nights at her boarding house.

During the remainder of the night, the party members have troubling dreams about a bloody lynx with a snake-like skeletal spine. The spine wraps around them and crushes them as the lynx's bloody, empty eye sockets stare into them, willing their demise. If the party mentions this dream to anyone else, they note that almost everyone in the town is having that same dream and has been for the past nine nights. The dreams seem to be more vivid the closer someone sleeps to the forest.

The Following Morning

The party awakens the following morning to the sound of commotion coming from downstairs. If the party investigates, they see villagers helping a young woman into a side room. Her back is bleeding from multiple claw slashes. Isiara is barking commands to villagers to get her hot water from the kitchen and clean linens. If the party inquires about any of the villagers about what happened, they tell them they found the woman (Audrey) face down in the snow, bleeding out from slashes to her back. They comment that this is the first time such an attack has happened within the walls of the village. Slowly, the villagers leave the boarding house and let Isiara tend to Audrey.

If the party comes down after the commotion, they can get the story of what happened from Isiara's son, Kelgar.

Isiara's son, Kelgar, serves the party breakfast in the common area once the commotion has died down. He mentioned to them that his mother wanted to speak with them once they were finished eating. He mentions how his mother hoped they might be able to help, seeing as they were able to slay a giant. The boy eagerly asks them about how they managed to kill a frost giant.

Audrey's Sick Room

After breakfast, Kelgar leads the party to Audrey's sick room, where Isiara tends to her wounds. Isiara explains to the party that this is the third such attack in less than a week. The woods have always been somewhat dangerous, but now it seems the villagers can't set foot outside the walls without being attacked by strange, unnatural monsters. Since the party was apparently able to slay a frost giant, Isiara hopes they might be able to get to the bottom of what is happening here and put a stop to it. Isiara tells them that she is going to start a collection to pay them for their services and that they can stay at the boarding house for free as they investigate. If the party agrees to this deal, she gives them a list of people's names who have been attacked so that the party can get the facts from them. Before the party leaves, she tells them what Audrey told her before she fell unconscious again.

Audrey was collecting water from the nearby spring when she was attacked by some horrid mutant wolverine. Its mouth had been ripped open, and its exposed rib bone gnashed like teeth. Audrey ran, but was pursued. Audrey hadn't even noticed that it had slashed her back, but by the time she reached the safety of town, she found her vision swimming and her back aching. The last thing she remembered was lying face down in cold snow.

The other contacts:

Ellnar, the owner of the local trader: attacked five days ago

Immeral, a hunter, attacked three days ago.

Ellnar's General Store and Post Office

Ellnar's General Store and former post office is a small but well-stocked place. Ellnar's wife, Rishi, greets the party with poorly feigned enthusiasm and tries to sell them some of her stock. Upon learning of the party's true reason for being there, she quietly takes them to the back living quarters of the building. She makes them wait as she enters her husband's room. She comes out a short time later and shows them in.

Ellnar is sitting up in bed, reading a very outdated newspaper. He wears a loose linen shirt that is unbuttoned to give easier access to the bandages wrapped around his upper torso. He is very open with his story, though he does jump around a lot in the telling.

Five days ago, he was collecting mushrooms from the nearby aspen grove to make his wife her favorite stew. He had only been out a couple of hours when, without warning, he was attacked by a small pale creature. He never got a good look at it as the creature darted around him, attacking from all sides. Just a flash of white, then a trail of red as his body was cut open.

Immeral's Home

Immeral's house is toward the edge of town on the main road leading toward the forest. Immeral greeted them at the door of his small house, hobbling on crutches. His right leg from the knee down is missing. He invites the party in and serves them tea. Despite his injury, he does his best to treat his guests with the utmost hospitality. If asked about his story, he tells the truth as clearly and directly as he can.

Three days ago, he went out into the woods to look for his friend and fellow hunter Jhorm. Jhorm had been missing for nine days, and Immeral had gone out every day to look for signs of his friend. When speaking of Jhorm, Immeral tries to remain stoic, but his emotion and fear for the fate of his friend are hard for him to mask. He had heard of Ellnar's attack and assumed it to be a rabid coyote or something of that kind. He thought his bow, his ax, and his skill as a hunter would be enough to face the challenges of the forest, as they had his whole life. Three days ago, when he went out, around dusk, he was turning and heading back to the village when he noticed some cloth snagged on a tree limb. He couldn't be sure, but he thought it looked like one of Jhorm's black tunics. He followed a strange trail near the discovery to a white pine grove. There was a creature like a bear that attacked him. He doesn't know how something so large got the drop on him, but before he knew it, he was fighting for his life. His trusty ax broke against the creature's thick hide, and its powerful limbs slashed at him. His foot was torn off by the creature's powerful limbs. As his foot tore away, he was free from the monster's grasp for a moment. He fled and found a hollow near the roots of a large tree to take refuge in. The monster tried to dig a space wide enough for its bulk, but gave up before succeeding. Immeral spent the night in that hollow, not daring to leave. Come morning, his leg was infected. He stumbled back to camp, where they ended up having to amputate his leg from the knee down.

Immeral knows why Jhorm was in the forest, but does not reveal this information unless directly asked by the party. Then he says that Jhorm was visiting the graves of his brother and sister-in-law. He does that from time to time.

Into the Woods

The party can approach the three regions of the forest in whatever order they desire. Once the woodland spring, the aspen clearing, and the white pine grove have been completed, the story progresses.

During the journey through the forest, the party occasionally sees a black nine-tailed fox following them. Any time the party tries to follow or chase away the fox, it jumps behind a tree and vanishes.

Woodland Spring

As the party approaches the woodland spring, the Aspect of the Rib Cage ambushes them from the snow cover on the ground. It then uses the snow cover to change its position on the battlefield to try to gain a tactical advantage.

Once the Aspect of the Rib Cage is defeated, the corpse of the wolverine quickly rots away to reveal a tiny child's rib cage. If the party does not take the rib cage, a black nine-tailed fox trots out from the forest pickup and takes the rib cage.

Aspen Clearing

As the party approaches the Aspen clearing, they spot a white arctic fox sitting on a rock in the middle of the clearing. Its eyes appear gouged out, and its jaw hangs slack, half torn off. As the party approaches, it attacks the party member with the fewest hit points first.

Once the Aspect of the Legs has been defeated, the fox's corpse quickly rots away, leaving a pair of tiny humanoid legs. If the party does not collect the legs, a black nine-tailed fox trots out from the aspen grove, picking up the legs in her mouth before disappearing into the forest.

White Pine Grove

As the party enters the white pine grove, an immense bear materializes from behind a tree and attacks the party. The bear has no head but has massive arms the width of tree trunks that end in gnashing, razor-sharp claws. It attacks the party member with the lowest AC first.

Once the Aspect of the Arms is defeated, its body quickly rots away to reveal a pair of tiny arms. If the party does not collect the arms, a black nine-tailed fox trots out from the white pine grove, picking up the arms in her mouth before disappearing into the forest.

Isiara's Tale

Once the party has dealt with the monsters, they can return to Isiara. Isiara demands to know what happened. If the party tells her, she grows morose and introspective. She then tells the party about the events that took place in Chen'Jvas over 20 years ago, from her perspective.

She was an inquisitor in the service of the Temple of Light who had been sent to investigate rumors of necromancy in Chen'Jvas. What they found instead were frightened parents trying to protect a child. The father, Cantu, was slain, and the mother, Marigold, fled into the storm with her child. Her fellow inquisitors followed, but Isiara deserted. Neither the child nor the mother was ever seen again. Isiara tells them that if the child died without a name and was never properly buried, then its soul would remain to haunt the living who abandoned it.

Jhorm was Cantu's brother and thus the only living relative of the child. He is the only one who can now give the child a name, and he is missing.

Isiara begs for the party to find Jhorm and free the soul of the child.

The Nine-Tailed Fox

When the party leaves Isiara's boarding house, they see the nine-tailed fox standing on the village wall, head tilted. The fox looks to the forest, then back at the party, before tilting its head again. If the party follows, it jumps off the wall into the forest. If the party leaves the village, they see it standing in the forest, waiting for them to follow. It leads them deep into the forest until nightfall, at which point it beds down in the snow beside a running stream and seems to fall asleep.

Nightmare at Camp

During the night, the party becomes aware of a shared dream. In this dream, they are all attacked by a lynx head attached to an impossible long, bony spine that snakes throughout the dream space. If a party member reaches zero hit points in this dream combat, that character dies in the waking world.

Once the Aspect of the Spine is defeated, the party awakens from the dream to find that it is a clear sunny morning. The nine-tailed fox has returned and holds a tiny spine in her mouth. She offers it to the party.

The Grey Forest

As the day progresses, the bright morning fades into a fog-filled afternoon. As the fog deepens, the forest grows quiet. In the distance, the party spots the silhouette of a bull moose watching them. If they approach, they can see that its legs are quivering. Closer still, and the party can see that the moose has no skin. Slash marks indicate its skin has been cut off. It flees at the party's approach, stumbling in pain before rising and bounding off.

The party can notice at various points, dead animals with their skin removed or their head torn off. It is at this point that the nine-tailed fox bolts ahead and vanishes from sight.

The Monster's Lair

If the party pushes on, they come to a hollow depression about 60 feet wide, a small pool of water at the bottom. Set into the walls of the hollow on the far side is a large burrow. Booted human legs can be seen protruding from the den. Beside the pool of water on the far side is a massive, hunched mound of fur. As the party enters the hollow, the mound of fur stirs and awakens. At its full height, it appears like a large humanoid standing on many deer legs. Its body is hidden within the folds of many bloody animals' skin draped over its frame like robes. Around its neck is a necklace composed of crow heads. Hanging loosely from a spine is a wolf's head. In the wolf's gaping mouth is the small skull of a human. Antlers from a deer have been driven into one of the eye sockets of the wolf's head. The other eye is closed. If opened, it is silver and has a special effect on whoever looks at it. The fingers are made of multiple deer antlers that seem to move and twist in unnatural ways.

Once the party has gotten the creature's hit point low enough, it transforms into a second phase. In this phase, it sheds its cloak of skins to reveal a body of twisted bones arranged haphazardly into the rough shape of a massive humanoid. The ribcage of this humanoid is full to bursting with all manner of animal skulls.

Once the party has defeated the Nameless Monster, its body also rapidly decays, leaving behind a small infant's skull. If the human boots are investigated, they discover the body of Jhorm the hunter. He is still alive, and any form of healing or restorative magic is sufficient to revitalize him.

In a haze, he begs them to take him to his brother's grave. He can walk, but stumbles along ahead of the party, leading the way.

Burned Cabin

The burned cabin is in a clearing of trees. The blackened timber for little more than a head of burned wood, like some giant bone fire put out before the logs were reduced to cinders. Jhorm stumbles and falls to his knees beside two gravestones set a distance away from the wreckage. The nine-tailed fox sits beside the graves. Its paws are brown with dirt, and a fresh-dug grave sits beside the other two. Any bones the nine-tailed fox collected are already placed in the grave. She beckons the party to add their collected bones to the grave as well. If the party places the bones they have collected into the grave, the nine-tailed fox begins to bury them. Once buried, the party needs to find a rock for the headstone and ask Jhorm to name the child. Once this is done and the headstone is set with the child's name, the curse is lifted, and the child's soul is at peace.

As the party leaves the cabin behind, they see the nine-tailed fox curled up on Marigold's grave before slowly vanishing, a look of peace on her face.

Resolution

The party returns to the village of Chen'Jvas and is hailed as heroes. They are given all 300 gold pieces the town could muster. The story ends with the party departing across the ice to go collect the bounty on the frost giant.