

I hate
Christmas!



HOW THE LICH STOLE CHRISTMAS!

How the *Lich Stole Christmas!* is a Fifth Edition adventure for **four to six characters of 18th to 20th level**, and it is optimized for a party of **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 20**. Although this is a holiday adventure based on a classic children's novel, it can easily be inserted into any Fifth Edition campaign setting or run as a stand alone adventure. Characters of 18th or 19th level who complete this adventure should earn half the necessary experience to reach the next level. 20th-level characters who complete this adventure will earn one of the epic boons detailed at the end of this adventure.

BACKGROUND

Every adventurer down in Ostenwold liked Christmas a lot. But the Lich who lived just east of Ostenwold did not!

Dresden the Lich hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season!

Now, please don't ask why. No one quite knows the reason.

It could be, perhaps, that his phylactery was too old. It could be that his brown molds weren't that cold.

But I think that the most likely reason of all May have been that his heart was two sizes too small.

But, whatever the reason, his phylactery or mold He stood there on Christmas Eve, hating folks from Ostenwold.

Staring down from his tower with a sour, skeletal frown At the warm lighted windows below in their town,

For he knew every adventurer down in Ostenwold beneath Was busy counting all their loot and XP.

"And they're hanging their shields," he snarled with a sneer. "Tomorrow is Christmas! It's practically here!"

Then he growled, with his bony fingers nervously drumming, "I must find some way to keep Christmas from coming!

For tomorrow, I know, all the Ostenwold fighters and clerics Will wake bright and early to their bards' obnoxious lyrics.

And then! Oh, the noise! Oh, the noise! Noise! Noise! Noise! There's one thing I hate! All the NOISE! NOISE! NOISE! NOISE!

They'll stand close together, with Christmas bells crashing. They'll stand side-by-side, and those adventurers will start slashing!"

"And they'll bash! And they'll pierce! And they'll STAB! STAB! STAB! STAB!"

And the more the lich thought of the rogues' sneak attacks, The more the lich thought, "I must stop this whole thing from coming back!"

"Why for five hundred years I've put up with it now! I must stop Christmas from coming! But how?"

Then he got an idea! An awful idea! The lich got a wonderful, awful idea!

"I know just what to do!" The lich cackled in his throat. "I'll make a quick Santy Claus hat and a coat."

That Christmas Eve, Dresden the Lich came down from his dark tower To steal away Christmas, during the latest hours.

"This is stop number one," the old Lichy Claus hissed,
As he climbed to the roof, empty bags-of-holding in his fist.

Then he slid down the chimney, a rather tight pinch.
But if Santa could do it, then so could the lich.

He got stuck only once, for a minute or two.
Then he cast etherealness and right into the wall he went
through.

Where the little adventurers' magic weapons hung all in a
row.
"These magic items," he grinned, "are the first things to go!"

Then he slithered and slunk, with a smile most obscene,
Around the whole room, and he took everything!

It was quarter of dawn. All the adventurers still a-bed,
All the heroes still a-snooze, when he packed up his sled.

Packed it up with their plate mail, and shields, and bows
Their lutes and their axes, their trinkets and ten-foot-poles!

Then a planar portal, Dresden opened up
Into the Astral Plane, all the adventurers' stuff he would
chuck!

"Pooh-pooh to the heroes!" he was evilly humming.
"They're finding out now that no Christmas is coming!"

ADVENTURE HOOK

Christmas morning is here! Unfortunately, though, it looks like all of the adventurers' prized magic items have been stolen from them during the night. From whom? Likely that evil lich up on the hill in his dark tower, that one named Dresden.

In fact, the characters *know* it was Dresden because he left a note:

"Neener! I took all your stuff!! At sunrise Christmas Day, I shall drop it all into the Astral Plane, thereby ending this horrible holiday forever!

– Dresden the Lich

PS I ate all the cookies and drank all the milk, too!"

(Which is especially appalling if you consider that lichs have undead nature, meaning that they don't require air, food, water, or sleep—the villain!)

Until now, Dresden's lived in the old tower for five hundred years and never bothered anyone. It's up to the characters to head up the mountain and confront the pesky bag of bones. If they don't do it before the sun rises the next day, Dresden will surely drop it all into the Astral Plane, likely never to be seen again.

STOLEN GOODS

The goods that Dresden stole from Ostenwold can be actual items owned by the characters—if they are characters from an ongoing campaign of yours. Of course, stealing valuable goods from your players' characters using nothing more than a poem as the how-and-why might upset some of them, even with promises that they might get them back at the end of the adventure.

If you wish to avoid potential frustration, or if the players are using brand new characters who didn't spend a year or more of play time earning their awesome gear, explain that the Ostenwolder (and maybe even the new characters) had two tier 4 treasure hoards worth of goodies among them which the terrible lich is now holding for ransom.

DRESDEN'S TOWER

The eight-story tower, hewn from stone, rises 80 feet from the rocky base of the mountain. Each floor has 10-foot-high ceilings throughout. Additional information about the tower is summarized below:

DOORS AND WINDOWS

Many of the strong, wooden doors and thick glass windows throughout Dresden's tower are magically sealed, requiring special keys, puzzles, or riddles to pass through. Once a door is unlocked via a solved puzzle, it remains unlocked and open. Of course, powerful characters will be able to forego these defenses if they don't wish to solve the puzzles. A magically locked door or window requires a DC 30 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to unlock or a DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check to break open. The *knock* spell temporarily reduces the DCs for the check by 10 (20 and 25 respectively). A character who fails an attempt to pick or break open a locked door or window can't try again until they receive help from another character, use a different tool, or finish a long rest. Until the *arcane lock* on a door or window is removed, it is impervious to all damage; otherwise, a door has AC 16, 22 hp, and immunity to poison and psychic damage, and a window has AC 13, 10 hp, and the same immunities.

ILLUMINATION

The inside of Dresden's tower burns with magical torches and candles which he can light or extinguish with the command word "illuminate."

LAIR OF A LICH

The entirety of the tower is considered Dresden's lair. Thus, Dresden can take lair actions anywhere inside the tower and on its roof. His Challenge Rating in his tower is 22 (41,000 XP).

MAGICAL WARDS

No spell other than *wish* can be used to enter the tower, leave it, or transport oneself from one level to another. *Astral projection*, *teleport*, *plane shift*, *word of recall*, and similar spells cast for these reasons simply fail, as do effects that banish a creature to another plane of existence. These resections apply to magic items and artifacts that have properties that transport or banish creatures to other planes

as well. Magic that allows transit to the border Ethereal, such as the *ethereality* spell, is the exception to this rule. A creature that enters the Border Ethereal from within the tower is pulled back to it upon leaving that plane. Magic that summons creatures or objects from other planes functions normally in the tower, as does magic that involves extra dimensional space. Any spells cast within such an extradimensional space (such as that created by the *magnificent mansion* spell) are subject to the same restrictions as magic cast in the tower. Spells can't destroy or alter the shape of the tower's magically protected ceilings, pillars, columns, walls, or floors. For example, an *earthquake* spell would not trigger a ceiling collapse or create fissures in the tower. Doors and furnishings, however, are not protected in this way. While they are in the tower, characters who receive spells from deities or otherworldly patrons continue to do so. In addition, spells that allow contact with beings from other planes function normally. Dresden's own spells are not affected by this magic.

DOME OF FORCE

A *wall of force* completely encompasses the circumference of the roof level of Dresden's tower. The dome rises 30 feet above the roof itself. Strangely, snow still flows through this bubble (a fact that clever characters might exploit).

WHERE IS DRESDEN?

To determine the **lich** Dresden's whereabouts when the characters arrive at the tower, roll a d20 and consult the Dresden's Location table or simply choose one of the suggested locations.

DRESDEN'S LOCATIONS

d20 Location

- 1–4 Meditating in his chambers (area 7a).
- 5–8 Studying in his laboratory (area 5b).
- 9–12 Reading in his library (area 4f).
- 13–16 Admiring all the stolen goods in the dungeon (area 1h or 1i).
- 17–20 Cackling madly on the roof (area 10).

APPROACHING THE TOWER

Being so far north and near Christmas, Ostenwold is currently entrenched in a dreadful blizzard. Thus, the journey up the mountain will be arduous. Of course, it shouldn't be anything that 20th-level characters won't be able to withstand. Once they reach the tower, read:

Behold! The tower of Dresden the Lich. This cylindrical tower rises from the rock of Crumpit Mountain like the hilt of a gray dagger. Through its myriad windows and arrow slits, you see strange light glowing throughout. And over the howl of the blizzard, you could almost swear that you can hear the ceaseless cackle of the mad lich himself.

FINDING A WAY INSIDE

There are a few ways into the lich's tower. Of course, none of them are easy. High-level characters are clever, so if they devise another way inside, be sure to reward them for creativity.

Main Entrance (Area 3a) This door is described in area 3a.

Dresden's Balcony (Area 7c) If the characters can reach the balcony in area 7c, they can enter through the doors there. These doors, like many of the others throughout the complex, are magically sealed. However, these doors aren't trapped.

Arrow Slits (Area 9) On the altar level, there are arrow slits at each of the beacons. If the characters can find a way to squeeze through these arrow slits—using a spell like *gaseous form* or *reduce*—they can enter the tower without any trouble. Of course, they'll have to contend with area 9's chief inhabitant, Max the Red Dragon.

Roof (Area 10) This way is a little less obvious, but potentially easier. If the characters can fly or climb 70-feet up to the roof of the tower and use a *disintegrate* spell or similar magic to blow a hole through its dome of force, they can enter the tower via the stairs at the top.

Windows (Various) Finally, the characters can try to enter through one of the windows. Although the windows are magically protected, they do not have the *symbol* spell cast upon them like the main entrance.

LEVEL 1 - DUNGEON

The lowest level of Dresden's tower is its dungeon, accessible via a ladder hidden in the secret compartment in area 2e.

1A - DUNGEON CORRIDOR

"Help us!" comes a chorus of children's voices as you enter this level. Small hands reach out from the barred doors of jails cells on either side of this narrow corridor, three doors to the north and two to the south. At the western end of this corridor is a wall made of shimmering, pink light. Each cell contains three children.

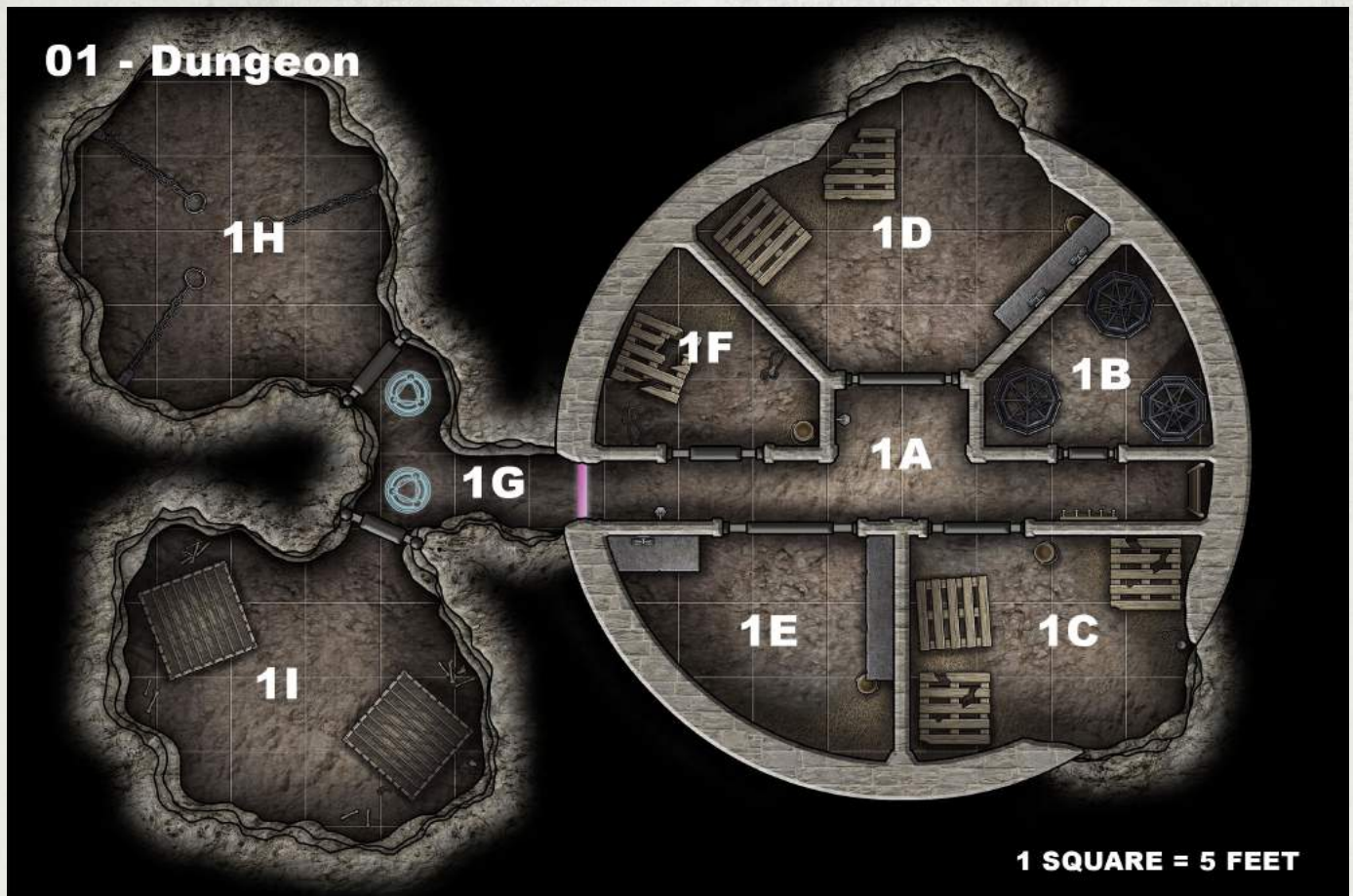
The children are all clever illusions, put in place to distract the characters from the goal of defeating the lich. They are all locked behind magically protected cell doors, so they aren't easy to free. Because they aren't real, Dresden has made it impossible to open these doors—after all, one interaction with his illusion will reveal their false nature. Instead, the purpose of the children is to deliver false information to the characters.

The children are preprogrammed with replies to common questions.

Why are you here? "The bad man captured us from our homes! He's placed vents all throughout our cells so that if our doors or the doors at the end of the hallway are opened, we'll all die in here!"

Where is Dresden? "We don't know. He placed us here then went upstairs." (Note that it's possible that Dresden could be on this level, likely in areas 1h or 1i.)

01 - Dungeon



How can we get you out of here? “We don’t know. The evil lich told us that if anyone tries to open these doors or the doors at the end of the hallway, gas will come out of the vents and kill us.”

Any other questions the characters might have will get a stock response of “I don’t know” or “I’m scared.” Recognizing the children are illusions requires a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check, made with disadvantage if the characters do so from the other side of a door.

Pink Door. The pink wall at the end of the hallway is a magical door put in place to protect the treasures Dresden keeps hidden beyond. The door functions similar to a *wall of force* except it has qualities which allow it to reflect magic. When a spellcaster casts a spell of 6th level or lower on the pink wall, roll a d6 to determine what happens.

d6 Effect

1–2 If the spell affects an area or has multiple targets, it fails and has no effect. If the spell targets only the door, it has no effect on the door and is reflected back at the caster, using the spell slot level, spell save DC, attack bonus, and spellcasting ability of the caster.

3–4 The pink door converts some of the spell’s energy into a burst of destructive force. Each creature within 30 feet of the pink door must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 1d6 force damage per level of the spell on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

5–6 Nothing happens.

The pink door opens by speaking the phrase:

*“Fahoo forays, dahoo dorays
Welcome Christmas! Come this way
Fahoo forays, dahoo dorays
Welcome Christmas, Christmas Day*

*“Welcome, welcome, fahoo ramus
Welcome, welcome, dahoo damus
Christmas Day is in our grasp
So long as we have hands to clasp*

“Fahoo forays, dahoo dorays...”

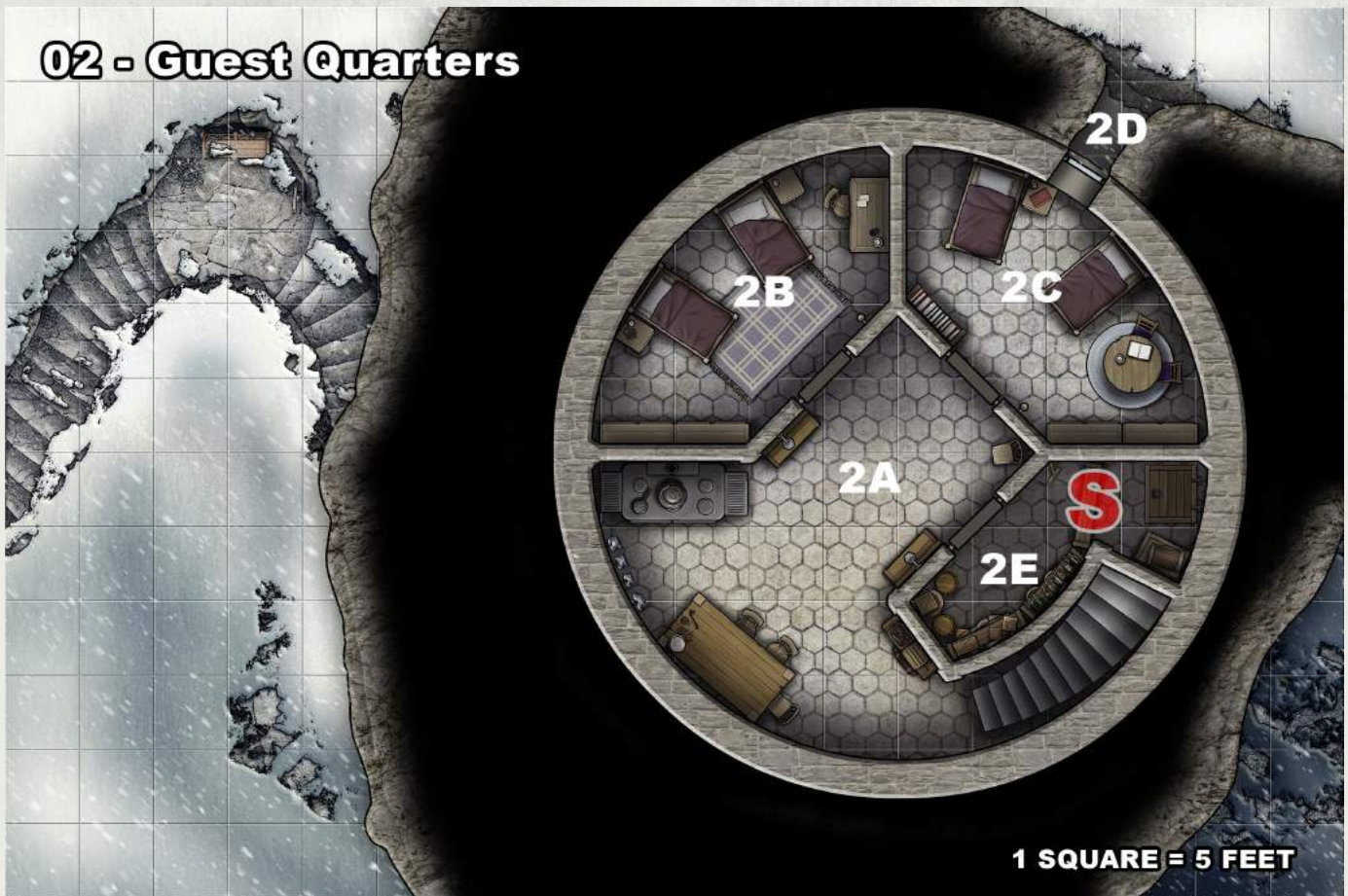
There is no way to know this unless they watch Dresden do it (which he will after his heart grows three sizes larger as explained in area 7a). Also, a *disintegrate* spell cast at 7th level or higher destroys the door, and the door can be wished open with the *wish* spell.

As the characters try to find a way to open this door, “gas” starts to flood the cells (see below).

1B - 1F - CELLS

The cell doors are all magically locked as described above. If the characters try to open any of the doors that lead into the cells, illusory gas starts to fill the cells. Naturally, the illusory children within start to choke and cough, begging the characters to stop. If the characters stop before they actually open the doors, the “gas” vanishes and the “children” regain consciousness.

02 - Guest Quarters



Should the characters enter any of the cells, the children within immediately vanish. When this happens, the characters hear Dresden's disembodied voice curse, "I guess you're more clever than I thought you were. No matter! I'll find another way to defeat you!"

1G - DEATH PASSAGE

Once past the pink door, the characters have another trap to contend with. This time, two blue glyphs glow on the floor. These glyphs exude powerful enchantment and conjuration magic. If a creature other than Dresden passes through a glyph, one of two effects happens:

- If the creature has more than 100 hit points remaining, the glyph casts *wish* with the intention of sending the creature to a random plane (likely, some empty region of the Astral Plane). The creature is allowed a DC 20 Charisma saving throw against this effect.
- If the creature has 100 or fewer hit points remaining, the glyph casts *power word kill* targeting the creature.

The only way to remove a glyph is by casting *dispel magic* against a 9th-level spell.

1H - 1I - TREASURE VAULTS

Both doors leading into this area are magically locked, as described at the beginning of this adventure.

Encounter: Dresden the Lich. If the characters somehow get through all of Dresden's wards and discover the lich here, the lich fights the characters with all its might. It would rather be destroyed (albeit temporarily, because you know... it's a lich) than give up its holiday bounty.

Treasure. The goods stolen from Ostenwold are split between these two rooms—you choose what goes where. At sunrise the next day, a portal opens in each of these rooms, sending the goods to two random locations in the Astral Plane. The portals remain open for 1 minute and function similar to the *gate* spell. These two portals are the only exception to the magical wards protecting the tower.

2 - GUEST QUARTERS

The second floor of Dresden's tower was once used for Dresden's servants. Now it only holds ghosts. None of the doors on this level are locked except for the secret door in area 2e..

2A - KITCHEN

Meals were once prepared in this room. Although it's clean (Dresden hates filth), it's obvious that the place hasn't been used in years.

2B - 2C - GHOSTLY SERVANTS

Dresden's old servants still haunt this pair of bedrooms on this level. All four are **ghosts**. Their names are Alicia and Beatrice (area 2b), Cathy and Vera (area 2c).

Vera's Riddle. When the characters first meet Vera, she offers them a riddle.

My name is Vera. I was once the head servant in this tower. I know what you seek and how to find it. But before I share this information with you, you must answer my riddle.



There are three other ghosts here with me: Alicia, Beatrice, and Cathy. One of the ghosts is a knight, one is a knave, and one is a spy. The knight always tells the truth, the knave always lies, and the spy can either lie or tell the truth. Who is the knight, who the knave, and who the spy?

Vera will share who is who, so there is no confusion there. When the characters approach each of the ghosts, they offer the following:

- Alicia says: "Cathy is a knave."
- Beatrice says: "Alicia is a knight."
- Cathy says: "I am the spy."

Solution. We know Beatrice isn't telling the truth, because if she was, there would be two knights; so Beatrice could be either the knave or the spy. Cathy also can't be the knight, because then her statement would be a lie. So that must mean Alicia is the knight. Beatrice, therefore, must be the spy, since the spy sometimes tells the truth; leaving Cathy as the knave.

Once the characters share the correct answer with Vera, she reveals the presence of the secret door in area 2e (if the characters didn't already find it) and tells them that the command word to unlock that particular door is "Sam Tsrhc." If the characters give any answer other than the correct one, the ghosts vanish and won't return until sunset the next day.

Encounter: Ghosts. The four **ghosts** will fight back if attacked. If destroyed, they rejuvenate in one hour, returning to their quarters as if nothing had happened.

2D - REAR WINDOW

A small niche in the side of the rock offers a clear view into this level. Although the window is magically sealed like the others throughout the rest of the complex, it isn't trapped. Therefore, this is one of the "easier" ways to enter the tower.

2E - SUPPLY CLOSET

This old closet holds all of the supplies the servants once used to clean the tower.

Secret Door. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the presence of a secret door behind one of the shelves. The door is magically sealed. However, if the passphrase "Sam Tsrhc" is spoken aloud, the door opens revealing a small compartment behind it. Inside this compartment, there is a trapdoor in the floor that offers a ladder down to the dungeon level (area 1a).

3 - ENTRY

The main entry to the tower serves as both Dresden's dining room and living area. Needless to say, it's trapped and guarded out the wazoo.

3A - FRONT DOOR

The most obvious way into the lich's tower is through the main entrance, 3a. This strong door is not only magically locked, but it's also warded with a *symbol* spell using the death glyph. Spotting the glyph requires a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check to notice it.

3B - LIVING AREA

This large chamber is exquisitely furnished and rather comfortable looking. A pair of large statues flank the foyer at the west end of the room. Opposite the door, the glow of a roaring fire illuminates a pair of couches separated by a large, coffee table upon which an in-progress game of chess sits. A dining table set for six rests near the northwestern wall. The smell of cooked meats, warm soup, and uncorked wine assaults your senses.

Encounter: Everything. It doesn't take long for the guardians of this room to animate and attack. First, the two statues at either side of the foyer animate and attack as **stone golems**. Next, a **fire elemental** leaps from the fireplace and joins the fray. Finally, two invisible **specters** start lobbing plates, silverware, and anything else they can get their ghostly paws on—in addition to being invisible, these specters have Multiattack which allows them to throw three objects per turn. A specter has a +4 to hit with a thrown target at a range of 20/60 ft. On a hit, a thrown object deals 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage. The only thing the specters won't throw at the characters is the chess board and its pieces on the table near the fire. These protectors fight until destroyed.

Chess Puzzle. If a character examines the chess game in play, hand them the player handout of the chessboard. The pieces are arranged to represent a game still in progress. "To solve the puzzle, a character must move the correct piece into place, which will grant white checkmate—the white bishop at position D3 must move to position G6. Only the bishop can move. All of the other pieces are locked in place as if they were *immovable rods*. Furthermore, touching the wrong piece causes 10 (3d6) radiant damage (if it's a white piece) or 10 (3d6) necrotic damage (if it's a black piece). The same thing happens if the white bishop is moved to any position other than G6.

Once the characters correctly solve the chess puzzle, the door at 3c unlocks and opens, granting the characters access up to level 4.

The chessboard emits an aura of evocation magic.

3C - DOOR TO AREA 4

This door is magically locked. Solving either the chess puzzle (see area 3b) or the three spirits puzzle (see area 4) both unlocks and opens the door.

There is a note posted on the door, visible from the side facing area 3b. It reads:

"Dear B,
I'm only one move away from winning.
- W."

4 - LIBRARY

Dresden keeps his impressive collection of books on this semi-labyrinthine level. To ascend to level 5 or descend to level 3, the characters will need to solve the puzzle of the

three spirits (see below).

4A - JACOB BARLEY THE CHAIN DEVIL

This curved hallway boasts two doors—one to the east and one to the south. There is a stairway that leads downstairs. The only sound in the room comes from the heavy ticking of a massive grandfather clock standing against the wall by the stairwell.

At the center of the hallway lurks a spectral figure wrapped in a large, heavy chain. The chain it draws is clasped about its middle. It is long and wound about him like a tail; and it is made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. After you've had a moment to observe the apparition, it turns its ghastly attention to you and speaks. "I wear the chain I forged in life," says the creature. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

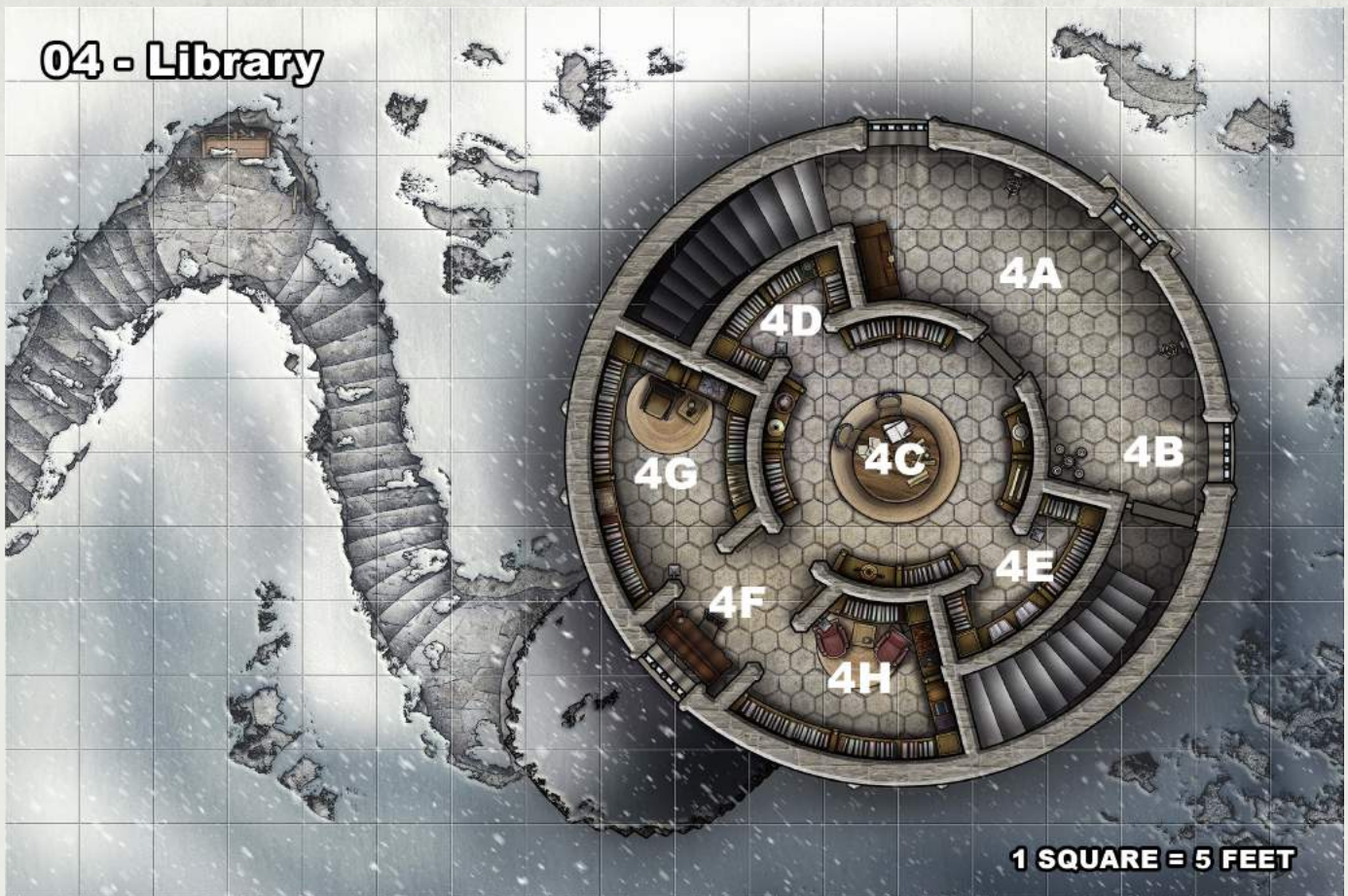
Encounter: Jacob Barley. The ghost's name is Jacob Barley, once a business partner of Dresden in life—now cursed to haunt his tower. But not really. It's actually a **chain devil** that Dresden summoned to slow down the pesky adventurers! After a few more non-sequiturs, the chain devil poses the challenge of this level.

"Within that library," says the spirit, pointing toward the southern door, "you will face three powerful spirits. Without their visits," says the devil, "you cannot hope to find what you seek. Expect the first when the clock strikes One... Expect the second when the clock strikes Two.. The third, when the clock strikes Three. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!"

The chain devil then slips into the ethereal plane (thanks to a *contingency* spell triggered by the quote it issued). If the characters fight the creature, it fights back and does so until it is destroyed.

Clock. A character who spends one minute or longer observing the large grandfather clock near the stairway down to level 3 notices that the hands are permanently stuck at midnight—despite making a constant ticking sound. The clock exudes conjuration magic. If the characters move the hands so that the time on the clock reads one-o'clock, the Spirit of Christmases Past appears in area 4h. The hands won't move again until the spirit is dealt with (see area 4h). After the characters have dealt with the Past and they change the clock again so it reads two-o'clock, the Spirit of Christmases Present appears in area 4g. Just as before, the hands won't move until the Spirit of Christmases Present is dealt with. Finally, after the characters have handled that spirit and adjust the clock to read three-o'clock, the final spirit, The Spirit of Christmases Yet to Be Appears in area 4c. Once all three spirits are dealt with, the doors in areas 4b and 3c unlock and open.

04 - Library



4B - DOOR AND STAIRS TO AREA 5

This door is magically locked. There is a switch next to the door in the stairwell itself. Otherwise, solving the three spirits puzzle (see area 4a) both unlocks and opens this door.

4C - ROTUNDA

A large table strewn with scrolls, notebooks, and writing utensils dominates the center of this round chamber. Three passages split off from the room, to the east, west, and south. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves choked with dusty tomes crowd the wall spaces between.

Once the characters successfully summon the Spirit of Christmases Yet to Be, it appears in this area. The spirit is an **avatar of death** (see the Appendix).

"If ye wish to find that which was stolen from you," says the apparition in a croaking, deathly voice, "answer me this riddle or face certain death.

"I have no mouth, but I will tell you a name that is not mine. I have no eyes, but I will show you the years I have seen. I have no mind, but you still seek me for my memories. What am I?"

If the characters offer the answer "gravestone" or "tombstone", the spirit vanishes. The clock from area 4a then chimes twelve times and the doors at areas 3a and 3b open.

Failing to answer the riddle in ten minutes or giving the wrong answer forces the avatar of death to attack the characters. If the avatar of death is destroyed, the doors still open.

Treasure. A character who spends 10 minutes searching this area and succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check (the character's choice) discovers the following *spell scrolls*: *finger of death*, *magic jar*, and *true resurrection*. There is also a spellbook containing all the 1st-through-4th-level necromancy spells on the wizard's spell list from the Fifth Edition core player's rulebook.

4D - NATURE SECTION

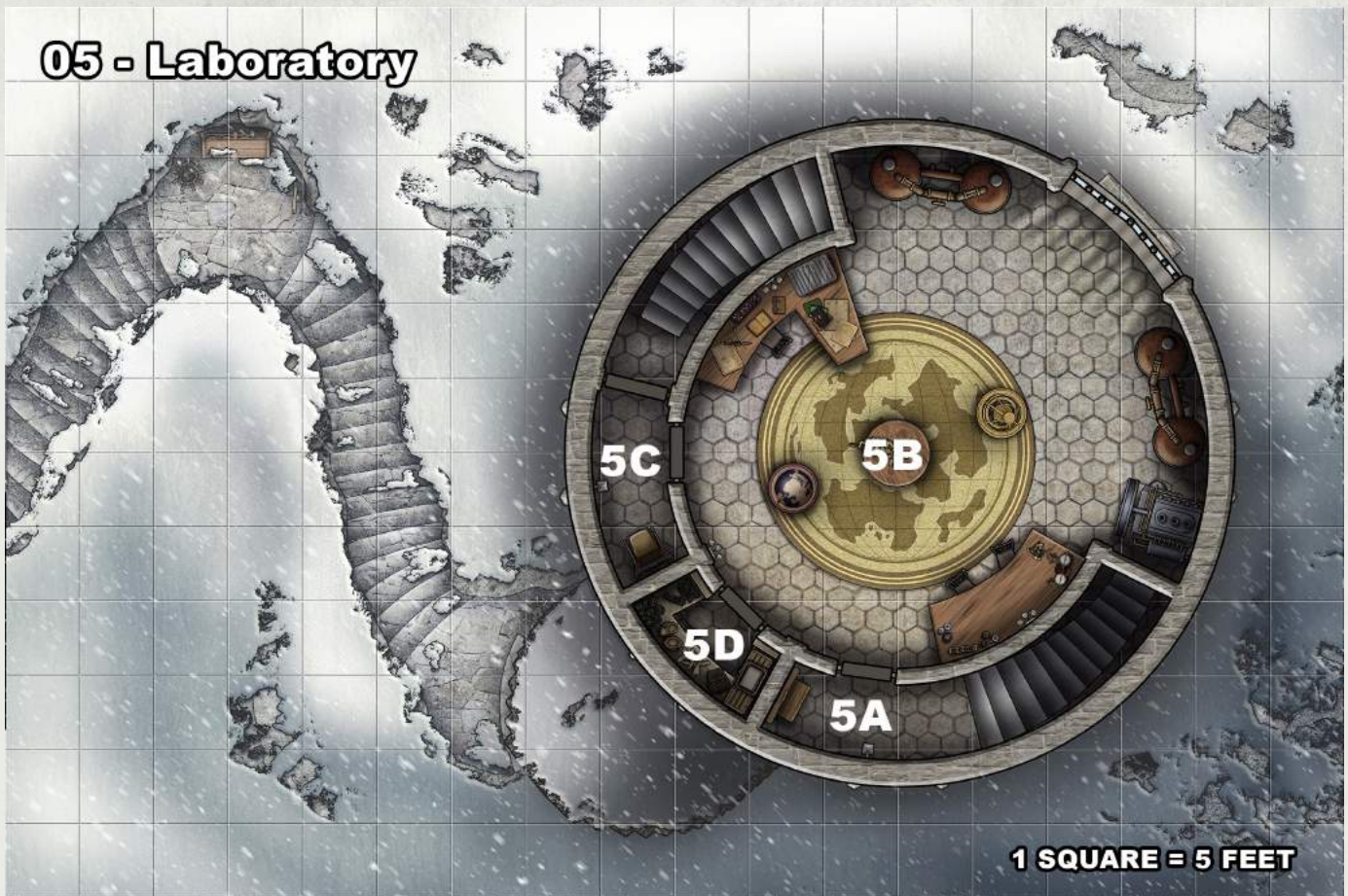
The characters discover a lovely collection of nature books in this alcove.

Red Gargantua Flower. A character with passive Perception 13 or higher notices that there is a book pulled out a few inches from its shelf space. The book is titled "A Comprehensive Guide to Red Gargantua Flowers." A bookmark set into the center of the book offers details on the Red Gargantua's ecology, noting that these plants enjoy eating gold coins.

4E - BOOKS OF (FALSE) SECRETS

Characters who review the book titles in this alcove notice that all of the books have the word "secret" written into their titles. If a character spends 15 minutes searching this alcove and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they quickly realize that all of the books are a sham meant to distract them. On a failed check, tell the players "you feel as if there is a secret hidden among these books... you just can't seem to find it. Perhaps if you search a little longer?"

05 - Laboratory



4F - DRESDEN'S STUDY

There is a writing desk against a window overlooking the southwestern side of the tower. If Dresden is in this area, he is located here sitting at this desk. If the characters fight him here, he gains the following lair action:

- The lich animates the nonmagical books and scrolls found throughout this level. The animated objects use the statistics for six **swarms of bats** except they are constructs, immune to poison and psychic damage and the poisoned condition, and lose their Keen Hearing feature. Replace the damage dealt by their bites with bludgeoning damage. These swarms remain until the lich dismisses them as an action, the books are destroyed, or the lich dies. Once the lich uses this lair action, it can't use it again until it completes a long rest.

Dresden has a *contingency* spell cast upon himself which triggers when his hit points are reduced to half or fewer—Dresden *dimension doors* to his chambers (area 7) to recuperate.

4G - CURRENT AFFAIRS SECTION

Books addressing geography, politics, medicine, and modern arcane advances fill the shelves of this alcove.

Encounter: Spirit of Christmases Present. If the characters successfully summoned the Spirit of Christmas Present, it appears in this area. The Spirit appears as a colossal frost giant wearing a green robe and holy wreath atop its blue skull.

“Hark!” bellows the colossal apparition, “’tis I, the Spirit of Christmases Present! If you wish to find that which was stolen from you, then answer this riddle for me:

“No matter how much rain falls on me, I will not get any wetter. What am I?”

If the characters offer the answer “water”, the spirit vanishes. The characters can then use the clock in area 4a to summon the next spirit (see area 4a).

Failing to answer the riddle in ten minutes or giving the wrong answer forces the Spirit to attack the characters. The Spirit uses the **ghost** stat block, except its size is Huge. Destroying the spirit allows the characters to proceed with the puzzle as if they had correctly answered the riddle.

Treasure. Characters who search the scroll bins in this chamber discover two *spell scrolls* of *knock*.

4H - HISTORY SECTION

All of the books here are old, brittle books that cover the history of the world.

Encounter: Spirit of Christmases Past. If the characters successfully summoned the Spirit of Christmas Past, it appears in this area. The Spirit appears as a woman with golden skin and large, feathery wings. She uses the **deva** stat block, except her alignment is neutral.

06 - Conservatory



With a laugh like wind chimes, this Spirit addresses you, “Behold! I am the Spirit of Christmases Past. To find that which you desire most, answer me this riddle:

“When you have me, you feel like sharing me. But if you do share me, you don’t have me. What am I?”

If the characters offer the answer “secret”, the spirit vanishes. The characters can then use the clock in area 4a to summon the next spirit (see area 4a).

Failing to answer the riddle in ten minutes or giving the wrong answer forces the Spirit to attack the characters. Destroying the spirit allows the characters to proceed with the puzzle as if they had correctly answered the riddle.

5 - LABORATORY

This level serves as Dresden’s laboratory.

5A - DOOR TO LEVEL 4

This door is magically sealed. On the side of the door opposite the main laboratory (area 5a), there is a lever that will permanently disarm the wards and open the door.

If a character inspects the door, they discover a 1-inch hole in its center. The solution to surpassing this door can be found in area 5c.

5B - MAIN LABORATORY

This room looks like it’s been ransacked. A large golden rug depicting a world is at the center of the chamber. The rug is flanked by two, semi-circular desks littered with alchemical supplies, tools, and journals. There are three doors set into the southern wall. At the north end of the room stand four copper cylinders fed by various tubes. Each cylinder appears to have a small door set into its front. Red ichor seeps out from the bottom of these doors onto the stone floors around the cylinders.

Encounter. Dresden the Lich and Fakes. If the characters encounter Dresden in this area, they find the **lich** throwing a fit. “Wrong! Wrong! All wrong!” he curses, shaking his bony fists at the ceiling. Once the lich spots the characters, it immediately casts *cloudkill* to heavily obscure everything in the room. When this happens, four **undead mages** emerge from the cylinders at the north end of the room and attack. During the confusion, Dresden *dimension doors* to area 7.

An **undead mage** uses the **mage** stat block except it has the following changes:

- Its type is undead and its alignment is neutral evil.
- The mage is immune to poison and the poisoned condition.
- The mage has darkvision out to 60 feet.
- The mages speak Abyssal, Common, Infernal, and Primordial.

07 - Master Suite



These undead mages fight until destroyed.

Even if Dresden isn't found here, the four mages attack when anyone other than Dresden or one of his servants enter this area.

Treasure. There is a vial of *oil of enlarge* on the counter. When a creature covers themselves, another creature, or an object with this oil, the target gains the “enlarge” effect of the *enlarge/reduce* spell for 1d4 hours (no concentration required).

5C - DOOR TO LEVEL 6

This door is magically sealed. On the side of the door opposite the main laboratory (area 5a), there is a lever that will permanently disarm the wards and open the door.

If a character inspects the door, they discover a 1-inch hole in its center. The solution to surpassing this door can be found in area 5d.

5D - SMALL OFFICE

A large desk takes up the majority of this small closet. Most of the desk is covered in empty glass vials, beakers, and other alchemical components. However, at the center of the desk, there are four stoppered vials, all containing liquids of different colors. Each vial is also tagged with a label. The vials are as follows:

- The potion with green liquid is labeled “R A T.”
- The potion with pink liquid is labeled “A L L.”

- The potion with blue liquid is labeled “I O N.”
- The potion with orange liquid is labeled “I T E.”

There is also a note on the wall above the desk from Dresden that reads:

“If you wish to escape this level, you must drink one of these potions. One of them is a *potion of gaseous form* which will allow you to slip through one of the two doors. The others are all deadly poisons. Choose wisely!”

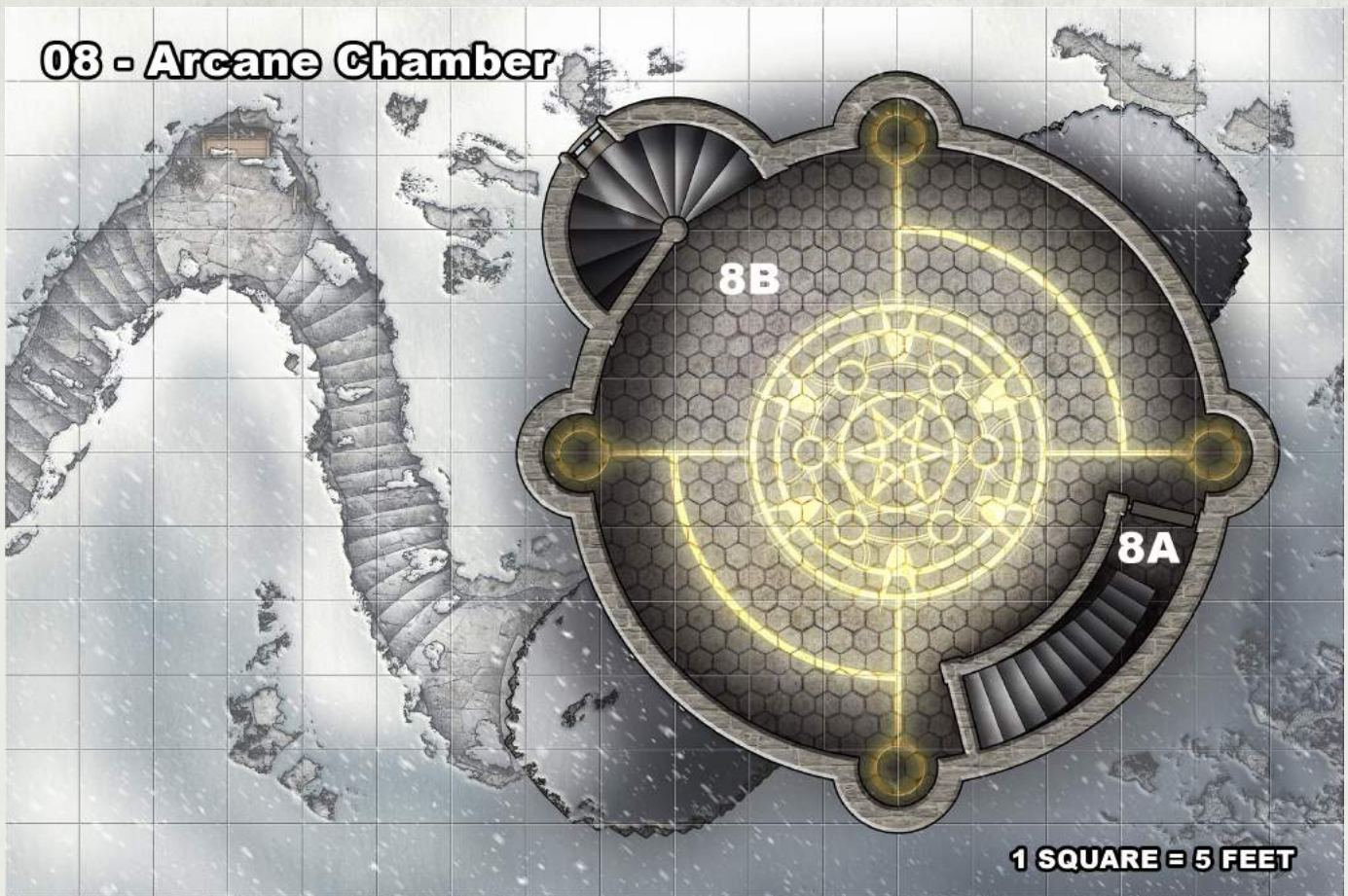
Combining the letters of the four labels spells the word “ALLITERATION.” Thus, the green potion is the *potion of gaseous form*. All other potions contain a harmful poison. A creature who drinks the contents of a poison vial must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 55 (8d10) poison damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one. All four potions exude the same aura of transmutation magic thanks to a casting of *arcanist's magic aura*.

By drinking the *potion of gaseous form*, a character can slip through the hole in one of the two doors at areas 5a and 5c and trigger the lever to open the respective door for their companions.

6 - CONSERVATORY

An impressive indoor garden consumes this level of the tower.

08 - Arcane Chamber



6A - DRESDEN'S GARDEN

The smell of fresh flowers, herbs, and other greens assault your senses. Globes of soft light drift 10 feet over large, wooden planters against every wall of this area. The center of the room is dominated by a colossal, red flower with white polka dots. Long vines stretch from the flower all the way to a door set into the eastern wall. The vines totally consume the door. It's hard to see any way through the door without hacking away at the vines that cover it.

The flower is a red gargantua flower, the same one detailed in the book found in the library's nature section (area 4d). Tossing a gold coin into the floor causes its vines to retract for 1 minute, granting access to the door that leads to area 7 (area 6b). Without removing the vines, it's impossible to open the door with anything less than a DC 35 Strength check.

Otherwise, the vines have AC 15, 100 hp, resistance to bludgeoning and piercing damage, and immunity to psychic damage. If the characters attack the red gargantua's vines, they rouse the wrath of the creatures hidden throughout the room.

Encounter: Shambling Mounds and Will-o-Wisps. If the characters attack the red gargantua's vines or try to force the door at 6b open, four **shambling mounds** rise from the planters and attack. Joining the shambling mounds are six **will-o'-wisps**, all of whom were disguised as the glowing orbs drifting around the room. These creatures aggressively defend the red gargantua and fight until destroyed.

6B - VINE-COVERED DOOR

Although it isn't magically sealed, this door is totally wrapped in vines from the side facing Dresden's Garden (area 6a). Unless the characters feed the red gargantua flower a gold coin, they won't be able to move through this door (see above).

There is a coin slot cut into the opposite side of the door; a painted arrow points at the slot. Beside the arrow a message reads, "Feed Big Red a gold coin, please." If the characters place a coin into the slot, a vine grabs the coin and the vines from the other side of the door retract.

7 - MASTER SUITE

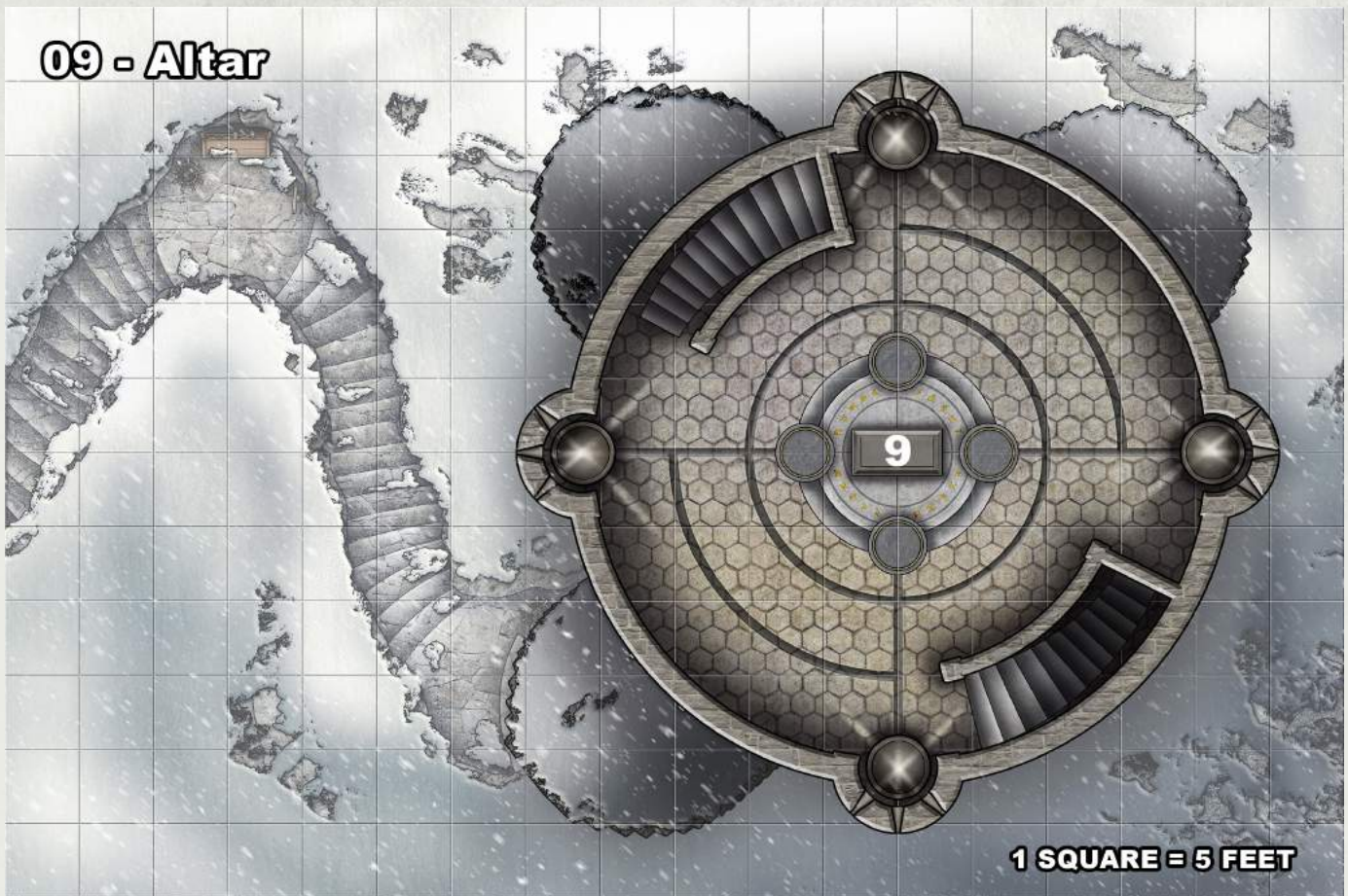
In life, Dresden used this room to sleep. Now the lich uses it to meditate. And curse.

7A - BEDROOM

A large, comfortable-looking bed with a purple duvet clings to a small free wall at the center of this room. A desk, wardrobe, and other embellishments betray this room's function as a bed chamber.

There are two staircases that lead in and out of this room—to the south is a stairway that leads down to the level below, and to the north is one that further ascends the tall tower. A pair of double doors marks the presence of an outdoor balcony, while a door in the eastern wall must hide a bathroom.

09 - Altar



Encounter: Dresden the Lich. It's likely that the characters will encounter Dresden the Lich here at some point or another. He either starts here (as determined by the Where is Dresden table) or he retreated here during an earlier combat. Either way, he's prepared to face the characters. While Dresden is in this chamber, he gains the following lair action which he can't use two rounds in a row:

- All creatures in this chamber must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or fall into a magical slumber. The sleeper remains unconscious for 1 minute, until the sleeper takes damage, or someone uses an action to shake or slap the sleeper awake. Undead and creatures immune to being charmed aren't affected by this magical effect.

Dresden continues to fight until he is destroyed or the characters affect a change in the lich.

Dresden's Heart. Atop one of the display tables near the stairs down to level 6, Dresden keeps a panoptic jar that contains his still-beating mortal heart. The heart is pitifully small. If a character uses a magical effect such as the *enlarge/reduce* spell or the oil of enlarge found in area 5b to increase the heart's size, and Dresden is still alive, it affects a change in the lich. Immediately, Dresden recognizes the error of his ways and his alignment changes to neutral good. He then offers to free all of the treasure from the vaults in areas 1h and 1i, even offering to *plane shift* the characters and their goods back to Ostenwold.

Treasure. If the characters search Dresden's desk, they will discover a small, black key with a half-melted bow. There is a note stuck to the key that reads "This key is to the door upstairs. Don't go up there, Timothy!"

There are various art objects placed around the chamber, too, all of which are mundane relics, but valuable regardless. Combined, the relics are worth a total of 25,000 gp.

7B - BATHROOM

The only thing in this bathroom is an awkwardly-shaped ettercap noncombatant named Timothy who's currently taking a bubble bath.

"Ope! Hello!" the ettercap says, as it continues to shave its legs. The ettercap is friendly and won't harm the characters. If the characters attack the ettercap, it won't fight back, instead bemoaning, "Ope! Looks like it's back to space for me!" before it quaffs a *potion of gaseous form* and slips away. At your discretion, the ettercap may offer one or two clues to solving some of the riddles throughout the tower especially if the characters offer the ettercap a piece of chocolate.

7C - BALCONY

The door to this balcony is magically sealed. However, it does offer a breathtaking view of the northern side of the tower.

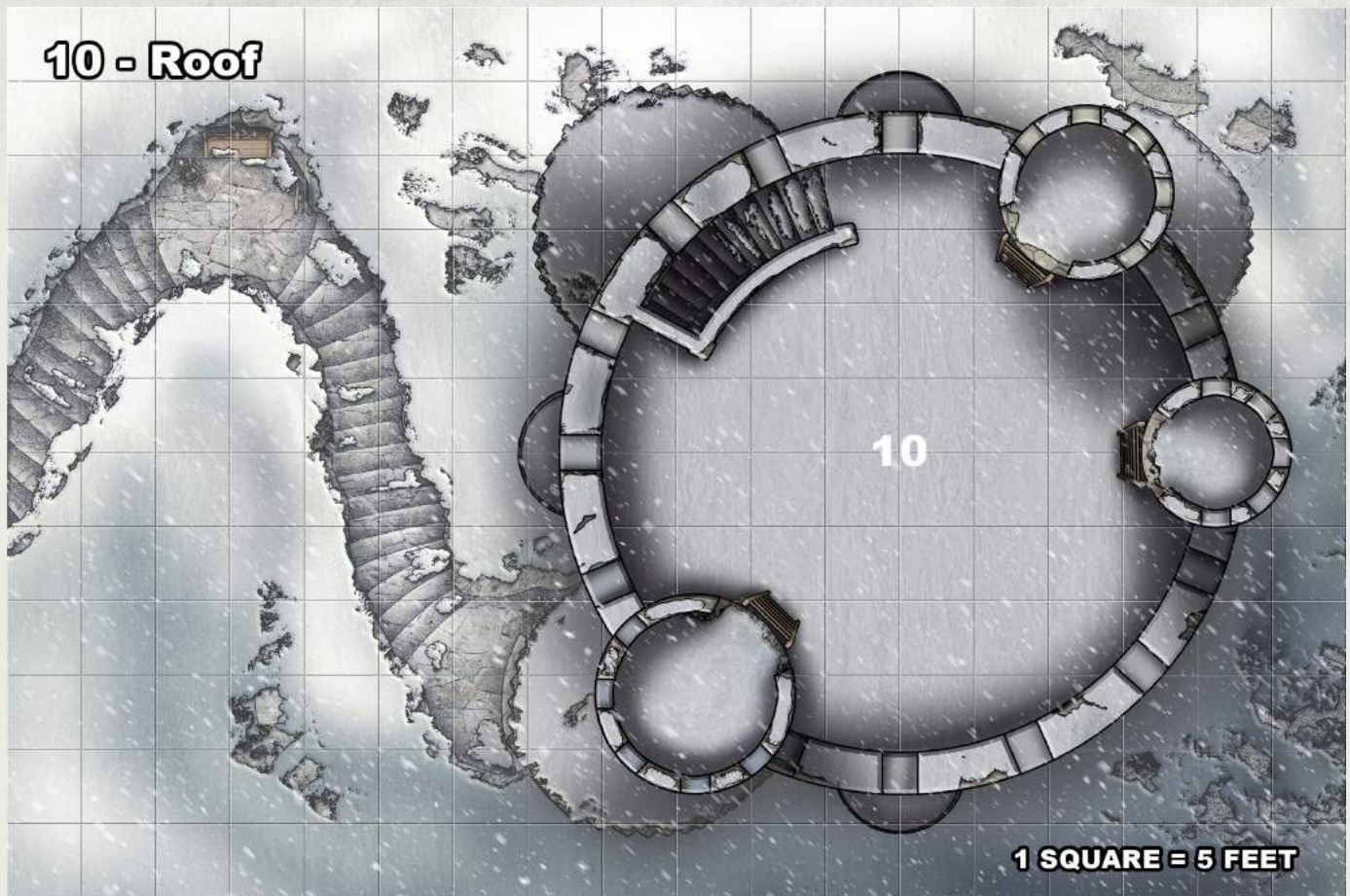
8 - ARCANE CHAMBER

Dresden uses this level of his tower for summoning powerful creatures. Currently, the balor Cinder-Lou Hoo resides here.

8A - DOOR DOWN TO AREA 7

This door is magically sealed. If the characters destroy the **balor** Cinder-Lou Hoo, or use the key found in Dresden's Desk in area 7a, the wards drop and the door opens.

10 - Roof



8B - CINDER-LOU HOO

A titanic thaumaturgic symbol covers the entirety of this level's stone floor. It glows with dim red light. Sitting cross legged in the middle of the circle is a gigantic, red-skinned creature with fierce horns, razor-sharp teeth, and a blonde tuft of hair that curls a foot above its skull. In one hand, the beast wields a sword that crackles with lightning. In its other hand, it wields a whip wreathed in flames.

It speaks in a deep, demonic voice: "The Book of Hoo says, 'No matter how different a mortal may appear, he will always be cursed with feelings of fear.'"

Encounter: Balor. This **balor** has been trapped in Dresden's tower for the last two hundred Christmases and it wishes nothing more than to escape. If it can't convince the characters to set it free, it will try to destroy them. The balor cannot leave the area unless the thaumaturgic symbol that binds it is removed. The symbol acts as the *imprisonment* spell, but allows the balor to move around the room so long as it doesn't go up or down either of the flights of stairs. It also cannot attack Dresden when it is trapped. And if it tries to speak its own name, it does so in gibberish—however, a character under the effects of a *comprehend languages* spell or similar effect will understand it.

Speaking the balor's real name, Cinder-Lou Hoo, frees it of its prison. Once freed, it tries to escape the tower by the quickest means possible, potentially attacking the characters during its rampage.

As a demon, it won't hold up its end of any agreements it makes with the characters, content to destroy them if need be.

9 - ALTAR

This wide room hosts a large, stone altar at its center. Four different alcoves in this room hold large orbs that glow with archaic energy, bathing the entire area in bright light.

At the northeastern part of a room, a huge, red dragon sneers at you. Massive antlers—not unlike a reindeer's—rise from the top of its head, scraping the ceiling above it.

Encounter: Max the Red Dragon. This **adult red dragon's** name is Max and he hates Christmas almost as much as Dresden does. It attacks anything that enters this area. Each of the orbs situated around the room grant Max the *Regeneration* trait. Max regains 10 hit points per intact orb at the start of his turn. Max dies only if he starts his turn with 0 hit points and all four orbs are destroyed. Each time these orbs heal Max, the light they cast flickers.

Each orb has an AC of 18, 100 hit points, and immunity to psychic and poison damage as well as bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage not made with magical weapons.

Max's job is to ensure that no one passes up or down through this chamber.

10 - ROOF

The tower's roof is completely exposed to the elements. A dome of force (see the Tower Features section for details) prevents creatures from entering or leaving the area.

Encounter: Dresden the Lich. Dresden likes to come to the roof to stare out over Ostenwold and sneer and whine about how much he hates Christmas while his red dragon, Max (see area 9) listens. If the characters encounter Dresden the **lich** here, he fights until his hit points are reduced to half or fewer. Then, a *contingency* spell *dimension doors* him to area 7 where he recuperates and prepares for battle.

AFTERMATH

So long as the characters can "rescue" the stolen treasure from areas 1h and 1i before sunrise the next day, they will successfully complete the adventure. If they managed to enlarge Dresden's heart and reverse his alignment, the lich helps bring the treasure back to Ostenwold. Then, if the characters permit, it joins them in celebration of Christmas.

*"And then the true meaning of Christmas came through,
And the lich found the strength of ten tarrasques, plus two!"*

*And now that his heart didn't feel quite so tight,
He whizzed with his load through the bright morning light.*

*With a smile to his soul, he and Timothy descended Mount
Crumpet
Cheerily blowing "Doot! Doot!" on his trumpet.*

*He rode into Ostenwold. He brought back their gear.
He brought back the magic items to the adventurers who
cheered!*

*He brought back their poles and their shields and swords,
Brought back their spellbooks, their foci, and wards!*

*He brought everything back, and all the food stuffs!
And he, he himself, the lich carved the roast flumph!*

*Welcome Christmas. Bring your cheer,
Cheer to all adventurers, far and near.*

*Christmas Day is in our grasp
So long as we have hands to grasp.*

*Christmas Day will always be
Just as long as we have we.*

*Welcome Christmas while we stand
Heart to heart and hand in hand."*

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APPENDIX

This section offers new rules for epic boons as well as the stat block for the avatar of death featured in this adventure.

EPIC BOONS

If you use the epic boons option described in the Fifth Edition handbook for gamemasters, 20th-level characters who successfully complete this adventure gain one of the following boons as a reward (instead of experience). You may assign the boons or have the players choose which one they like:

BOON OF THE DRAGON

You can speak Draconic and you are immune to the breath attacks of all dragons. Plus, you automatically pass all saving throws made to overcome a dragon's Frightening Presence effect.

BOON OF KNOWLEDGE

You gain proficiency in the following skills: Arcana, History, Medicine, Nature, and Religion. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses any of these skills. Also, whenever you make an ability check using these skills, you can treat a d20 roll of 9 or lower as a 10.

BOON OF LIMITED MAGIC IMMUNITY

You cannot be affected by a spell of 2nd level or lower unless you wish to be.

BOON OF UNDEATH

You have immunity to necrotic damage. You also have advantage on saving throws against spells and other effects created by undead. Ω

CREDITS

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Proofreading by The DMDave Irregulars

Being Awesome by YOU

AVATAR OF DEATH

The avatar of death is a ghostly humanoid skeleton clad in a tattered black robe and carrying a spectral scythe. In this adventure, the avatar of death acts as the Spirit of Christmases Yet to Be.

AVATAR OF DEATH

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 20

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 60 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened,
paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., truesight 60 ft., passive
Perception 13

Languages all languages known by its summoner
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The avatar can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Turn Immunity. The avatar is immune to features that turn undead.

Actions

Reaping Scythe. The avatar sweeps its spectral scythe through a creature within 5 feet of it, dealing 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.