

# The Twitching Hive



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# Using this book

## This book assumes the following:

1. You want to GM a game of *Dungeon World*,
2. You're looking for a low-prep, one-shot, introductory, "throw'em-in-the-deep-end" adventure,
3. You've read the rules (especially the GM section),
4. You're fairly new to GM'ing (whether *Dungeon World* or RPGs in general) or looking for inspiration.

*Dungeon World* is more improvisational than most RPGs, but just because you're *playing to find out what happens* doesn't mean you, the GM, shouldn't have an idea what will happen next.

## REFERENCE

- 🗨️ The **speech bubble** is something to be **read aloud** to the players. Usually, it's an introduction, statement or question. "You" means "you, the player" in this context.
- 👁️ The **eye** is something **interesting or useful**. If your players are spouting lore, discerning realities, or otherwise investigating, this highlights something they might find out.
- ⚠️ The **warning** is a **custom move**. Custom moves work the same way as any other move - they're just designed for a specific adventure.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

## Before the game

- \* Familiarise yourself with the background, NPCs and their goals.
- \* Prepare maps, monster info and items for reference during play.
- \* If this is your first session, print off copies of the basic moves and the playbooks.

## At the table

- \* Start by reading the introduction aloud, then asking the players the questions provided. (Try to ensure each player has answered at least one). Focus on throwing the players into the action.
- \* Tell them the uber-rule: when you do something, roll 2 dice and add a stat. On a 10+ it happens; on a 7-9 it happens with caveats; on a 6- mark XP and you won't like what happens next. Explain anything else as it comes up in play.
- \* Use the impressions to set the tone of the adventure and the details from locations to give specific knowledge.

## After play

- \* Touch base and make sure everyone had fun (including yourself!) If not, try and work out what can be improved next time.
- \* Pat yourself on the back for a job well done!

# Starting the Adventure

## INTRODUCTION

You're in a dimly-lit sandstone room, deep within a ziggurat built by giant ants. Your twin elf guides are looking very nervous.

One of the four stone slabs around you is piled with ores, another with mouldy plant-life. A fungus the size of a tree has sprouted from it.

You spot several twitching shadows shuffling towards you. The ants seem diseased, their faces swollen and discoloured. More of them are swarming from the southern corridor.

## QUESTIONS

- \* Where is this ziggurat located?
- \* What threat do the ants pose to your people?
- \* Why are the elves so nervous? Why do they want your help destroying the queen?
- \* When did you see trolls and ants working together?
- \* Who avoided triggering the yellow spores around the entrance? *(Let's find out! **Everyone roll+DEX**. If you have Trap Expert, take +1 forward. On a 10+, you avoided exposure and did it quietly. On a 7-9, you avoided either exposure or detection, your choice. On a 6-, you avoided neither.)*
- \* And, as always, *what do you do?*

# Background

## **WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW**

Most trolls know better than to stray within reach of the ants, but those unlucky enough to be caught face a grim fate. The ants cultivate a special parasitic fungus that only affects trolls, making the normally rampant beasts docile. Other species have offered a kings' ransom for the ant's secret weapon, but the ants know how dangerous the spores could be if they get out of control and keep their existence a secret.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what's happened here. Spores from another colony, carried by one of the pack-trolls, unwittingly turned into a strain that affected ants as well. Once the queen was infected, the whole colony was doomed. Most are already dead, but those infected and still mobile roam the halls for fresh victims. So far, the parasite only affects ants, but if left unchecked who knows how far it could spread.

### **How do the elves factor into all this?**

Relationships between the elves and ants have always been tense. The ants control most of the mines in this area, the only source of a magical ore that the elves rely on for sustenance. Although the ants are well aware of this advantage over the elves, open hostility is rare. On the other hand, the elves are not above petty theft if the opportunity presents itself.

### **And the spiders?**

The spiders are something of a mercantile caste between the elves and ants. They try to act as peacemakers and middlemen; for the most part, this has worked well for everyone.

## IMPRESSIONS

- \* Efficiently-cut sandstone walls, covered with moss
- \* Cloudy, spore-filled air
- \* The sound of shuffling bodies through the walls
- \* Pale, luminescent fungus
- \* Open mineshafts rich in mineral wealth
- \* Twitching shadows, from somewhere nearby
- \* An uncomfortable humid warmth
- \* Lumbering shapes

## NPCS

### Nostarion & Eleniel, the elf guides

These twin desert elves are rangers. Their job is to scout the wastes for more supplies of the magicite the elven families of the northern forests desperately need. Having encountered the PCs - strangers in a strange land - they've proposed a truce in exchange for wealth and the favour of the court.

Both elves are pale, but Nostarion is the paler of the two. He is skilled with the longbow, but a coward at heart. The horror of the infected hive may well be too much for him - he's seen a lot of grim things in the desert, but few as bad as this.

Eleniel is the close-range specialist of the two, and more sturdy. She hefts a steel greatsword like it was almost nothing. Brave and more loyal (but most loyal to her kin) she accepts the horror of the hive as a challenge to be overcome. If the players (or her brother!) suggest leaving, she'll point out the potential devastation this infection could cause if left to spread to other colonies - or worse, other species.

**▲ At the start of a session or when the elf twins owe the party one**, roll. Roll+1 if they have already found some magicite to snack on. On a 10+ hold 3; on a 7-9 hold 2; on a 6- hold 2 but one of the twins starts acting irrationally. Any player may spend hold, one-for-one, to have an elf do one of the following:

- \* (Nostarion) Add +d6 damage to a *volley*
- \* (Eleniel) Add +d6+1 damage to a *hack & slash*
- \* (Either) Take the full force of a blow meant for a PC

### **Pii'treb, the spider-kin envoy**

En route from his clutch, Nat'rob found himself stranded in the wastes and was welcomed into the colony on the eve of the infection. Although unaffected by the fungus (yet) he was forced into hiding as the colony turned into a bloodbath. He's currently hiding in a store cupboard, wishing he was back home. If rescued by the party, he'll be forever grateful.

**▲ If Pii'treb escapes the ziggurat alive**, word will spread among the spiders of the parties' actions. Pii'treb will offer the party sanctuary with his clutch and a fine reward from his trader's supplies.

## FRONTS

### The Infected Colony

*Cursed place*

- \* The infection takes root in another colony
- \* The infection spreads to another species
- \* One race attempts a radical quarantine
- \* The ants or another race are effectively wiped out

**Doom:** Pestilence

### The Elves' Advantage

*Ambitious organisation*

- \* The elf council learns of the fungus
- \* The fungus is intentionally spread by elf rangers
- \* The ants find out, and declare war

**Doom:** Chaos

## STEADINGS

Although this colony is well past saving, there may be others out there for your party to travel to. Here's how you go about making them:

### Making your own ant colonies

By default, an ant ziggurat is moderate, booming, guard, exotic (royal jelly), resource (ores), oath (other ant colonies), personage (the queen), craft (sandstone). In addition, choose one:

- \* The colony is suffering the early stages of fungus infection; -population, +lawless, blight(fungus)
- \* The colony is built on a rich, but well-known mine; +prosperity, +guard, blight(raiders)
- \* The elves have openly attacked this colony before: +guard, emnity (elves)

- \* The colony currently lacks a queen: -personality, -exotic, lawless
- \* The queen has latent magic abilities and the colony reveres her as a living god: +arcane, +divine, +guard, enmity (nonbelievers)

### **Making your own spider clutch**

By default, a spider clutch is moderate, steady, watch, resource (goodwill), craft (trade goods). In addition, choose one:

- \* The clutch is a prominent meeting place amongst the tribes: +prosperity, +market
- \* The clutch makes it's home in an underground cave or webbed between the northern trees: +safe

### **Making your own elf clan**

By default, an elf clan is moderate, shrinking, garrison, safe, elven (duh). In addition, choose one:

- \* The clan lives a life of luxury and are heedless of harsh realities: -safe, -defences, exotic (drugs & experiences), lawless
- \* The clan is militant and a base for ranger patrols: +defences, +guild (rangers)

## ITEMS

### Royal Jelly

This viscous substance is harvested and stored for use in the development of new queens. It is highly valued by many species for its anti-ageing and restorative properties, though the effects on non-ants can be much more erratic.

**▲ When you eat the royal jelly**, you instantly recover D6+6 health. In addition, you also suffer one of the following effects, depending on what you rolled.

**1-3** You continue to heal an additional 1HP every time you rest, for another 6 days. At the end of this period, choose a physical characteristic from an ant or similar insect; this spontaneously grows from your body.

**4-6** Your dreams are plagued by visions of glorious, multi-limbed creatures for several days. When you awake, you find you share the ants' vast knowledge of herbs and ores. Other ants will instinctively know you have consumed royal jelly and will react appropriately - either reverence, friendship, or jealous hostility.

## **DUNGEON MOVES**

### **An old cavern gives way**

There's a mighty rumbling, and the sound of mandibles chewing through stone above. A huge chunk of wall falls over the entrance where you stood a moment ago!

### **You hear the trolls approach**

Over the chittering and delicate puffs of blooming fungus, you hear a mighty crashing and banging from below. Something's on it's way - it sounds bigger than an ant, it's dragging chains or some kind of metal weapon behind it.

### **You find an ant in the early stages of infection**

The ant is stood in the corner, but when they turn around you spot the tell-tale marks around their eyes. It's only a matter of time until the infection takes over their brain. For now, the poor creature is desperate to join you, and may become violent if turned away.

### **The elves desert you to consume magicite**

The battle is over, but where did those damned elves run off too? You find them by the slab of ore, rooting through it. They stop and turn to face you as you approach. Robinel at least has the sense to look guilty; Nathanos has an eerie red glow around his eyes.

### **Someone is infected**

Someone starts stuttering. They weren't stuttering before. Their eyes look kind of... swollen. Uh-oh.

# Names

## Elf (males)

Mithrennon  
Saeldur  
Nestarion  
Locien  
Arandur  
Tirithon  
Feredir  
Bregolien  
Calanon  
Idhrenion

## Elf (females)

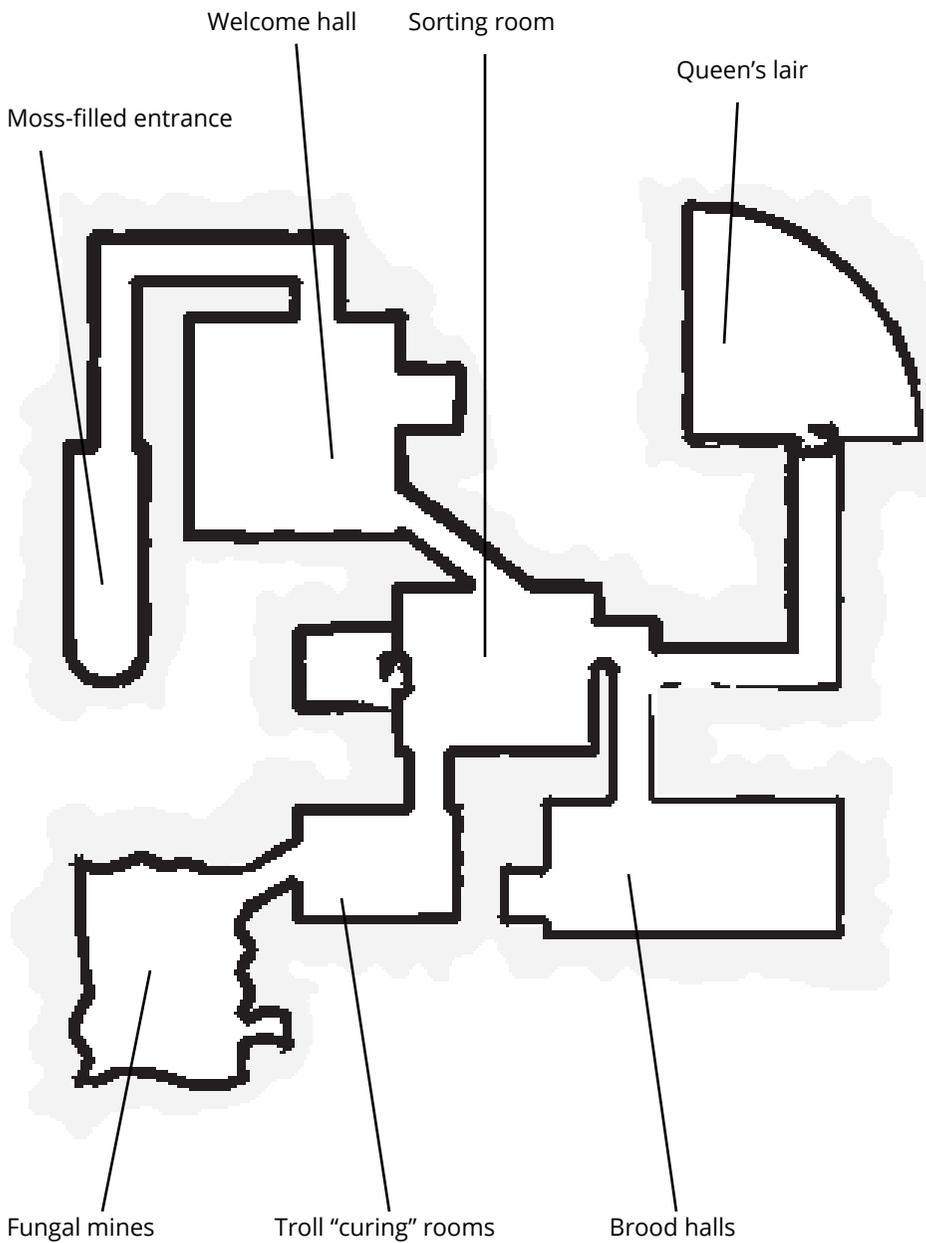
Eleniel  
Meldiriel  
Lostariel  
Indilwen  
Rhavaniel  
Naerwen  
Lairielithoniel  
Falathiel  
Alassiel  
Valadhiel

## Ant (drones)

Kri  
Vau  
Yem  
Ayt  
Tar  
Ban  
Huhran  
Vekk  
Jiye  
Visk

## Ant (queens, ziggurats)

Kala  
Valyar  
Pess  
Quij  
Satar  
Oiro  
Faz  
Bel  
Zoohn  
Walya



# Locations

## MOSS-FILLED ENTRANCE

A sandstone staircase, leading to the top of the ziggurat. The finely chiseled walls are filled with revolting yellow fungus.

**⚠** **When you breathe in the yellow spores**, roll+CON. On a 10+, you're hacking and wheezing, but you'll live. On a 7-9, you're hacking and wheezing, and it doesn't go away until you make camp. On a 6-, it *really* doesn't go away. You might want to see a doctor.

## WELCOME HALL

Devoid and empty of life, the welcome hall lies oddly abandoned. Some of the yellow fungus has made it's way in here, but it's more easily avoided.

👁 You think there's some of the ants' hieroglyphs carved into the walls, hidden under the mold. Closer examination reveals carvings of the ziggurat. Crude examples of ants & trolls travel through the ziggurat, carrying goods downwards to the queen.

## THE SORTING ROOM

This is where the players start (see *introduction*). It's a long hall where the ants collected their wares before they were moved elsewhere in the ziggurat for processing. Several infected drones enter from the northern corridor, already in the throes of infection.

👁 The fungus growing through the rotted plants looks dangerous, but only seems to be triggered by close proximity.

👁 There's a few shards of raw magicite - a precious magical mineral - half-buried in the ores. The elves seem very interested in the stuff. Elves have been known to drain essence from magicite as a source of nourishment.

👁 The western wall is carpeted in more moss, but the wall isn't stone - it's a thick leather tarp. The treated hide has kept out the worst of the parasite, and several trade goods, fine herbs and rare gems lie intact in this room.

**⚠ When you search the discarded supplies**, roll+WIS. On a 10+, you find up to 40 coins' worth of raw materials, or an equivalent value amount in dungeon gear (adventuring gear, rations, bandages etc.) On a 7-9, you also find one option (your choice) from the list below.

- \* A cloud of spores
- \* A sleeping troll
- \* Enough magicite to make the elves jealous

## INFECTED DRONE

*Horde, Organized*

⚔ *Crushing Mandibles (d6+2 damage, close)*

♥ *7 HP*      *1 Armor*

**Special quality:** Insectoid, Hive Mind

**Instinct:** to spread the infection

- \* Act with mindless intent
- \* Entrap something in mandibles
- \* Twitch and wrench spasmodically

## THE CURING ROOMS

This was where the feral trolls were brought to be 'cured' and turned into the ants' slaves. For now, it seems to be deserted. A roughly-hewn passage leads down to the mines.

Pii'treb the spider-clan envoy is hiding here, beneath a pile of dirty rags. He will initially lash out, believing the others to be infected, but if calmed down will happily join the group if it means escape. The players don't understand his language, but the elves do.

👁️ There's a lot of rampant fungus here, but it doesn't seem to be the same strain as the others. The spider was hiding in it for a long time, though...

**⚠️ When you closely examine someone for signs of infection**, roll+INT. Take +1 forward if you've examined an infected ant already, or if you've had experience with the species you're examining before. On a 10+, both; or they aren't infected right now (your choice.) On a 7-9, pick one:

- \* You know how long until they turn
- \* They won't realise they're infected unless you tell them, or it's too late

## FUNGAL MINES

This is where the trolls once mined ore for the ants. The seams of iron and magicite are eerily lit by luminescent mushrooms. Troll corpses lie in every corner, now host to strains of the fungus. Unfortunately, some of the trolls, though ridden with spores, are still mobile.

**⚠** **When the red spores waft towards you**, roll+DEX. On a 10+, you turn away just in time. On a 7-9, you turn away, but you fail to spot something important. On a 6-, a single spore makes it into your eye, putting you in agony. Wash your eye out with fresh water right now, or face the consequences.

## FUNGAL ASH TROLL

*Group, Large, Organized, Forceful*

✦ *Growth-studded hand (d8+5 damage, reach, forceful)*

♡ *18 HP*     *4 Armor*

**Special quality:** Bloated with infection

**Instinct:** to ensure the fungus' growth

- \* Shrug off horrible injury
- \* Distribute more spores
- \* Take root in a wet, warm place

## BROOD HALLS

This was the living quarters for the ants, once. There is evidence of a civil war as the non-infected struggled to escape or destroy their infected brothers. Evidently, they did not succeed. The stench of rot is everywhere and the air is dense with drifting spores. There is a narrow tunnel carved into the ceiling, apparently freshly dug. You think you hear the sounds of erratic digging coming from it.

👁 If an infected drone manages to escape to the surface, it could spread the infection further. That's not something likely to be good for anyone.

👁 The bodies all look dead, but it's hard to tell. You think you see some of the 'corpses' twitching, though it could just be the fungus overtaking their bodies. (Eurgh!)

**⚠** **When you pass through the grey spores**, any exposed metal (swords, armour, belt buckles) begins to corrode away. The longer you stay there, the worse it gets.

## Royal Guard

*Horde, Small, Cautious, Intelligent*

❖ \* *Crudely-wielded spears (d6 damage, reach, 1 piercing)*

♥ <34 HP 1 Armour

**Instinct:** Protect the budding fungus

- \* Loose a feral troll
- \* Collapse into a cloud of spores
- \* Pin a creature down for infection

## QUEEN'S LAIR

A heavy sandstone slab blocks the way to the queen's chambers. To open it, the mandibles from one of the royal guard must remain clamped shut on the carved lock system. (The rest of the ant is optional!)

👁 It is a great honour for a royal guard to become "the lock" - the one responsible for keeping the queen's door open or closed. It is said their mandibles could snap a spine in half.

The lair itself has been almost entirely overtaken by great roots and tendrils of fungus. The queen herself still sits in the centre, alive after a fashion - her immense egg sac overtaken by the parasite to breed disgusting, mobile fungal monstrosities.

## FUNGAL QUEEN

*Solitary, Huge, Terrifying*

❖ *Gouts of spores (1d12 damage, near, ignores armour)*

♡ *18 HP 2 Armour*

**Instinct:** Foster the fungus

- \* Reveal hordes of fungal mites from her egg sac
- \* Sprout fungal tendrils everywhere
- \* Summon the remains of a royal guard

## FUNGAL MITES

*Horde, Tiny, Terrifying, Devious*

❖ *Spontaneous growth (d4 damage, close, ignores armour)*

♡ *3 HP 0 Armour*

**Instinct:** To take root somewhere warm

- \* Overwhelm a larger, warmer creature
- \* Take root and bloom rapidly
- \* Take root and bloom much later

## EPILOGUE

**⚠** **When you escape the hive**, roll. Take +1 if any of your followers (the 2 elves and the spider) are still alive, and an additional +1 if the queen was defeated.

On a 10+, word spreads of your valiant work in the desert encampments and the survivors offer their personal thanks. On a 7-9, as above, but one follower didn't get out 'clean' - a speck of fungus survived on them to propagate elsewhere. On a 6-, a speck of fungus survived on one of you!

### Royal Jelly

A sealed conch filled with a viscious jelly, 1 weight. When consumed you heal d6+6 health, but that's not all that happens...

### Suit of stillness

A carapace of lizard hide designed by the ants for humanoid use. When you wear it and *make camp* in the desert, you don't need to consume a ration.  
1 armour, worn, 50 coins,  
1 weight

### Sealed spice jar

Will make anything taste better! **When you spend a few hours spicing up stale or unpalatable food**, you turn it into D4 rations.

3 uses, 1 weight.

### Healing potion

Drinking this will immediately restore 10 HP.

OR

### 2 Bandages

Spend a few minutes tending wounds, then regain 4 HP.

### Clutch of troll scabs

DISGUSTING! But good at deflecting blows. +1 armour

OR

### Infused stone

It keeps whispering at you...  
(as *Bag of Books*)

### Pretty bones

Some kind of ant trophy.  
d6x10 coin, 2 weight.

OR

### Obsidian Ingot

A good smith may be able to work this... 30 coin, 2 weight.