

# Cliffhangers Adventures

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## The Tower of Lore

*By Jesse Decker*

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*The Tower of Lore* is a short adventure for four 8th-level characters. Nearly any mix of characters will work, but the adventure consists of four sequential encounters, so a cleric or another source of recuperative magic is extremely useful. The adventure should prove a reasonable challenge for characters from 7th to 9th level. The adventure is set in a quiet area of the Duchy of Urnst in the **Greyhawk** campaign setting, but can be located almost anywhere within a day's travel of a small village. The adventure uses "The Old Tower" map from the October [Map-A-Week](#) web feature.

### Adventure Background

Two months ago, an ambitious young diviner named Stannis Moonsdale journeyed to the small village of Ethdar in the Duchy of Urnst. The mage came to the area looking for a cache of lost lore supposedly left by a powerful mage who used to live in the region. With the help of the villagers and his own powers, Stannis was able to locate the ruined tower. Accompanied by his powerful shield guardian, Stannis traveled to the ruined tower, forced his way past the magical traps guarding the inner chamber, and as expected, found a stash of loot.

Despite diligent research and divination, Stannis did not discover the true fate of the tower's original owner. The priest who constructed the tower was Nithis Callal, an elf and servant of Lolth whose own schemes ended in ruin. Nithis learned that he was to be sacrificed as part of a play for power by one of Lolth's prominent priestesses. Refusing to give up his life so easily, Nithis refused the call of his deity and began the terrible research of the process to become a lich. Although the priestess was furious with Nithis's failure to obey, punishment was a long time in coming. After her scheme failed, the priestess was left with one mission: to destroy the one she believed responsible for her failure. Calling upon Lolth's love of revenge, the priestess cursed Nithis by transforming him into a drider. This didn't stop him -- even in drider form, Nithis's transformation into a lich continued.

When Stannis arrived, the undead monstrosity that Nithis had become still lurked in the chambers beneath the tower. Not wanting to risk a confrontation, Nithis used his spells and drider abilities to hide, hoping that the trap he had laid would ensnare the new arrival. Rumors that Stannis had heard about the tower were mostly of Nithis's creation. When he was alive, Nithis used similar rumors to lure adventurers to the region, and the rumors survived their creator's transformation into undeath. The lore that Stannis discovered was carefully crafted by Nithis, under the guidance of his goddess, to shatter the mind of anyone not dedicated to the mistress of spiders.

Aware of the dangers of such hidden lore, Stannis took precautions when exploring the contents of Nithis's remaining library, but he fell victim to the trap nevertheless. The trap exposed his mind to the direct touch of Lolth, destroying him, and leaving his corpse in the twisted form of a bodak.

The adventure consists of exploring the small tower, confronting first Stannis's shield guardian, the bodak that Stannis has become, then the drider lich lurking under the

tower.

### Hooking the Characters

Because the adventure can take place almost anywhere, getting the characters to the Tower of Lore is relatively easy. However, simply passing by the tower might not provide enough motivation to explore its interior. Here's a short list of ideas to get the characters into the tower.

- The players know Stannis, or know of the diviner's abilities, and need his advice on an important matter. Stannis is an expert on a number of subjects, such as history, arcane knowledge, and geography.
- The players have heard rumors of the tower themselves. Stannis isn't the only sage to be intrigued by tales of the tower's contents. A rival of Stannis could hire the party to learn the tower's secrets. The secrets would be a strong temptation for any of the party's spellcasters as well.
- Stannis initiated some major projects in Ethdar, at least by the village's standards, and had made plans to spend a good deal of money on them. The merchants of the village have finished their work and are now anxious for their payment. The smith, wainwright, and innkeeper need payment to recoup their expenses. The three contact the party as a group and ask them to check on Stannis in exchange for a considerable discount on their services as long as the group is in the area.

### Encounter Area 1: Outside the Tower

The countryside around the tower consists of open, rolling hills with sparse trees. Since Stannis returned to the village a few times during his stay at the tower, the villagers know the route. Hungry for news from the outside world, the villagers warm to outsiders quickly. A successful Diplomacy check (DC 10) gets them to share what they know of Stannis and the route to the tower. The tower is about one day's travel by horse (just over 30 miles) from the village.

As the players approach the tower, read or paraphrase the following text:

*As you approach the ruined tower, it becomes clear that the one-story building once rose higher than its current size. Piles of rock on top of the building reveal the fate of the tower's upper stories. The building rests on top of a small hill, offering a good view of the surrounding area.*

Before the characters explore the tower, they must deal with a pair of athach who have recently wandered into the area. The giant humanoids patrol areas **1** and **2** on the map. Had Stannis encountered the pair, he would have driven them off. Their presence should be a clue to the characters that the mage is unable to leave the tower.

**Athach (2):** hp 133 each; see [Monster Manual](#) page 21.

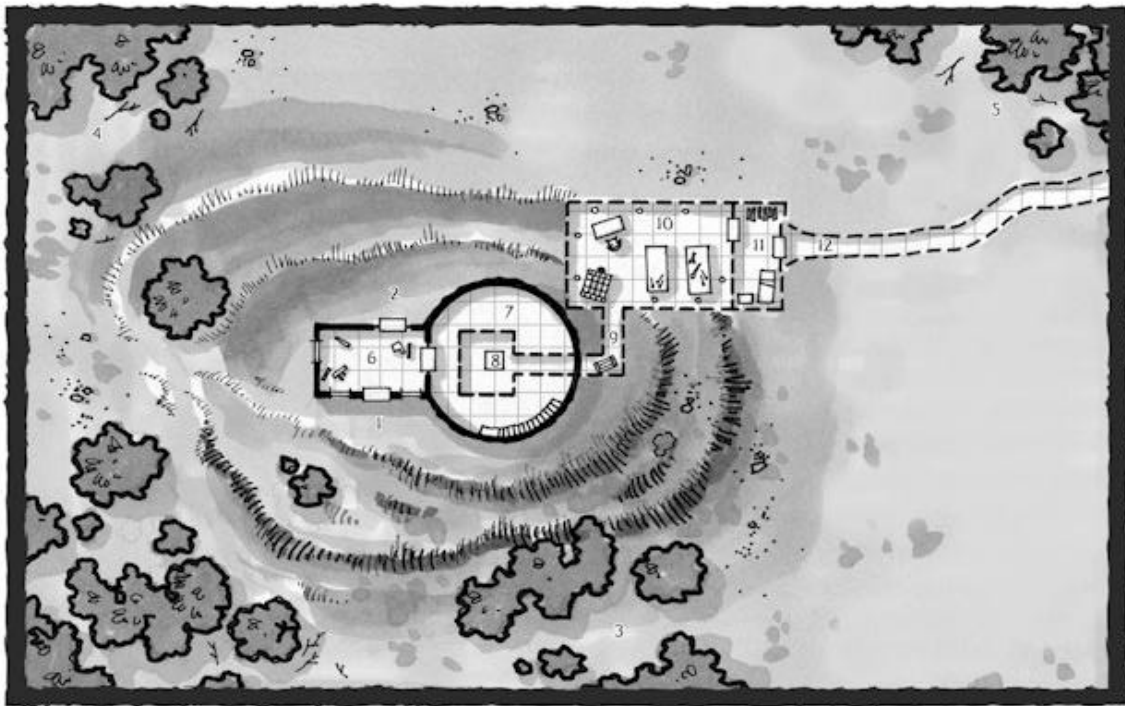
### The Cliffhanger

After dealing with the athach, the characters still need to investigate the tower. Continuing to follow Stannis's final command, the mage's shield guardian patrols the inside of the entry chamber. Characters have a good chance to hear the guardian's ponderous footsteps. Allow the characters a Listen check (DC 10) to hear the footsteps echoing in the small chamber (Area **6**).

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The *Tower of Lore* is a short adventure for four 8th-level characters. The first part of the adventure set the party on the trail of a powerful diviner, Stannis Moonsdale, who -- unbeknownst to the party -- has fallen prey to dark magic. Episode 1 culminates with a brief fight outside the tower where the diviner was last known to be. Episode 2 includes a confrontation with the diviner's shield guardian servant and offers the group a chance to learn more of the diviner's fate.

The adventure uses "The Old Tower" map from the October [Map-A-Week](#) web feature. The tower itself is mostly ruined; only the first story, including a small entry chamber, remains intact. The shield guardian moves slowly around the inside of the entry chamber, and a Listen check (DC 10) allows the characters to hear the automaton's footsteps. Both doors into the tower are protected by an *arcane lock* (12th-level caster). These are strong wooden doors (hardness 5, 20hp, DC 23 to break open normally, DC 33 because of the *arcane lock*).



### Inside the Tower (Area 6)

Ordered to prevent anyone from entering the tower, Stannis's mightiest creation, a shield guardian, waits for the adventurers. Although the undead Stannis (detailed in Episode 3) still possesses the amulet that controls the guardian, the madness that consumed him during his transformation to undeath prevents him from exercising control over it. Without new orders, the guardian is an implacable foe to anyone trying to explore the tower.

Characters who know something of Stannis's background, either from talking with the villagers in Episode 1 or through skill use (Bardic Knowledge DC 25, Knowledge History, Knowledge Local [Greyhawk] DC 30) know that Stannis had a shield guardian like the one attacking them.

**Shield Guardian:** CR 8, hp 82, see the [Monster Manual](#), page 163.

**SA—Store Spell:** The guardian has *fire shield* stored (cast at 12-level), set to be cast as soon as it begins combat.

**Tactics:** The shield guardian fights with mindless intensity, but it is limited by its instructions. If the party retreats from the chamber, the guardian does not pursue. Attacks from outside the tower will, however, draw the guardian out.

The entry chamber itself is full of broken masonry and the remains of wood furnishings. Stannis kept most of his possessions in the inner chamber, but a large chunk of masonry in this room served as a makeshift desk. Papers and a vial of ink rest on the stone, giving evidence of its use. The room is covered with a thick layer of dust, obscuring most of the original stonework.

Stannis spent a fair amount of his time in the entry chamber, and its interior contains several items of interest to the party:

**Unsent Letter:** Stannis communicated with his scholarly associates mainly by means of *whispering wind* or similar spells. When his travels took him beyond the range of such spells, he occasionally sent brief letters to describe his progress. One such letter is on Stannis's makeshift desk. Finding the letter is easy (Search check, DC 5). The letter is addressed to Duran Highson of Greyhawk and states simply that Stannis found what the two believed to be hidden here and that he was staying to study the contents.

**Secret Notes:** Stannis was a careful researcher who strove to maintain a balance between keeping accurate notes and concealing his discoveries from others. Two pages of sparse notes are concealed by *secret page* spells. When examined normally, the pages look like a simple accounting list of Stannis's expenses. The actual contents of the first page reveal that Stannis uncovered whatever hidden lore he'd sought. The actual contents of the second page document his attempts to master a new divination he discovered. (The new divination is actually a trap designed by the drider lurking in the chambers below the tower.)

The secret pages cannot be located by a normal search. A *detect magic* spell reveals a faint aura around the pages, but does not reveal their contents.

**Original Decor:** Although it won't tell the PCs much, anyone making a difficult Search check (DC 20) notices that the original stonework looks quite creepy. Relief carvings along the walls and ceilings show thousands of little spiders rushing up the wall. The carving shows the spiders coalescing into the form of a giant spider in the center of the ceiling.

## The Cliffhanger

During the battle and subsequent exploration of the room, the lich in area **10** casts *clairvoyance* on the chamber. A successful Scrying skill check (DC 20) reveals the magical sensor created by the spell, alerting the party members to the fact that they are being watched.

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with the undead monster that Stannis has become.

### The Inner Chamber (Area 7)

When Stannis discovered it, the inner chamber was relatively intact. Nithis, the lich hiding beneath the tower, destroyed or drove off all adventuring groups to that date. However, when confronted with more powerful opponents, like Stannis, the lich resorted to trickery, planting a tome of its own creation in the ruins of the tower. The tome, now destroyed, held instructions to a powerful divination ritual. In actuality, the ritual was designed to draw the attention of Lolth, the evil deity of the drow.

Stannis, although a careful researcher, was taken in by the ruse. As a result of his exposure to the deity's dark power, he was slain, only to rise again in the twisted form of a bodak. The bodak's tormented mind bears little resemblance to that of the mage it once was. In its madness, the bodak has destroyed most of the contents of the room, including Stannis's spellbook and the tome containing the lich's trap.

The room itself is filled with fragments of fallen masonry, tatters of Stannis's possessions, and little else. The bodak, although intelligent, is plagued by madness and has not yet ventured out of the room. The creature has no coherent attack strategy, other than to stay away from attackers and focus its deadly gaze upon them.

**Bodak:** hp 58, see the [Monster Manual](#), page 27.

*Possessions:* ring of jumping, bracers of armor +2.

*Notes:* Although bodaks usually have no possessions, Stannis was transformed so recently that the monster still retains a few items of the mage's equipment. Adjust the statistics in the *Monster Manual* accordingly.

**Treasure:** *Pearl of Power* (2nd level). Although bodaks typically possess no treasure, this tiny pearl has rolled into the corner of the room, unnoticed by the insane, undead Stannis. Other than this pearl and the possessions noted above, the bodak has destroyed all Stannis's equipment, including his spellbook and the tome that led to his transformation.

### The Return of Stannis

Although there is little direct evidence beyond the possessions the bodak carries, most PCs will realize that the creature was once Stannis. The characters are unlikely to know much about Stannis's background or friends (Bardic Knowledge or Knowledge Local [Greyhawk] DC 30), but the letter found in Episode 2 gives them a possible clue. Should the characters resurrect Stannis or take his remains to Duran Highson in Greyhawk (a 13th-level cleric of Heironious who will resurrect his old friend), the party will have earned the gratitude of one (or more) powerful members of the Greyhawk community.

### The Cliffhanger

Although Stannis did not discover them, a few chambers beneath the tower remain intact (areas 8-11 on the map). The trap door leading underground is hidden in the center of the floor (Search check, DC 20). The lich in area 10 observes the party through a *clairvoyance* spell. Once the party has dealt with the bodak, the lich launches a surprise attack by first casting *darkness* on the trapdoor, opening the door, casting *fireball* into the room, then closing the door. If the party tries to interfere (an unlikely event over two rounds of combat), the room is suddenly covered in darkness then filled with flames. The

lich then retreats to area **10** and begins preparing for the group's attack (see Episode 4).

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### **Under the Tower (Area 10)**

Nithis first built the chambers beneath the tower as an escape route, but when the tower was mostly ruined (by the same drow attack that drained his level, see below), he fled to these hidden chambers and made them his permanent lair. Dry, stale air fills the chambers, which contain the decayed furnishings of the lich. In life, Nithis maintained the large chamber (area **10**) as his work room, but now even the shattered tables have mostly rotted away. If the players locate the trapdoor and make their way into the underground chambers, Nithis doesn't hesitate to attack.

**Nithis Callal 7th-level Drider Lich Sorcerer:** CR 10; Large Undead; HD 7d12; hp 46; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 19 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural, +1 ring, +1 amulet); Atk +6 touch (1d8+5, Will save DC 14 for 1/2 damage), SA fear aura, paralyzing touch, poison, spells; SQ turn resistance, damage reduction 15/+1, immunities, spell resistance, undead; AL CE; SV Fort —, Ref +6, Wil +12; Str 15, Dex 15, Con —, Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 18.

*Skills:* Concentration +10, Spellcraft +14, Spot +9, Listen +9, Hide +8 (Nithis's skill point total reflects a 15 Int, the +2 Int for becoming a lich has not granted him extra skill points.)  
*Feats:* Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Craft Wondrous Item.

SA—Poison (Ex): Bite, Fort save DC 16, 1d6 temporary Strength initial and secondary damage.

SA—Spell-like Abilities: 1/day—*dancing lights, darkness, detect chaos, detect evil, detect good, detect law, detect magic, faerie fire, levitate*. Save DC 14+ spell level.

SA—*Fear Aura (Su)*: 60' radius. Creatures of less than 5 hit dice must make Will save (DC 18) to avoid effects of *fear* spell.

SA—*Paralyzing Touch (Su)*: Creatures touching the lich must make a Will save (DC 18) or be permanently paralyzed.

SQ -- *Turn Resistance (Ex)*: +4 turn resistance.

SQ -- *Immunities (Ex)*: Immune to cold, electricity, polymorph, and mind-affecting attacks.

Sorcerer Spells Known: 0 -- *detect magic, resistance, light, read magic, ghost sound, daze, mage hand, open/close*; 1st -- *charm person, endure elements, expeditious retreat, magic missile, shield*; 2nd -- *darkvision, see invisibility, web*; 3rd -- *clairaudience/clairvoyance, fireball*; 4th -- *improved invisibility*.

Spells per day: 0: 7, 1st: 7, 2nd: 7, 3rd: 6, 4th: 5.

*Possessions: Ring of protection +1, amulet of natural armor +1, cloak of resistance +2, potion of bull's strength, potion of jump.*

*Note:* Nithis was 11th level when he created the phylactery to become a lich. However, during his transformation, he was attacked by loyal servants of Lolth, a pair of clerics commanding a group of wights. Although he fought off the attack, he lost four levels as a result of the battle. Because he'd already completed the phylactery, Nithis was able to finish his transformation to a lich despite his reduced level.

*Tactics:* Nithis begins the adventure with *darkvision* cast on himself. He also casts *clairvoyance* twice to watch the characters face the encounters described in Episode 2 and Episode 3. Nithis is a cunning and ruthless opponent. After launching the surprise attack in the last installment (during which he uses more spells, see Episode 3 for a complete description), he retreats to his underground chamber (area **10**) and prepares to face the PCs in earnest. He casts *endure elements* on himself one or more times, selecting energy types based on the attacks the PCs used in earlier encounters. He also casts *see invisibility* on himself if the PCs have any obvious spellcasters in their group. He then climbs onto the ceiling and casts *improved invisibility* on himself. During the battle, Nithis concentrates his offensive spells on those who seem able to see him. He is careful to always cast a spell and then move (using his Move Silently skill), attempting to prevent opponents who can't see him from using the origin point of his spells as a way to locate him.

If the battle turns against him, Nithis casts *expeditious retreat* on himself and retreats down the underground passageway leading away from the tower. If he has time, he'll cast *silent image* (of a plain wall) on the door to prevent the characters from following him.

### Continuing the Adventure

The destination of the underground passageway (area **12**) remains to be determined. Here are some ideas:

- **The Underdark:** There are many entrances to the vast Underdark. This could be the where Nithis hunts.
- **Another Ruin:** Nithis was attacked by drow during his transformation to a lich, so there must be some dark elves nearby.
- **An Escape Plan:** A hidden exit onto the surface is the simplest end to the passageway.