

NICHOLAS THE GIFT-GIVER'S NORTHERN PALACE

HAVE A MERRY D&D HOLIDAY!

BY CHARLES RYAN

In the farthest northern reaches of icy darkness stands a fabulous palace—the grand home of a mysterious tribe of gift-giving elves. At least, rumors speak of such a place. Great riches and rewards supposedly emanate from the Northern Palace, so surely any party of adventurers will find it a worthy location to seek out.

The rumors are only partly true. While the so-called Northern Palace is indeed home to a famous gift-giver, its principal inhabitants are not elves—they're gnomes, reindeer, and a couple of humans. The Northern Palace serves as the home and workshop of Nicholas the Gift-Giver and his helpers.

GETTING THERE

The Northern Palace is hundreds of miles beyond the farthest extent of civilized habitation—as far north, it is said, as it is possible to go.

USING THE NORTHERN PALACE

Dungeon Masters who wish to introduce their group to a nice, cold jaunt north followed by a warm welcome and some time off from the rigors of adventuring may want to include the Northern Palace in their games. You can tie this side trek adventure into your current campaign using any of the following options.

Simple Curiosity. The characters hear the rumors of a palace filled with treasure far to the north. Being in between adventures, they decide to see if the rumors are true.

By Assignment. Someone has heard that the Northern Palace not only exists, but that it is currently woefully empty due to some malignant force, or is controlled by vile and unknown creatures. The gift-giver lord who used to live there might even be dead. The characters are sent north not only to discover whether the palace exists, but also to determine who currently controls the site. Perhaps the characters arrive to discover

evil creatures in residence that would normally be at their throats—but these guests are strangely laid-back and non-combative. What will the adventurers do in response?

By Mistake. A portal or teleport goes horribly awry, or so the characters think when they end up in front of the Northern Palace. What will they discover inside? This option is particularly useful if the adventurers need some time off to recover from a grueling adventure. A fellow guest at the palace might even be a high-level cleric who can assist with any dead compatriots.

THE PALACE

When the characters arrive within sight of the Northern Palace, read or paraphrase the following.



The Northern Palace rises from a plain of white, standing atop a foundation of icy stone. Despite its forbidding, desolate surroundings, the building seems strangely cheerful. A warm glow beckons from its many windows, which are frosted deeply with snow and ice. Dark green wreaths adorn the walls, contrasting with the palace's red trim, while evergreen bunting hangs beneath deep eaves, iced in a thick layer of fresh snow.

The exterior of the palace is dominated by a thick, round tower, beneath which a wide, vaulted passage cuts through the rocky foundation to lead into an inner courtyard. Along the outside of the tower, near the passage opening, a staircase rises from the ground to a landing and a large wooden door. Massive, blocky buildings form wings to either side of the tower, but no battlements or defenses can be seen.

Outside the palace and in the interior courtyard, cold wintry weather is the norm during all seasons. Within the chambers of the palace, the atmosphere is warm and comfortable.

Doors. The doors throughout the palace are made of stout wood. None are locked. Although the majority of the palace's inhabitants are gnomes, most doors are generously sized for Medium humanoids.

Lights. Except where noted otherwise, the palace is cheerfully lit by torches and lanterns.

Heat. The temperature within the palace is magically maintained at a comfortable level of warmth. Many areas feature brightly burning fireplaces, all of which make for a cheery environment.

Ceiling Height. Many of the rooms throughout the palace—especially the large workshops—are cavernous, with ceilings as high as thirty or forty feet. The ceilings of most other rooms and passageways are twelve feet high.

AURA OF PROTECTION

The Northern Palace is a place of peace, and is protected by powerful magic. While within 1 mile of the palace, any creature must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw to undertake any harmful action, as determined by the DM. This includes actions that require an attack roll, that might deal damage to or impose a condition on another creature (directly or indirectly), or that require another creature to make a saving throw.

AREAS NOT ON THE MAP

Several key areas of the Northern Palace are detailed below and on the map, which shows the main floors of the principal buildings. The palace is quite large, however, and not all of it is detailed here. In particular, the ground floor of the main building features storerooms filled with raw materials, food, extra reindeer tack, and similar items. The floors above contain the feasting hall, bedchambers for the Claus

family and guests, and the toy lab where new toys and gifts are invented and developed. The gnome quarters are located in the rear building's several upper floors.

1. GREAT FOYER

The Northern Palace is entered by way of a huge round foyer, which serves as a gathering area for the site's inhabitants as well as an entrance hall. The main floor of the building sits well above the palace's rocky foundation, so a large staircase against the side of the tower leads to the front door.

The palace's entry room is an astoundingly luxurious chamber fifty feet across and at least that high. The walls are carved in evergreen patterns, painted in rich hues of red and green, and gilded in gold. Thick carpets cover the floor, and a fire roars in a huge hearth opposite the front door.

The room is dominated by a huge tree, spreading fifteen feet across at the base and standing more than forty feet tall. Toys and trinkets in red, green, and gold richly adorn the tree, offset by tiny candles that glow cheerfully among the evergreen branches.

Characters arriving at the Northern Palace as expected guests might find gifts under the tree with their names on them. A gift will also appear under the tree for any guest—expected or not—who remains in the palace for more than one day. See “Nicholas the Gift-Giver's Random Gift Generator,” following the adventure.

The bright-burning fire in this room is created by a magical *Yule log*. See “New Magic Items” at the end of the adventure.

2. GNOME WORKSHOP

Here, in one of the several workshops in the Northern Palace, gnomes toil merrily at their vocation: making toys. The annual demand is staggering, and shifts of toymakers are on duty twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year.

This high, bright room would be cavernous if it weren't stuffed with all manner of gears, conveyor belts, catwalks, and machinery. Scores of long, low tables are scattered throughout the area, with small figures clad in red and green moving between them and keeping busy with tasks of construction. Some chatter among themselves while others sing, but the clatter of their work and the ever-churning machinery all about them overwhelms their voices.

At any given time, twenty **gnome toymakers** are at work in the workshop. Although a few individuals are somewhat secretive about their work, the toymakers generally welcome any visitors with enthusiasm. Anyone new to the gnome workshop is treated to a frantic but

enthusiastic tour of the facility, and is loaded up with samples of toy wagons, hobbyhorses, dolls, and other toys before being able to escape the room.

3. CANDY CANE SHOP

No holiday season would be complete without candy canes, and this shop is their mystical source.

A sweet, minty smell fills the air in this brightly lit chamber. Numerous large vats filled with thick, bubbling liquid—either milky white or bright red in color—sit on raised hearths. Overhead, the high space is crisscrossed with conveyor-like chains, from which dangle thousands of red-and-white-striped, cane-shaped confections.

Enormous vats cook up the thick, sugary goo from which the candy canes are made. They are rolled, cut, and formed on tables scattered in and among the vats, then hung to set on the many chains that chaotically cross the vaulted ceiling.

Ten **gnome cooks** toil merrily at their tasks here. They mostly ignore visitors, but anyone attempting to sneak a candy cane is in for a harsh reprimand from a sharp-eyed gnome. Anyone asking nicely is welcome to sample a candy cane—but no more than one per person per day.

The palace's main kitchen, another huge chamber filled with the scent of good food and staffed by more gnome cooks, adjoins the candy cane shop.

4. REINDEER STABLES

The large building at the rear of the courtyard is dominated on the ground floor by the reindeer stables.

A long, wide corridor stretches some fifty paces or more, touched by the scent of sweet hay. A dozen two-part stable doors line either side of the corridor, most with their top halves open. Through these open doors, large stalls are visible, each strewn with hay and featuring an ornate feed trough and water barrel—and nearly half of which are occupied by reindeer.

At the eastern end of the corridor, an eerie red glow emanates from one of the open stalls.

Nicholas's sleigh reindeer use **elk** statistics, but they have Intelligence 10 and can understand speech in Common. Each reindeer lives in its own large, comfortable stall, as befits an intelligent, well-cared-for creature. Twenty reindeer live here in total—not just Nicholas's star performers, but a number of backup reindeer as well. During the day, some rest in their stalls, but many spend their days playing games in the palace courtyard.

5. SLEIGH HOUSE

An extension of the reindeer stables, this area is home to a powerful magical relic.

GNOME TOYMAKER

Small humanoid (gnome), lawful good

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 9 (2d6 + 2)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +4, Perception +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Gnomish

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Gnome Cunning. The gnome has advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Spellcasting. The gnome is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (2 slots): *detect magic*, *identify*, *snare**

* From *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*

ACTIONS

Tinker's Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

GNOME COOK

Small humanoid (gnome), lawful good

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 9 (2d6 + 2)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +4, Perception +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Gnomish

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Gnome Cunning. The gnome has advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Spellcasting. The gnome is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames**, *mage hand*, *shape water**

1st level (2 slots): *detect magic*, *identify*, *unseen servant*

* From *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*

ACTIONS

Candy Fork. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

This large, dim chamber is lit only by small, high-hanging lamps coated heavily with frost. A pair of large double doors lead out into the courtyard, but these are currently barred. Row after row of tack and harness hang from pegs in the walls, but the primary feature of the room is the huge object at its center, shrouded in heavy tarps.

Removing the heavy tarps reveals an enormous sleigh ten feet wide and twenty feet long. *The Sleigh of Nicholas the Gift-Giver* is a magical artifact, as detailed in the “New Magic Items” section below.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

The ancient magic of Nicholas the Gift-Giver is manifested in these rare and unique items.

YULE LOG

Wondrous item, very rare

This large log burns warmly and brightly when set aflame. While the *Yule log* is burning, any creature within 30 feet of it can use an action to cast the *holy aura* spell, which affects target creatures within 30 feet of the *Yule log*. This property of the *Yule log* can't be used again until the next dawn.

The *Yule log* burns down to a small fragment after 24 hours. If that fragment is saved when the fire is put out and later used as kindling to start a new fire with a mundane log weighing at least 200 pounds, that log becomes a new *Yule log*.

THE SLEIGH OF NICHOLAS THE GIFT-GIVER

Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement by a lawful good character)

This huge and finely crafted sleigh is painted bright red with green trim and gold filigree. At its front is a large, padded bench seat large enough for up to six Medium creatures. The back of the sleigh is a cargo area capable of holding an unnatural number of gifts.

Random Properties. The *Sleigh of Nicholas the Gift-Giver* has the following randomly determined properties:

- 2 minor beneficial properties
- 1 major beneficial property

Power of Flight. Any creature harnessed to the sleigh gains the ability to fly (as the *fly* spell) for as long as it is so harnessed. If a number of creatures whose Strength scores total 100 or more are harnessed to the sleigh, those creatures can pull the sleigh while flying, in the same manner as they would pull it along the ground.

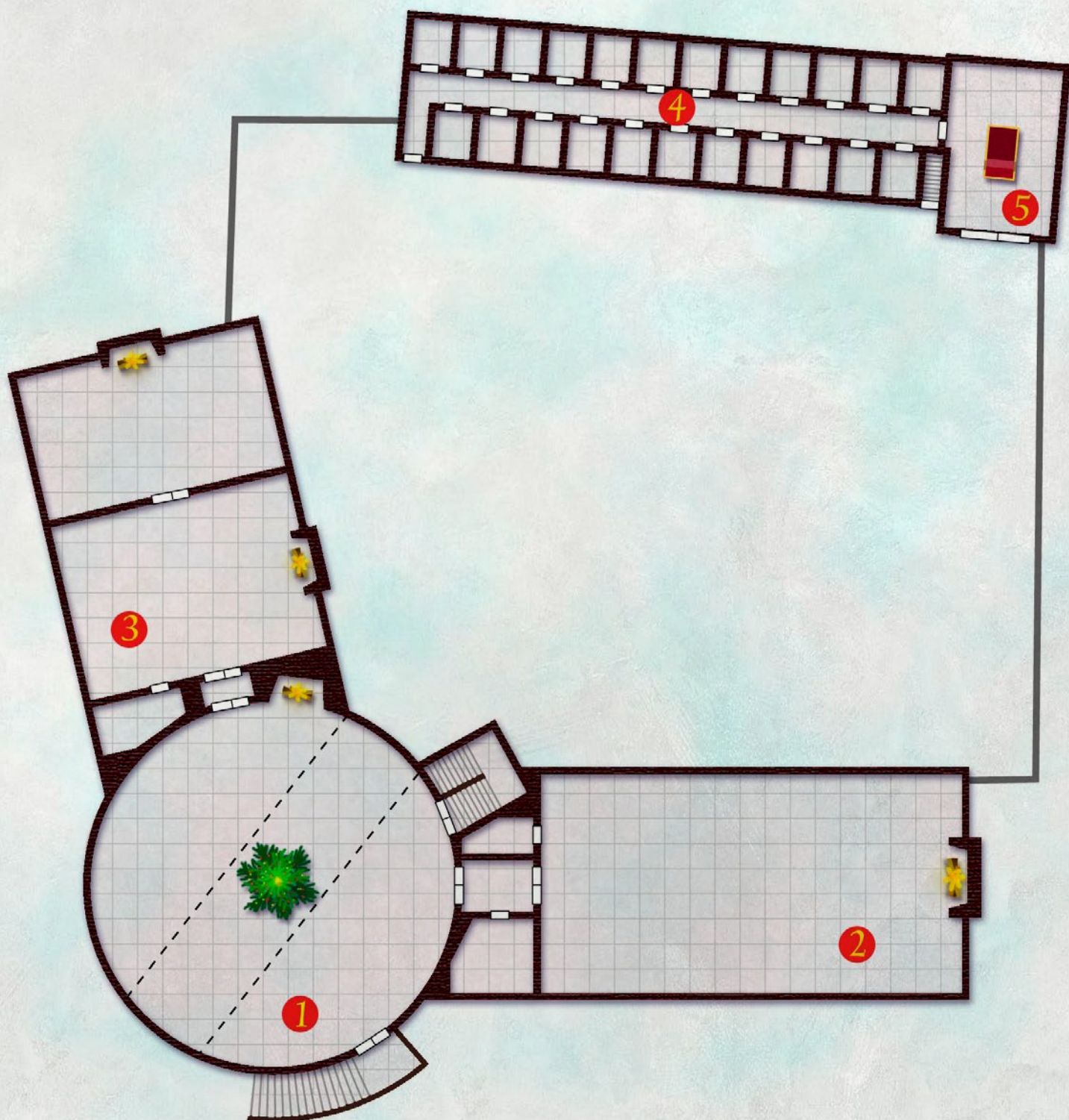
Space for Gifts. The cargo area of the sleigh is a magical storage area similar to a *portable hole*, but its magic functions only when the space is filled with gifts to be given out on the night of December 25th. On any other day, the cargo area holds objects of any type, but only up to its normal volume.

On December 25, an unlimited number of gifts can be placed into the cargo area, with any particular gift retrievable as an action. However, any object not created

as a gift and intended to be given away that night is magically ejected from the cargo area.

A Long Night's Work. If you are attuned to the sleigh, you have the ability to stop the flow of time (no action required), but only during the night of December 25. This effect targets you, any creatures harnessed to the sleigh, and any creatures in the sleigh that you designate as your assistants. This allows all of you to use actions and move as normal while time is stopped for other creatures. This effect temporarily ends if you spend any amount of time engaging in activities other than delivering gifts, but can be restarted again once those activities are complete.

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NICHOLAS THE GIFT-GIVER'S RANDOM GIFT GENERATOR

Characters who discover gifts in their name under the tree in the great foyer can use the following tables and the tables in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to determine what they receive. Consult the Alignment table first, to determine a possible bonus for the initial gift roll. Then roll on the Gifts table to determine the type of gift—from a lump of coal for characters on Nicholas's naughty list, to adventuring gear, weapons, armor, or even magic items for characters who have won the gift-giver's favor.

Once the type of gift has been determined, a specific gift of that type can be rolled for or selected by the DM. If a magic item has been rolled for, consult the indicated table in chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

ALIGNMENT

Alignment	Gift Modifier
Lawful good	Roll on the Gifts table with a bonus equal to 5 + one-half your character level
Neutral good	Roll on the Gifts table with a bonus equal to 2 + one-half your character level
Chaotic good	Roll on the Gifts table with a bonus equal to one-half your character level
Lawful neutral	Roll on the Gifts table with a bonus equal to one-half your character level – 2
Neutral	Roll on the Gifts table with a bonus equal to one-half your character level – 5
Chaotic neutral	Roll on the Gifts table with a bonus equal to one-half your character level – 10
Lawful evil	Lump of coal
Neutral evil	Rock
Chaotic evil	Switch

GIFTS

d20 Result	Gift
0 or less	Lump of coal
1–2	Old silver piece
3–5	Shiny new gold piece
6–9	Roll on or select from the Adventuring Gear table
10–13	Roll on or select from the Weapons and Armor table
14–17	Roll on or select from the Special Items table
18–20	Roll on or select from Magic Item Table A
21–23	Roll on or select from Magic Item Table B
24–26	Roll on or select from Magic Item Table C
27–29	Roll on or select from Magic Item Table F
30+	Roll on or select from Magic Item Table G

ADVENTURING GEAR

d12	Adventuring Gear
1	Antitoxin (vial)
2	Backpack
3	Climber's kit
4	Holy symbol
5	Holy water (flask)
6	Mirror, steel
7	Rope, hempen (50 feet)
8	Rope, silk (50 feet)
9	Saddle, military
10	Spellbook (blank)
11	Waterskin
12	Wine (fine, bottle)

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

d6	Weapons and Armor
1	Armor (padded, leather, studded leather, hide, chain shirt, or scale mail)*
2	Shield (decorated with a family crest, holy symbol, order insignia, or other image suitable to the character)
3	Simple melee weapon*
4	Simple ranged weapon*
5	Martial melee weapon*
6	Martial ranged weapon*

* Choose a type of armor or weapon that the character is proficient with.

SPECIAL ITEMS

d20	Special Items
1	Burned out <i>loun stone</i>
2	Inn stay (coupon, 1 week, comfortable)
3	Sprig of mistletoe
4	New set of socks and undergarments
5	Live goldfish in an ornate bowl
6	Fresh cookies and a small waterskin filled with cold, delicious milk
7	Small bird skeleton that shouts out audience laughter whenever the holder makes a horrible joke or pun
8	Small tome detailing the life of a miser visited by three powerful undead
9	Wand that can no longer hold charges; now emits a small stream of jelly
10	Small burlap bag with a flame branded on the outside; once per day when dough is placed in the bag, fresh-baked gingerbread can immediately be pulled out
11	A stuffed animal in the shape of a tarrasque; hidden interior gears allow it to animate as a clockwork toy (see rock gnomes in the <i>Player's Handbook</i>)
12	Journal penned by one "Volothamp Geddarm" chronicling (with some degree of honesty) his dealings with various monsters
13	Board game involving various scenarios set around Baldur's Gate
14	Expertly carved and painted miniature statuette exactly resembling the character
15	Set of polyhedral dice in a fine velvet pouch; an icon on the 20-sided die matches the deity of the character
16	A bulette pup that eats only snow
17	A toy, once owned and much beloved (but long lost) by the character receiving the gift
18	Roll for an item on the trinket table in chapter 5 of the <i>Player's Handbook</i>
19	Roll for an item from the Elemental Evil Trinket table
20	Roll for an item in the More Items in a Giant's Bag table