



SANTA CLAUS VS. THE BODY SNATCHERS

S*anta Claus vs. The Body Snatchers* is a Fifth Edition adventure designed for **three to five characters of 6th to 9th level**, and it is optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 7**. Characters who complete this adventure should earn half the experience necessary to reach the next level. The adventure is setting independent and can easily be inserted into any campaign world of your choice so long as you don't mind a dose of Christmas themes and science fiction in your adventures.

BACKSTORY

Body snatchers captured Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, the elves, and even the reindeer. Thanks to their ability to take on the form of any creature they've seen, these aliens from beyond now look exactly like the North Pole's most famous denizens. They've even claimed Santa's famous sack of toys, his flying sleigh, and the naughty-or-nice-list.

Why have they decided to do this? The answer is obvious: they wish to break into the guild houses of adventurers all over the land and steal their gear and magic items. With no gear to fight back, the adventurers won't be able to thwart the body snatchers' future plans (which, frankly, are too unspeakable to share in this short background section, lemme tell you!). And since they look like Father Christmas, no one will think to question it.

Currently, the body snatchers are holed up in a cluster of shops in a northern city. At the cluster's heart lies a secret hideout once inhabited by bandits (who the body snatchers ate, obviously). They are holding captive the jolly fat man, his wife, and staff at the hideout. Once the body snatchers fully execute their plans, it's curtains for Saint Nick and the gang.

So far, no one's caught on to the body snatchers' plot—that is until the body snatchers, in disguise, came upon the Snowtalon Orc clan. The Snowtalon clan's village was the faux Santa Claus' last stop just before the light of Christmas

morning. The orcs—who rise with dawn—discovered coal in their stockings. Knowing in their hearts they'd been good little boys and girls that year, the orcs believed something was amiss right away, and took to their giant snow owl mounts. They tracked the fake Santa and downed his sleigh with a few well-placed javelin throws.

The orcs are closing in—they want answers, and they want them now.

ADVENTURE HOOK

At the start of the adventure, the characters are traveling through a snowy winter wonderland when they witness an unusual scene.

It's early morning. The unmarred virgin snow before you looks like something out of a bard's tale. Of course, it doesn't take long for something to disrupt this harmonious scene.

A red blur—almost like a shooting star—cuts through the sky above. The red streak zooms toward a farm some 300 feet ahead of you. It seems almost crazy to think—maybe it's a trick of the light—but you'd swear that the shooting star wasn't a shooting star at all, but a red sleigh being pulled by deer the size of horses.

With a horrendous boom, the sleigh and deer crash between two of the farm's buildings. Before you can react, a pair of orcs mounted on giant white owls swoop in behind the grounded sleigh. Judging by their javelins and how quickly they arrived at the scene of the crash, you'd guess that the orcs were responsible for the sleigh's wreck.

The wreckage is 300-feet away. If the characters decide to investigate, they find the following scene:

You find the red sleigh turned over on its side. Its contents, dozens of parcels wrapped in white, green, and red paper, litter the ground around it. The reindeer that were pulling the sleigh loiter in the area surrounding the wreckage. Some stand near a copse of trees, while others sniff for food near the barn. One of them even stands on the roof of a nearby outbuilding!

There are three figures who pull themselves up from the wreckage. The first two look like a cross between gnomes and elves, with the childlike appearance of a halfling. They wear green costumes highlighted by white and red striped socks. The third is an old, portly, bearded man wearing a red, fur-lined suit, bound by a colossal black belt. Staggering, he grabs a red stocking cap and pulls it onto his head.

“Ho ho ho!” he says, with a jolly laugh, surveying the scene. “What a crash!”

Approximately 150 feet from the fat man, his assistants, and the crashed sleigh, stand the two orc owl-riders and their mounts. Both plant their javelins in the snow, draw wicked great axes from their backs, and snarl at the trio. It looks like those orcs want blood!

The two **orcs** are named Ogclub and Prunk. Like the other orcs in the Snowtalon village, they received coal as gifts—despite a year of being relatively good!—and they want answers. Their two **giant owls** wait for them while they stalk toward Santa Claus and the elves.

Of course, Ogclub and Prunk didn’t shoot down the real Santa Claus. “Santa Claus” is actually a **doppelganger**, as are the two “elves.” All three pretend to be the roles they’re playing until their lives become threatened, at which point they draw their zap guns (see the sidebar) and fight the orcs.

None of the reindeer are real, either. They are **bad taxidermy reindeer**, simulacra which use the statistics of an **elk** except with the following changes:

- **Type.** The bad taxidermy reindeer is a construct.
- **Fly.** The bad taxidermy reindeer has a flying speed of 50 ft.
- **Immunities.** The bad taxidermy reindeer is immune to poison and psychic damage, as well as the poisoned condition.
- **New Trait: Eerie Resemblance.** The bad taxidermy reindeer resembles a reindeer. A creature that can see the reindeer can discern its true nature with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check.
- **New Action: Insect Cloud (1/Day).** A 10-foot-radius cloud of biting insects extends out from the reindeer. The cloud spreads around corners, and its area is lightly obscured. It lasts for 1 minute, or until the cloud is scared away with smoke or fire. Any creature in the cloud when it appears must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 3 (1d6) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. A creature that ends its turn in the cloud takes 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

ZAP GUNS

Zap guns are special, lightning casting weapons with which the doppelgangers in this adventure have armed themselves. A zap gun is a 1 pound martial ranged weapon with a range out to 30/90 ft. On a hit, it deals lightning damage equal to 2d6 plus the attacker's Dexterity modifier. When an attacker rolls a 1 on an attack roll using a zap gun, the zap gun's energy cell becomes depleted and it must be replaced.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters intervene, the three doppelgangers continue to play their roles. They even use their innate ability to read minds to convince the characters that “Santa” and his “helpers” know what the characters want more than anything. The snarling, frustrated orcs don’t believe the doppelgangers’ deception for one minute. After humoring a brief parlay from the adventurers, the orcs attack. If the characters prevent the orcs from harming the doppelgangers, the doppelgangers use the characters’ defense to quietly sneak away with their faux-reindeer.

If the orcs draw blood from the shapechangers, the doppelgangers grab their weapons and start firing. Knowing that they are probably outmatched, the doppelgangers try to escape by mounting the reindeer and flying off.

Should the characters or orcs significantly injure the doppelgangers, they drop their false appearances and reveal their alien nature. In exchange for their lives, they beg. They will let the characters know where the real Santa Claus and his elves are being held. They warn that if nobody saves Santa Claus before the end of Christmas Day, the doppelgangers’ companions will kill Santa and his helpers. They direct the characters to the cluster of shops in which they are holding their captives.

Even if the doppelgangers escape, they inadvertently leave behind a clue indicating where they’re headed. One of the wrapped gifts spilled on the ground during the crash bears a bow from Trickle’s Gift-wrapping Service. Trickle is a retired goblin commando who shares a shop and flat with an aging worg named Churd the Chonk. The shop is part of the cluster of shops from which the doppelgangers hatched their plot.

If Ogclub and Prunk are still alive and hear the doppelgangers or see the clue that leads to the shop, they encourage the characters to investigate. Christmas is a big tradition in their village, and all the members of their clan have been (mostly) good. If something happened to the true Santa Claus, the characters should investigate it immediately. The orcs offer to join the characters, but also warn that they should be with their families on Christmas—especially now that the characters are involved.

THE SCROOGE REWARD

If the clues and orcs’ sob stories aren’t enough to push the characters toward the shops, they start to hear rumors that local adventurers had their weapons and gear stolen in the night. Local investigators believe that the series of burglaries

was done by an “unnaturally obese man wearing entirely too much red accompanied by child-faced cut-purses.” The local guild collects enough gold to offer a 5,000 gp reward to anyone who finds the thieves and returns the items.

There, ya big Scrooges. Gold. Now go save Santa.

THE DOPPELGANGER HIDEOUT

Found in a filth-ridden rathole district of a busy northern town, the doppelgangers' hideout is a collection of shacks, lean-to's, and repurposed ruins. Even when a gang of doppelgangers aren't using this impregnable fortress to stage Christmas-based heists, its shops are managed by all manner of questionable ne'er-do-wells.

Unless stated otherwise, all the hideout's corridors and rooms are 10-foot high. Torches, candles, and natural light keep the area relatively well-lit during all hours. The lack of insulation does little to prevent winter's chill from seeping into its stalls.

Most of the doors throughout the hideout are kept unlocked. In the minds of the shop owners who run the place, it's just easier to threaten someone with a club to the head than it is to replace a lock.

However, the area is littered with secret doors. Finding a secret door requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Opening the door requires a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

A map of the hideout is included in this adventure.

1 - BOBBO'S BOOKSTORE

Thick dust lingers in the air, inviting sneezes all around. Tall, haphazardly built shelves clutter nearly every inch of wall-space, each one choked with old, tattered tomes. At the north end of the store stands a counter made from crates and barrels, behind which a purple-lipped human clutching an empty bottle of two-copper-wine like a bedded lover snores loudly.

Except for the store's unconscious owner, Bobbo (N human **commoner**), there is no one else here. And from the looks of it, that's probably the status quo. Drunk on cheap hooch, the only way to wake Bobbo is by first removing his drunken condition (casting a spell that removes poison effects will work), then shaking him awake. Unfortunately, Bobbo doesn't know anything about the doppelgangers. He does invite the characters to enjoy a book while they're in the shop.

CURSED BOOKS

Every book in the store is cursed. Anyone who picks up a book and opens one must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to read the book until completion, as if they had been affected by the *geas* spell. When this occurs, roll 1d4 + 1 and multiply the result by 100. This is the number of pages the book has. A character with an Intelligence score of 12 or better can read 1 page per minute. Double the time for characters whose Intelligence scores are lower than 12.

Sadly, none of the books in the store are written on fascinating topics. Most are typo-ridden romance novels.

TREASURE

Bobbo keeps a fat coin purse at his side. So long as he remains drunk and unconscious, it's easy to lift. The purse contains 8 pp and 20 gp.

SECRET DOOR

There is a secret door hidden in the southeastern corner of this shop. It leads to area 11.

2 - BLOOKA'S BAKERY

The first time the characters enter this area, read:

Fresh bread, blueberry scones, and cookies right out of the oven assault your senses the moment you step into this bakery. Despite the downtrodden appearance that the rest of this series of shops possesses, this bakery exudes hometown charm.

A short, plump human woman in her seventies greets you as you enter. She holds a fresh tray of gingerbread cookies cut into the shapes of people.

“Why, hello!” she greets you. “Welcome to Blooka's Bakery! I'm Blooka!”

So, Blooka is totally a **green hag** in disguise. The doppelgangers asked her to join their cause, promising rare magic items in exchange.

Currently, she's assumed the appearance of Mrs. Claus who is pretending to be a bakery owner named Blooka. Blooka/Mrs. Claus/hag oozes with niceness, hoping to catch the characters off guard.

QUESTIONING BLOOKA

If the characters question Blooka about the doppelgangers or Santa Claus, she “breaks character”, leans in, and shares with them:

“You're all very clever,” the old woman says, leaning in close. “So, I'll tell you exactly what's going on here. My name isn't really Blooka.”

She sighs.

“My name is actually Anya Claus. My husband is Santa Claus. And yes. It's true. A gang of shapechangers captured us recently and stole my husband's sleigh, hoping to use it to steal magic items from adventurers all over the land.

“Fortunately, my husband's fighting instinct kicked in and he fought off the whole gang with the help of the elves and some of his more powerful toys.”

If the characters don't see through the hag's ruse right away, they might still have questions. The hag will do all she can to get the characters to exit the shop and leave the area. Here

The Doppelganger's Hideout



Map design by [Cze and Peku](#)

are a few answers she might offer:

Where is Santa Claus now? “He was in his shop, but I think he just left to go fix the trouble that those pesky doppelgangers caused.”

Why are you here? “We actually use this series of shops as our northern staging ground for the holiday. It’s much more convenient for my husband to work from here rather than travel all the way from the North Pole.”

Where are the rest of the elves and reindeer? “Likely, they’re helping Santa on his mission.”

What did you do with the doppelgangers? “Once we defeated them, we tied them up in tinsel and delivered them to the local authorities. My guess is that they will stand trial after the holidays. They’re probably in the city’s dungeon right now.”

If the hag manages to get the characters out of the shop, she sends one of her animated gingerbread cookies to alert the doppelgangers in area 12 that the jig is up—adventurers know they’re here.

FIGHTING BLOOKA

Once Blooka gets the feeling that her lies aren’t enough to get the adventurers to leave, she totally drops the act and reveals her true form: a green hag! She then commands the gingerbread cookies to join her in a fight against the heroes.

The animated gingerbread cookies form two swarms and attack the adventurers. Use the **swarm of insects** stat block, except they are Medium swarms of Tiny constructs, vulnerable to fire damage, immune to poison and psychic damage, and immune to the poisoned condition.

If Blooka’s hit points are reduced to half or fewer, she tries to flee. If the adventurers capture her, she reveals that the doppelgangers are still in their hideout. When pressed, she will reveal the location of one or more of the secret doors that leads to the hideout—likely the secret doors in area 1 or area 3b.

TREASURE

Blooka has already claimed two magic items thanks to her deception and discretion. Hidden behind the counter, she keeps an *arcanist’s magnificent magnifier* and an *oaken candle*. Both items are by *The Griffon’s Saddlebag*.

3 - STABLES

The northernmost part of the hideout is dedicated to its ramshackle stables.

3A - STALLS

Six large reindeer bearing thick antlers cluster in a series of stalls. Most of the deer snort and kick when they see you, the sleigh bells on their bridles jangling. However, one of the deer just gives you a blank stare. Oddly, it’s in a stall flanked by two empty stalls.

The characters might catch a faint whiff of a cloying scent coming from the separated deer. It is the smell of preserving fluid oozing from another of the doppelgangers’ bad taxidermy reindeer. If the characters come within five feet of the deer, it emits a dense cloud of insects and collapses into a

pile of rotting furs, wood, and bones.

The cloud of insects takes up a 20-foot-radius sphere. Each creature in the area when the insects appear must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) piercing damage on a failed saving throw or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature who ends their turn in the area takes 10 (3d6) piercing damage. Each round, the cloud starts to break up—it deals 1d6 less damage. After 3 rounds, the cloud completely disperses.

The five living deer are all Santa’s reindeer (one of which has a glowing red nose). They use the **elk** stat block, with the addition of a flying speed of 50 ft. Sadly, the other four deer were killed by the doppelgangers.

3B - FEED STORAGE

This room is used to hold animal feed. It also hides a secret door in the southern wall that leads to area 12a.

4 - TRICKLE AND CHURD

Trickle is a retired **goblin** warrior who now spends his days arguing with a jowly, arthritic **worg** named Churd the Chonk. The odd couple lives in this cold, ruined circular tower base, offering their services as gift wrappers. The doppelgangers paid Trickle to wrap their fake Santa gifts and gave him a little extra for discretion. The characters may have found some of those gifts at the farm crash.

A neutral evil creature at heart, Trickle has no qualms about giving up the nature of his employers. After getting a quick look at the characters—and any shiny objects that they might be wearing—he prices his valuable information at 500 gp. When the characters cough up the cash, he tells them all he knows: doppelgangers captured a fat man in a red suit and are holding him somewhere on the property. He knows that there’s a way into the center of the hideout through Dink’s Butcher shop to the south.

Trickle and Churd are, as he says, “too cold and too old” to fight. If threatened, they’ll cave and still give the information they have, switching to a pathetic stance.

5 - DINK’S BUTCHERY

The characters smell rotting meat as soon as they come within 10 feet of this shop.

5A - SHOP

When the characters enter the shop, read:

There’s blood everywhere! Okay, sure. It’s a butcher shop. So, blood isn’t *that* strange. But still, it’s easily one of the foulest butcher shops in the region. Stinking sausage links, greenish cuts of meat, and enough blood to fill a bathtub make this shop look like something out of a ghastly ghost story.

A short, scar-faced goblin wearing a dark green shirt and black apron looks up from behind the counter. “Wot?” he barks as he slams a rusty cleaver into a nearby block of wood.

The **goblin’s** name is Dink. Dink has worked the butcher shop for 30 years and has seen many unsavory types come and go. For him, the doppelgangers are just the latest bunch of criminals to operate from within the cluster.

After he's had a second to size up the characters, he wipes his hands on a clump of rags and shrugs.

"Guess you're here for the body snatchin' lot, eh? Oy! Go through the abby-twar and push on the north wall. Ya ain't heard this from Dink!" He points to the abattoir.

Dink's never been a fighter. If threatened, he'll laugh, "Been a lotta knives at Dink's ol' throat, yet Dink still lives. Know why, mate? 'Cause Dink ain't worth killin'." He smirks, displaying a mouth hopelessly devoid of teeth.

5B - ABATTOIR

Dozens of dead pigs hung on meat hooks crowd this small, blood-soaked area. Just as Dink promised, there is a secret door hidden in the northern wall. The secret door leads to area 13.

6 - STORAGE

Tall crates and barrels envelop the interior of this exterior storage shed. When the characters arrive, one of the doppelgangers, disguised as an elf, is moving boxes to and fro. When the **doppelganger** notices the characters, she smiles and introduces herself as Mixie.

MIXIE THE "ELF"

Using her innate ability to read minds, she tries to get a feel for why the characters are at the cluster. If she senses that they're looking for the other doppelgangers, she will do all she can to persuade the characters that there aren't any other doppelgangers at the location, using many of the same lies that Blooka (see area 2) gives.

If deception doesn't work, she surrenders. She then offers to lead the characters to where Santa Claus is being held. Mixie hopes that she can lead the characters to area 12a where the toy soldiers will attack the characters so she can flee. If there are other doppelgangers along the way, Mixie speaks her intentions loudly to alert them with such lines as, "Oh no! I guess I've been caught by a band of adventurers! Right this way, heroes! I will show you where they're keeping Santa Claus!" and so forth.

Mixie recognizes that she's outnumbered and does what she can to escape the characters as soon as possible.

7 - SOOT'S SMITHY

This Smithy is one of the few parts of the cluster that's warm.

7A - SHOP

A small bell over the shop's exterior door alerts Soot to the presence of visitors. Normally, Soot (a **duergar**) works from his back room. But he's always eager to greet shoppers.

You hear a deep-voiced creature from the back room shout, "All right! Hold yer horses! I'm-a comin'!" A white-bearded, red-eyed dwarf, covered from head-to-toe in black soot, marches into the shop.

"What ya lookin' fer?"

Soot's in a great mood. After all, he just bought the entirety of the doppelgangers' magic weapon supply gathered from their first run in the sleigh for a pittance. He eagerly awaits the second run (which was in the crashed sleigh). Soot hopes to

sell the weapons at 20% off market price, giving him an edge in the magic arms market.

Soot tries to play coy about the existence of the doppelgangers. Unfortunately, he's a terrible liar (he makes all his Deception checks at disadvantage). If the characters see through Soot's poor ruse, he tries to make a deal with them.

"Hey! Look! I know you folks're lookin' for a fight, but it's the holidays for dirt's sake. I'll make you a deal. Word's goin' around that the adventurer guild's lookin' to pay 5,000 gold for all them lost magic weapons. Of course, the stuff I got back there is worth far more than 5,000 measly crowns, friends. Even yer most basic enchanted weapon can fetch 300. And I've got at least 40 of 'em back there. How's about you take half of that pile back there, and ol' Soot keeps the other half? Then you let them body-snatchers keep doin' their thing and we all just keep our mouths shut. Eh! What'd'ya say?"

If the characters agree, Soot lives up to his part of the bargain. He lets the characters take half the magic items in area 7b. He promises not to tell the doppelgangers what they were up to so long as they promise to do the same.

If Soot's deal doesn't work for the characters, he won't fight them (he moans about a bad back preventing him from doing so). But he does promise that if they steal from his shop without at least paying what he paid for the magic items (500 gp), he'll make sure that the characters will get what's coming to them.

If the characters ask Soot where they can find a way into the doppelgangers' hideout, he suggests that they ask Dink at the butcher shop to the north. Dink's shop's been there longer than anyone else's.

7B - WARES

Soot barred the exterior door, preventing anyone outside from entering this way. A character can break down the door from the outside with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check.

The doppelgangers sold 40 *+1 magic weapons* to Soot, which crowds every surface of this room. Those weapons are:

- 1 club
- 4 daggers
- 1 handaxe
- 3 javelins
- 2 maces
- 2 spears
- 1 light crossbow
- 2 shortbows
- 3 battleaxes
- 1 flail
- 1 glaive
- 2 greataxes
- 2 halberds
- 5 longswords
- 2 greatswords
- 1 maul
- 2 scimitars
- 1 short sword
- 1 rapier
- 1 hand crossbow
- 1 heavy crossbow
- 1 longbow

8 - JAIL

Best known as the "drunk tank," this small jail is used for drunks, shoplifters, and other folks who aren't bad enough to get tossed into the city's dungeon.

8A - ROUSTABOUT'S POST

The jail's guard is a lone, corrupt **hobgoblin** named Roustabout, whose crooked gold tooth grin greets the characters as they enter. After the doppelgangers took Santa and his elves captive, the doppelgangers paid Roustabout a fair sum to place the elves in holding.

If the characters ask Roustabout what he knows about the doppelgangers, the hobgoblin feigns ignorance. Should the characters see through this deception, he pretends to surrender and hands them the keys to the cells.

What he'll fail to share, however, is that the door that leads to the cells (area 8b) is a **mimic** named Harvey. Unless the mimic is fed a mouse (Roustabout keeps a few dead mice in the drawer of his desk), it attacks. Roustabout then joins in the fight.

TREASURE

Roustabout has the payment he received from the doppelgangers in his desk, 100 gp.

8B - CELLS

This dirty jail is divided into nine holding cells. Behind its rusty bars you see five figures all dressed in green costumes with matching stocking caps. These creatures look like a cross between gnomes and elves with the faces of human children. And they look exhausted.

The largest cell holds a plump, elderly human woman wearing all red. She, too, looks like she's been through the wringer.

Santa's five elves (use the **kobold** stat block, except their alignment is neutral good) and Mrs. Claus (neutral good half-elf **commoner**) are prisoners. They're too tired to try to convince the characters that they're not doppelgangers but will thank them profusely if freed. Unfortunately, none of them know exactly where the last of them, Santa himself, is being held. They recommend that the characters continue to search for the body snatchers while they seek out the town guards.

9 - CLOSED INN

This inn hasn't been in service for years. Of course, even when it was open, nobody used it; the place is gross.

9A - FRONT DESK

Judging by the dust, cobwebs, and mold that covers everything here, this old inn probably hasn't been used in a few months, if not longer. Oddly, the front desk is relatively clean. A shiny, silver bell sits atop its surface. A sign beside the bell reads "ring the bell for service."

The bell, its sign, and a sizable chunk of the counter are all part of the same hungry **mimic**. It attacks anyone who "rings it."

9B - BEDROOMS

These rooms are all in varying states of disarray and/or decay. None of them holds anything of value; however, the southeasternmost room hides a secret door in the northeastern wall. This secret door leads to area 18.

9C - SECRET DOOR

A secret door offers access to area 10b. Nipnip (area 10) sometimes uses this door to flee from tough foes.

10 - NIPNIP'S NURSERY

Nipnip, an unusually tall **kobold**, manages this plant nursery. Although the state of the building itself is relatively poor, the plants are in great condition.

10A - GREENHOUSE

This impressive greenhouse holds dozens of green, healthy-looking plants. Light mist rains from thin hoses hung along the skylight. A lanky five-foot-tall kobold greets you with a pleasant chirp. In her claws she holds a large, potted flower, whose red petals shimmer beneath the mister's drops of water.

Nipnip doesn't speak Common, only Draconic. She seems friendly enough but uses her lack of Common to feign ignorance. Like many of the shopkeepers who work in the cluster, the doppelgangers paid Nipnip for her silence.

If pressed, Nipnip grows increasingly anxious. She won't fight but will try to reach the button on the wall (see below) to trigger the shop's poison trap. From there, she tries to escape through the secret door in the southern wall in area 10c.

Poison Spray Trap. The mister isn't the only hose threaded throughout the greenhouse. A button hidden on the wall beside Nipnip's desk at the north end of the shop activates the poison spray. The poison spray comes from a rare plant Nipnip's worked with for years. Her prolonged contact with it has made her immune. Otherwise, the poison spray affects the entire area. When it is activated, each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, the creature is also blinded. Creatures who end their turn in the area must repeat the saving throw unless they have already failed on a saving throw against this poison.

Noticing the trap before Nipnip triggers it requires a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Disarming the trap—either before it's triggered or after—requires a character with proficiency in thieves' tools to succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity check.

Nipnip has wired the button on the wall so that it must be pressed three times before it stops the poison. Failure to press it three times increases the pressure of the poison— increase the DC by 2. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check recognizes that it takes three pushes of the button to turn off the poison.

TREASURE

Nipnip keeps a coin purse with 100 gp on her person.

10B - BACKROOM

Nipnip uses this small room to store empty pots, soil, and gardening tools.

10C - STORAGE

This large, low-lying area sees little use. If Nipnip fled here after trying to poison the characters, she locks the door connecting this area to area 10b and dashes to the secret door in the southern wall (see below). To get through the locked door, a character with proficiency in thieves' tools must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity check. Alternatively, a character can break the door down with a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check.

SECRET DOORS

There are two secret doors in this area. The first secret door, which connects this area to area 19, is hidden in the eastern wall to the south of a large bookshelf. The second secret door connects this area to area 9c. It's hidden in the southern wall.

11 - SMUGGLER'S SHED

Local smugglers previously used this old shed to store their ill-gotten gains and illegal goods. Anything that may have had value in this area has long since been confiscated by the city militia.

SECRET DOORS

A secret door in the western wall connects this area to the outside of the cluster. A second secret door in the northern wall links this area to area 12.

12 - BANDITS' CORRIDOR

This secret corridor lies at the heart of the cluster. Crates filled with blackmarket goods line the walls. Thanks to unclaimed illegal shipments of Boki fish—banned in the region due to their enchantment properties—the entire place smells of rotting fish.

12A - WESTERN CORRIDOR

These cold hallways reek of rotting fish and sawdust. Large crates line the walls. Thick sacks fat with gift-wrapped goods are tucked into every nook and cranny. There are also toys all over the floor. In fact, three toys the height of a fully grown human stand against the wall. Each of these toys has been carved to look like a member of the militia. Their wooden, painted faces are locked in a perpetual grin.

Of course, the three toy soldiers are animated objects that attack anyone who comes into the corridor that isn't one of the doppelgangers. They use the **animated armor** stat block. A fight here alerts the doppelgangers in area 19 to the characters' presence.

TREASURE

A character who spends 10 minutes looking through the crates will find 200 pounds worth of well-preserved Boki fish. Knowing their value requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. The fish are illegal throughout the region, but the right buyer will pay up to 1,000 gp for the lot.

SECRET DOORS

There are two secret doors on this side of the corridor. The first is hidden in the northern wall; it connects this area to the stables, area 3b. The second secret door hides in the southwestern corner and links this area to area 11.

12B - SANTA'S SLEIGH

Someone jammed a huge, red sleigh into this small office. Sacks chock full of toys surround it.

This is Santa's real sleigh, stolen by the doppelgangers and stored here. They plan to use the sleigh as a "getaway" vehicle once they've completed their mission.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the northern wall connects this area to area 13.

12C - WATER ACCESS

Smugglers use this water way to gain access to the sewers below the city. However, recent infestations of giant spiders and lycanthropes have made the sewers less than desirable. The Boki fish operation now sits as it once did when it was abandoned five years previous.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the southern wall connects this area to area 14.

13 - NARROW WAY

This long, wooden-plank hallway runs nearly the entire length of the cluster. Two **doppelgangers** disguised as elves stand guard at the eastern side of the corridor, a few feet from the secret entrance to Dink's abattoir (area 5b). When a fight breaks out, one flees to area 19 to warn the other doppelgangers while the second tries to keep the intruders at bay. They both surrender as soon as their hit points are reduced to half or fewer.

14 - SHORT PASSAGE

This short, cold passage hides three secret doors—one to area 6, one to area 12c, and one to area 15. A lone **doppelganger** disguised as an elf hides here. If it sees intruders, it flees via the quickest route it is able with the intention of warning the doppelgangers in area 19.

15 - DOCUMENT ROOM

Once upon a time, the bandits who ruled the cluster used this room to store their sensitive documents. After they fled, they left the room as it was. The bandits must have been killed (or jailed) since they've never returned to reclaim the room and its contents. Most of the scrolls that litter the shelves and tabletops are old, brittle, and moldy.

TREASURE

A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the shelf against the western wall slides out. The bandits who used to use this room dug a small hole

in the floor and placed the shelf over it to hide its presence. Within the hole is a small bag filled with 16 gems. Each of the gems is worth 100 gp.

SECRET DOORS

There are two secret doors into and out of this room. One secret door is in the northern wall and connects this area to area 14. The other secret door is hidden in western wall and connects this area to area 16.

16 - EMPTY STOREROOM

Two toy soldiers (**animated armor**) stand guard in this room. They attack anyone who enters this area that isn't a doppelganger.

SECRET DOOR

The eastern wall hides a secret door that connects this area to area 15.

17 - MR. CLAUS, I PRESUME?

The true Santa Claus is kept in this locked room. Opening the lock requires a character with proficiency in thieves' tools to succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity check. Alternatively, a character can make a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to break the door down. The doppelganger inside will also open the door should someone deliver the correct sequence of knocks—knock-knock-knock...knock-knock-knock... knock-knock-knock, knock knock (*Jingle Bells*). Only the doppelgangers know this knock.

If the characters aren't careful or quiet as they enter this room, they find the **doppelganger** (disguised as an elf) using the real Santa Claus as a human shield with a zap gun to his head.

"No false moves, heroes! Or the fat man gets it!"

The true Santa Claus (use the **mage** stat block) is down to his last 2 hit points and he's currently being grappled. A shot from the zap gun will likely end his life. The doppelganger uses its action on each of its turns to ready an attack to zap Claus if the characters move five feet closer. With the tip of the zap gun on Santa's temple, the doppelganger has advantage on the attack and the attack will count as a critical hit. The characters will either need to negotiate with the doppelganger or do some quick thinking.

The doppelganger is smart enough to realize that the characters have all but thwarted their operation. It now just wants to escape and will use Santa Claus as a bargaining chip until it's sure that it's free of reprisal.

If the characters free Santa, he encourages them to seek out the true elves and Mrs. Claus, wherever they are (they're in area 8b). Once Santa Claus knows that his wife and friends are safe, he offers to join the party to help them put a stop to any remaining doppelgangers.

18 - SECRET STORAGE

This small room is used to store more of the doppelgangers' fake presents. A single **doppelganger** disguised as an elf works here. If attacked, it tries to flee to area 19 to alert the other doppelgangers.

Other than countless lumps of coal, there is nothing of value here.

SECRET DOOR

There are two secret doors that lead to this chamber: one in the south wall and one in the north wall. These doors connect to areas 9b and 20 respectively.

19 - DOPPELGANGER CENTRAL

Unless the characters somehow managed to get this far without betraying their presence, read the following:

Not one, not two, but three Santa Clauses stand at the center of this large room. One of the three Santa's sits on his knees, his arms bound behind his back. His right eye is swollen shut and his lip is busted and bloody.

The other two Santas hold strange weapons to the beaten and broken Santa's temple.

"Drop your weapons, heroes! Ho ho ho!" laughs the Santa to the left.

"Ho ho ho! Or we'll blow a hole into the true Santa Claus' head!" chortles the other.

The Santa on his knees says nothing.

All three Santa Clauses are **doppelgangers**. The trio hopes to use the fake hostage situation to trick the characters into relinquishing their weapons. Once the doppelgangers are sure that they've neutralized the threat of the characters, the "hostage" Santa frees himself of his binds and stands. The three then "ho ho ho!" as they try to tie the characters up.

If the characters see through the deception of the three doppelgangers, the two doppelgangers holding zap guns fire their weapons while the third removes his binds and jumps into melee combat. The doppelgangers are tough, but refuse to get caught or die at the hands of a few pesky adventurers. If the characters reduce their hit points to half or fewer, they flee, using the network of secret doors to mask their getaway.

EVIDENCE

The walls are covered in maps of the doppelgangers' sleigh routes, blueprints for the creation of bad taxidermy deer and animated toy soldiers, as well as a step-by-step plan for capturing Santa and stealing his identity. If the characters take the doppelgangers alive, this evidence is enough to put them away for a long, long time.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the southwestern corner of this room connects this area to area 10c.

20 - SECRET BARRACKS

This narrow room is lined with seven small beds. The doppelgangers used this area as their barracks. A search of the room reveals a small treasure chest that holds 1,500 gp. The doppelgangers used this gold supply as the way to fund their operation.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the southern wall leads to area 18.

AFTERMATH

Overall, the doppelgangers know that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Their Santa scheme isn't worth jail time or execution at the hands of adventurers. Therefore, they will flee the first chance they get. Because they're naturally stealthy and can assume the appearance of anyone they've ever seen, they use crowds and alleys to escape.

After he reunites with Mrs. Claus, the elves, and the remaining reindeer, Santa Claus offers his gratitude to the characters. He offers to give them anything that they desire, so long as it can be created via a single casting of the *wish* spell. After rewarding the characters, Claus, his wife, and the elves pack into his sleigh and fly north, back to their arctic home.

Of course, if the characters fail to save Santa Claus but still defeat the doppelgangers, someone will need to fill the jolly fat man's boots. If the elves or Mrs. Claus are still alive, they come to a simple conclusion: perhaps the adventurers can fill the role until they find a suitable replacement. If the characters agree, they have one year to prepare for the next Christmas. Ω

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