

REIGN OF WINTER



ECOLOGY OF THE WINTER WOLF

OUR GUIDE ASSURED US WE WERE NEARLY TO TROLLHEIM. WE CRESTED A RISE ONLY TO SEE OUR PATH BLOCKED BY A RAVINE. THE LIGHT WAS FAILING, AND THERE WAS NOTHING FOR IT BUT TO MAKE CAMP AND TRY TO FIND A WAY AROUND TOMORROW.

NO ONE WILL STAND GUARD; THEY FEAR TO LEAVE THE PROTECTION OF THE FIRE. WHAT WAS LEFT OF OUR LAST WATCH WAS FOUND FROZEN IN THE SNOW YESTERDAY AT DAWN. AS THE SUN SETS AND THE HOWLS RISE UP, I KNOW NOW THAT THE WOLVES WERE NEVER CHASING US. THEY WERE HERDING US.

~PAGE FROM A BLOOD-STAINED JOURNAL FOUND NEAR TROLLHEIM

ECOLOGY OF THE WINTER WOLF

Creatures of frozen forests and icy hills, winter wolves resemble mere beasts, but behind their cold eyes lurk malevolent intelligence and hatred for all that is warm in the world. Winter wolves live for the joy of hunt, the terror they bring to their prey, and the sadistic thrill of murder.

Winter wolves lie between worgs and dire wolves in size. In appearance, they resemble pale wolves as large as bears. Despite their name, winter wolves are more closely related to worgs than they are to wolves, being descended from a breed of northern worgs now believed to be extinct. Like worgs, winter wolves have the gift of speech. Their muzzles, shorter and more flexible than those of wolves, aid them in forming words while leaving their formidable bites unimpaired.

Travelers and hunters dealing with winter wolves would do well to remember that the wolves communicate with howls in addition to using human speech. Nocturnal baying may well be winter wolves laying an ambush, using their vocalization for long-distance communication, not simply wolves howling at the moon. Winter wolves always prefer hunting intelligent creatures over animals, and they count on their prey underestimating them.

A winter wolf's lack of hands limits its tool use to what it can manipulate with mouth and paws. To mitigate this, winter wolf packs often ally with humanoids, particularly giants. Some winter wolves seek the means to attain humanoid form themselves and overcome this racial limitation entirely.

GENESIS

Winter wolves lack a written history. Elder wolves pass on their legends to young cubs as pack members gnaw bones in the dark recesses of their dens. According to the winter wolves, their race had its origins in the hardy northern worgs. These worgs eked out hard lives in the bitter cold, their numbers too few to claim richer lands from their southern kin, despite their greater size and ferocity. Their legends tell that the destiny of their kind changed forever during the Age of Darkness, for Earthfall had awakened Thremyr, the First Jarl, who became god of the frost giants. Enraged, the icy god stalked furiously across the frozen wastes of Golarion, shedding fragments of his hide with the force of his thundering steps. Where his bounty rained down, the ice and snow awakened.

In these stories, the winter wolves speak of the First Pack, the first worgs to become their own kind. Some say the First Pack dared dine on the fallen flesh of Thremyr, or that its pack mates slew and devoured the ice trolls and frost giants his detritus spawned. Other tales claim that Thremyr came across a pack that blocked his way and swept it aside with a blow from his mighty fist. All agree that Thremyr's touch awakened winter's heart within the

winter wolves, driving the warmth from their flesh and the color from their fur. Never again would the winter wolves fear the cold of winter or crave the heat of warmer lands.

Whenever northern worgs and winter wolves met, the worgs were forced to submit to their fiercer kin. One by one, the winter wolves claimed leadership of the worg packs, exterminating those that resisted. Cubs from matings between the species invariably were touched by frost like the winter wolves. Within a century, the northern worgs were gone, supplanted by the winter wolves.

ECOLOGY

Winter wolves can live as long as 50 years, though most die violently rather than of natural causes. They reach their prime at around 10 years of age, and enter a slow decline near their twenty-fifth year. A winter wolf pregnancy lasts 7 months, ending in a litter of two to four cubs usually born in the dead of winter. Females have a litter every 3 to 5 years. Winter wolf cubs spend their first 18 months largely defenseless, after which proper fangs and their breath weapon develop. Winter wolf cubs of 18 months to 3 years in age are about as big as a normal wolf and have the young simple monster template. Winter wolves reach adult size toward the end of their fourth year, and it is then that they gain acceptance as full members of the pack.

Fully grown winter wolves stand 4-1/2 feet tall at the shoulder. They measure 8 feet from nose to hindquarters, with another 3 feet of bushy tail. Even well-fed winter wolves weigh only about 450 pounds—their bodies are surprisingly lean for their size. Despite this, they have greater strength than the heavier dire wolves. Winter wolves have broad pads on their feet, well suited for running across snow.

Pale nearly to the point of albinism, winter wolves have gleaming white coats and piercing ice-blue eyes. In cold weather, the knowledgeable can distinguish them from white-furred dire wolves by their lighter build and the telltale absence of fog when they pant. A healthy winter wolf is never warm to the touch, and its breath is as chill as the morning frost. Even though they have no need of fur for warmth, winter wolves have luxurious coats. This thick fur serves nearly as well as a coat of armored plates against bites and weapon blows. Close examination of a winter wolf pelt reveals long, hollow-shafted guard hairs not so much white as translucent. Beneath these guard hairs lie finer, shorter hairs, also colorless. Perhaps owing to these guard hairs' hollow shafts, winter wolf pelts weigh less than furs of similar quality while still keeping the wearer pleasantly warm.

Though winter wolves can survive in any normal climate, temperatures much above freezing leave them irritable and sweltering—they're only truly comfortable in ice or snow. Winter wolves succumb quickly to extreme

REIGN OF WINTER

RIMEPELTS

Winter wolf pelts are prized for their beauty, warmth, and luxurious feel, as well as their light weight. On occasion, fortunate hunters find an exceptional pelt that upon the death of the winter wolf manifests magical powers. The powers of these *rimepelts* vary by the telling, generally providing resistance to cold, imbuing the wearer with bestial ferocity, or even granting the ability to assume the form of a winter wolf.

Only on the rarest occasions does a winter wolf's pelt develop these properties. When it does happen, *detect magic* reveals a magical aura (matching the school and strength of the *rimepelt* itself) immediately after death. The pelt proves surprisingly easy to remove from the wolf's dead flesh, requiring only a knife or other blade and a successful DC 25 Profession (trapper) or DC 25 Survival check. Failing the check by 5 or more destroys the pelt; the attempt can be repeated at a cumulative -2 penalty per failed check. This penalty applies even if another person makes the attempt. Each check takes 1 hour to perform. After removal, any remaining blood or flesh on the fur flakes away over the next several days. A *rimepelt* requires no additional treatment for preservation or to keep it supple.

For more information on the properties of a *rimepelt*, see page 61.

heat, a condition they avoid at all costs. Though well aware of their vulnerability to flame, winter wolves cannot truly be said to fear fire. Rather, harming or threatening a winter wolf with fire arouses its ire, leaving it determined to repay each burn with tooth and claw, no matter how minor. Winter wolf packs concentrate their attacks on any enemy using fire, particularly favoring their breath weapon should it prove effective.

An adult winter wolf must consume an average of 20 pounds of meat per day to support its metabolism—more if it makes frequent use of its icy breath. Any good-sized animal suffices as prey for a hungry winter wolf, but they particularly crave intelligent prey that fully comprehends the terror of its eminent demise. Young prey is preferred, as it is less able to defend itself. Winter wolves particularly like to drag away children, and for full intimidating effect they devour babies in front of their parents. Winter wolves hunting alone seek out feeble or isolated prey, while packs attack groups, with each member of the pack trying to bring down its own kill. Winter wolves usually hunt creatures weaker than themselves; if forced to bring down more dangerous game, pack members work together to separate and cripple a single individual.

Winter wolves prefer to eat muscle tissue that's frozen solid, but they also favor organs and entrails that are still

warm. They freeze the extremities of their prey with their breath and save the unfrozen torso for last. The bitter cold leaves blood flow sluggish, often keeping their hapless meal alive for most of the feast. Winter wolves can survive for some time on a non-meat diet, but their health and temper rapidly suffer.

SOCIETY

Like true wolves, winter wolves run in packs. Unlike wolves, however, winter wolf packs aren't led by a mated pair. Instead, the pack follows a single dominant pack leader of either gender. Any other member of the pack, or even a winter wolf from another pack, can challenge the pack leader for dominance. First, the challenger must fight a pack member of the leader's choice. If the challenger defeats this champion, it must fight the pack leader next, with no opportunity to rest. Such challenges rarely end in death, though a triumphant pack leader always marks the challenger with a souvenir of its defeat, typically a torn ear or a gouged eye. A winter wolf chosen as champion can refuse, and a pack leader that loses the respect of the pack may find itself standing alone against a challenge. Winter wolves that ignore the protocol of challenge risk facing the wrath of the entire pack.

Packs rarely exceed a dozen wolves save under the guidance of exceptional pack leaders. Larger packs develop a regimented structure, with the pack leader ruling a gang of alpha wolves, each of which keeps another dozen or so wolves under its control. Such larger packs tend to break apart if the pack leader doesn't frequently assert dominance over the other alphas.

Cubs treat the pack as family, but remain closest to their parents. The pack encourages cubs large enough to fight to take on easy prey like animals and Small humanoids, and quickly step in if the cub gets in over its head.

Young wolves frequently strike out from the pack to hunt on their own for weeks or months, returning or joining another pack as their wanderlust fades. Likewise, mated pairs often strike out together and form their own packs as their cubs mature. Most pack leaders make no effort to keep wayward wolves in the pack, though they ruthlessly drive solitary wolves away from favored hunting grounds. As a rule, winter wolves save violence for those not of their own kind, preferring posturing and threatening over fighting.

Though they don't consider themselves precisely crippled by their lack of hands, winter wolves recognize the value of tool use, and frequently ally with humanoids as a consequence. They also feel a level of contemptuous kinship with worgs and mundane wolves, and sometimes incorporate these lesser breeds into their packs.

Working safely with winter wolves requires mutual respect. As long as the wolves feel valued and well-treated,

ECOLOGY OF THE WINTER WOLF

they remain content. They cannot abide working with the weak or fearful, and inevitably betray or desert such allies after a time. Relations with warm-bodied creatures are always touchy for the winter wolves; any mutual benefit is weighed against the wolves' lust to feel hot blood cooling against their fur.

Frost Giants: As fellow creatures of the cold, winter wolves share a common bond with frost giants and often work closely with them. They take a subservient role to the more powerful giants, though any frost giant that repeatedly treats the wolves harshly is likely to meet a grisly end from the vengeance of the pack.

Hill Giants: When working with dim-witted creatures like hill giants, winter wolves keep up a pretense of being nothing more than advisors and allies, but often run matters behind the scenes. Winter wolves working with hill giants are notoriously fickle, obeying the hill giants for only as long as it suits their own interests.

Humans: Winter wolves only work with humans of exceptional intelligence or power, such as the White Witches of Irrisen. In no circumstances do they allow themselves to be treated as slaves or mere animals, though bearing riders can be negotiated. Generally, winter wolves feel similarly toward other non-giant humanoids, though they harbor considerable antipathy towards elves. Winter wolves almost never work with Small humanoids like goblins (leaving worgs to fill that role), viewing them as little more than unsatisfying meals.

Trolls: Trolls, particularly of the ice troll variety, enslave winter wolves for use as guard animals. Their regeneration (and the cold immunity of ice trolls) protects them from the worst the winter wolves have to offer as they brutally beat the winter wolves into submission. Given an opportunity, such abused winter wolves eagerly betray or turn on their troll masters.

Werewolves: Winter wolves view werewolves almost as kindred spirits, owing to their intelligence and propensity for evil. They generally only cooperate with natural lycanthropes, as afflicted werewolves lack a proper appreciation of lupine ways. Winter wolves harbor deep jealousy of the lycanthrope's hybrid form, combining as it does the best aspects of humanoid and wolf.

Wolves and Dire Wolves: Winter wolves acknowledge a distant kinship with wolves. They occasionally seize leadership of dire wolf packs, their strength and intellect making them more than a match for their larger kin. Wolves running with winter wolf packs eat last and often go hungry. The winter wolves make use of these cousins much like humans use hunting dogs, and wolves' great speed is perhaps the only trait that winter wolves could be said to envy.

Worgs: While winter wolves dismiss common worgs as slow-witted and weak, they may admit worgs into their packs when prey is plentiful. Worgs in a winter wolf pack rank low in the pecking order, but still above wolves and dire wolves. Winter wolves allied with worgs often send their smaller cousins out to scout, taking advantage of the worgs' superior stealth.



B. MATHENEY

REIGN OF WINTER

GRANDMOTHER'S GIFT

From sire and dam to cub, each generation of wolves passes on the tale of the Pact to the next. No two packs tell the tale quite the same, but each telling speaks of a great white wolf, eyes red as coals, meeting the pack and challenging its leadership. This mythical wolf was none other than Baba Yaga in wolf form. Coming to the winter wolves, she ripped the pack leader's champion to shreds, then forced the leader to submit and bare its throat. Though the pack was hers to rule by right, she declined leadership and instead offered them a pact. She came to the winter wolves to recruit their aid in the Winter War, and promised them their own place in her nation once it was won. After Irrisen was hers, the wolves would travel to a human city known as Whitethrone. Here they would be honored beyond all save the blood of the queens of Irrisen. They would guard Whitethrone from enemies both inside and out, and rip the flesh from any who tried to escape the city walls. A hole would be rent in the city's mighty walls, that no gate might stand between the pack and the glory of the hunt. For their loyalty, they would be granted a boon—within their district in Whitethrone, dubbed the Howlings, the wolves would have the power to take the form of a human, enjoying all the pleasures that might bring.

In human form, wolves in both Redtooth and Whitethrone favor loose clothing that they can quickly don when changing into human form, and just as quickly remove or shake off when changing back into wolf form. When visiting winter wolves enter one of these areas, they feel the tingle of old magic and immediately are aware of their ability to shift. Wild winter wolves often feel animosity toward the city-dwelling wolves, but they jealously yearn to walk on two legs and feel the creature comforts of humanity. The pact has endured since the age of Whitethrone's founding, a testament to both the winter wolves' unparalleled freedom within the city and the seduction of human form.

This tenacious effect is difficult to hinder. The ability to change shape does not function in an *antimagic field*, and any wolves entering an *antimagic field* in human form instantly revert to their true form. Permanently unraveling this effect requires powerful magic. A *mage's disjunction* spell has the potential remove it, but the effect is treated as if it were an artifact. Baba Yaga is directly tied to this effect—destroying it would certainly attract her attention.

LAIRS

Winter wolves in the wild live in natural caves or dens dug into the earth and snow. Some packs take captives who they force to dig or enlarge their lairs for them. Such slaves rarely survive past their work's completion. As the pack sleeps, one

or two wolves stand guard some distance outside the lair, howling to alert the others if trouble approaches. Winter wolves can see in the dark, and as such, they keep their caves and tunnels pitch black—the approach of light thus serves as another warning against intruders.

When winter wolves ally with humanoids, they often make superior accommodations part of the arrangement. They favor cozy rooms that resemble dens, but that have door latches lupines can easily open without assistance. They expect a supply of clean drinking water, furs to sleep on, and ready access to the outdoors. Winter wolves prefer to hunt for their food, but if that isn't practical, they also demand plentiful meat, preferably freshly killed.

Though winter wolves have little practical use for material wealth, they recognize its value. Many hide substantial caches of coins and valuables in their lairs for potential bribery or trading. They enjoy the look and cool touch of gemstones and keep them to admire or give them to their pups for playthings. Wooden and leather items they tend to chew into ruin, even those bearing magical enhancements.

Most winter wolves don't bother wearing magic items, though a few wear magical jewelry such as headbands, necklaces, and rings. Notable exceptions are the shapechanging wolves of Redtooth and Whitethrone. In human form, they make use of lightweight magic items, particularly potions and weapons, but avoid bulkier items such as armor and belts that might be lost when shifting back into their natural form.

WINTER WOLVES ON GOLARION

No land holds more tales of winter wolves than Irrisen, where the Jadwiga count them as trusted allies. In Irrisen's capital of Whitethrone, the wolves serve Baba Yaga's daughter and, in accordance with an ancient pact, even walk the streets in human form. A similar magic holds sway in Redtooth. The winter wolves of this village take human form by day, returning to their four-footed form at day's ebb. In Redtooth, the life of anyone foolish enough to venture out after dark is forfeit to the pack. At night, the human residents of Redtooth stay safely shut away in their homes, their yards always secured by a gate. For whether by ancient pact or by eldritch curse, no wolf of Redtooth may pass through a closed gate save by leave of the residents beyond. Notably, Redtooth's only inn, the Open Claw, lacks such a protecting gate.

In both Whitethrone and Redtooth, white hair, ice-blue eyes, and perhaps slightly pronounced canine teeth may betray a winter wolf beneath a human guise. In the case of Redtooth, however, many true human residents of the city bear similar features, making them an unreliable auger at best. In Irrisen, white or silver hair and a wild manner often leads to accusation of "a nip of the wolf" in the

family lineage, and in truth the wolves of the city do take human mates from time to time. Such couplings rarely produce offspring, and when they do, it's never of the human sort. Female winter wolves bear cubs as normal, whereas human women impregnated by a winter wolf find themselves infected by the magic of the Howlings, and take on an increasingly wolflike appearance as the pregnancy progresses. Should the expectant mother leave Whitethrone, the pregnancy invariably fails; should she stay, the end of her term culminates in the birth of a cub much like any other winter wolf, but often of keener mind. The few human mothers who survive the agonizing and dangerous delivery shed their silvery fur and lupine features in a matter of weeks.

Many Ulfen of the Lands of the Linnorm Kings wear winter wolf pelts as proof of hunting prowess. The winter wolves of this land run in large packs organized with near-military discipline and execute brutal raids against Ulfen towns. Smaller packs ally themselves with frost giants or ice trolls as a matter of survival.

In the Fog Peaks of Taldor, the fallen kingdom of the frost giants once kept winter wolves more as pets than as allies. Now the packs run free, sworn to never again be subjugated. The winter wolves of the Fog Peaks prey mercilessly on the trolls and surviving frost giants there, often dragging away their young to serve as slaves.

Winter wolves plague the wilderness of Darkmoon Vale, working in close allegiance with the worgs that infest the region as well as the lycanthropic druids of the Arthfell Forest. The winter wolves of Darkmoon Vale run in mixed packs with wolves, worgs, and dire wolves. As the sight of a white-pelted wolf draws unwelcome attention from hunters, the wolves often roll in mud or dirt to mask their color when venturing near settled areas. Of late, a few winter wolves have been initiated into druidic mysteries by the werewolves of the Arthfell Forest. They seek to extend the druidic art of wild shaping in order to take on humanoid forms.

ADVANCEMENT AND VARIANTS

A typical winter wolf pack leader has the advanced simple template. More powerful winter wolves generally advance by class level rather than by increasing Hit Dice. Appropriate martially inclined classes include ranger, rogue, fighter, and barbarian, roughly in

that order. Spellcasting winter wolves, while rare, include bards (using howls to inspire their allies), oracles (of the bones, nature, or wind mysteries), sorcerers (of the boreal, destined, or water elemental bloodlines), and occasionally druids and summoners. As winter wolves have no racial talent for spellcasting, they require the Eschew Materials feat to cast most spells. Verbal components do not hinder them.

In Redtooth and Whitethrone in the nation of Irrisen, winter wolves can assume human form. Another variant, the northern worg, is commonly believed to be extinct, but may still exist in remote regions of the world.

Northern Worg (CR -1): Northern worgs have the same statistics as winter wolves, but they lack the cold subtype, the accompanying vulnerability to fire, and winter wolves' frosty breath weapon. They appear much the same as do winter wolves, but with yellow eyes and slightly darker fur.



B.METHENEY