

# RUN, JOE, RUN

Joe Ebber is a drunk, a gambler, and overall a lousy guy. Were it not for a loving brother named Bill, Joe probably would have been discovered face down in a ditch some time ago. Recently, Joe made some bad bets with a local crimelord, Boss Glass. A lot of bad bets. Joe owes 100 gold pieces to Glass, and it's already been thirty days. Normally, Glass would let a debt that insubstantial slide, but Glass needs to send a message to others: nobody skips their debt with glass.

Glass sent his two best thugs: Hsssh and Shhhh, a pair of invisible stalkers, to track down Joe. As soon as Joe caught wind of the elementals, he ran, narrowly avoiding them. Joe's made it into the country where his brother has a cabin in the forest. He hopes he can hide there. Little does Joe know the stalkers have an innate ability to track their targets no matter where those targets disappear to. Pretty soon they'll find Joe.

Run, Joe, Run is a Fifth Edition for 4th-level characters. It easily fits into any campaign setting that includes a wintery forest. Characters with excellent perception skills or even truesight will excel in this adventure.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure starts when the characters find themselves at Bill Ebber's cabin. Here are a few reasons they might be there:

- Bill is an old friend of the characters or has an item or information that the characters need to collect. They are meeting with Bill at his cabin when Joe arrives.
- The characters are traveling through the wintery forest where Bill's cabin is located. Attracted by the smoke from his fire and smell of fish, they ask to stay the night; Bill obliges.
- The characters might not even start at Bill's cabin. It's possible that they see Joe running through the forest, scared for his life (see "Tracking Joe" below).

Whatever reason the characters have for being at Bill's cabin, at some point, Joe arrives, frantic and desperate. Read or paraphrase the following:

Suddenly, there's a pounding at the front door. "Bill! Bill!" comes a man's frantic voice from the other side. "You've got to let me in!" Cautiously, Bill grabs a fire poker and steps to the door. "Joe? Is that you?"

"Yes! Bill, please! Let me in! They're after me!"

Bill opens the door. A blurry-eyed man stumbles into the cabin. No further word, he rushes over to Bill's wine decanter, pours himself a cup, and downs it, gulping loudly. Bill shuts and bars the door behind the strange visitor.

"Joe, what's going on?" Bill asks.

"It's Glass. I owe him money, Bill. And he's sent... something after me. You've got to hide me, Bill. They're going to kill me!"

Bill introduces the frightened man as his brother, Joe. From there, Joe explains his situation to everyone there: how he owes money to the crimelord known as Boss Glass.

Joe feels a little better that there are adventurers with his brother. When asked what he believes is chasing him, Joe explains he isn't sure. He couldn't quite see them. "They were like ghosts!" he says over and over again.

It takes Bill a while to calm his brother. Eventually, he leads his brother to a cot in the corner. Exhausted from being on the run, Joe passes out immediately.

Both Bill and Joe Ebber are N human **commoners**.

## ESCAPE IN THE NIGHT

It's likely that the characters will want to get involved and help Joe from his assailants. They may even keep watch. At some point in the evening, Joe wakes and comments that he wishes to use the outhouse, stretch his legs, or some other plausible reason for stepping outside.

Whatever reason Joe has for getting away, that's when the invisible stalkers catch up to him. Joe senses them immediately; he sees the nearby brush rustle or notices a disturbance in the snow.

Panicked, Joe runs into the forest.

It's possible that the characters confront the stalkers at this point in the adventure. The two **invisible stalkers** are intelligent and know that it would be better to take Joe when he's alone. They might fight the characters for one round, but eventually flee, flying away to find Joe.

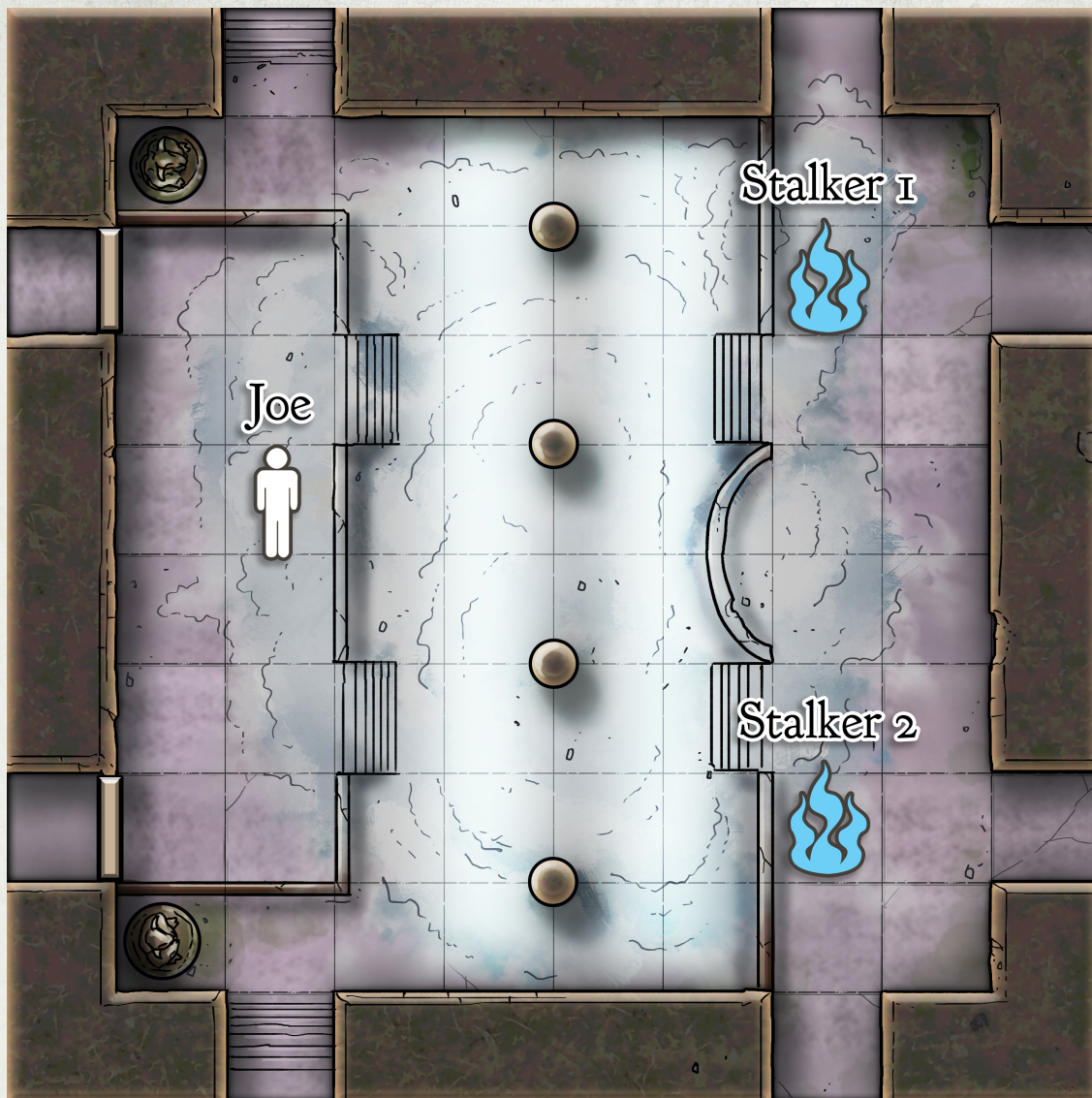
## TRACKING JOE

No matter what happens, Joe should disappear into the forest. If the characters don't wish to follow, have Bill urge them to help, offering whatever he can—Bill isn't rich, but he has up to 10 gp he can offer if he needs to. The tracks Joe leaves in the virgin snow are easy for anyone to follow. After 20 minutes of following Joe's path, the characters arrive at the ruins of an old estate.

The tracks lead into a snow-covered clearing. Stone ruins mark the territory around, which Joe's tracks lead right through. About 40 feet ahead of you at the center of the ruins, you hear Joe groaning. Judging by the faint echo, it sounds like he may have fallen into a pit or well.

Joe tumbled into the estate's old basement, twenty feet down. The fall broke his leg; he's down to 0 hit points, but stable. He needs medical attention quickly. Getting into the pit is fairly simple. If the characters lack a rope, they can scale the walls of the pit with successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) checks.

Unfortunately, before they can help Joe, trouble comes.



## THE INVISIBLE STALKERS

Hsssh and Shhh find Joe in the pit. Seeing Joe's weakened state as an opportunity, they ignore the presence of the characters and go for the kill. Refer to the map of the estate basement for details on where Joe is relative to the invisible stalkers at the start of combat. The characters are likely surrounding Joe.

Of course, the stalkers are invisible. However, the falling snow makes it a little easier to notice them. When they move through the central area (the area with the snow on the map) there is a visible disturbance in the falling snow. They always fly, so they won't leave footprints, but when they come closer to Joe, they may touch down revealing their presence. In addition, snowflakes collected on their forms may also be noticeable.

Bound to Glass's will, they must do their best to destroy Joe Ebber. The invisible stalkers will fight until destroyed. As elementals, destroying them returns them to the plane from which they were called.

## ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

If the characters save Joe, it's likely that Boss Glass won't be happy. He's probably going to send goons after them. Even if the characters pay off Glass (what's 100 gp to a band of adventurers?), Glass sees Joe's survival as an insult and wants him to pay in blood. And if Joe is killed, Bill may urge the characters to help him avenge his poor brother.

The basement of the ruined mansion may also lead to further adventures, as well. While running the map, you can treat the egresses as alcoves or empty closets, or they could be tunnels leading to further dungeons and further adventures. Ω.