

The Castle's the Key

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This is a one-off adventure designed for use with Dungeon World. Whether you've never run a game before or you're a veteran GM, I hope this book provides plenty of ideas to kickstart your game.

PLAYING FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Before the game:

- ▶ Get familiar with this book.
- ▶ Have dice, pens, spare paper and the rules to hand.
- ▶ Go over the *impressions* while the players get settled.
- ▶ Relax! You're gonna do just fine.

At the table

- ▶ Remind everyone of the basic rules.
- ▶ Start the players in the middle of the action. Explain how they're in a tricky position, ask questions to work out how they got there, then ask "*what do you do?*"
- ▶ Don't be afraid to stop to consider what happens next.

After the game

- ▶ Thank everyone for playing. Ask what they liked or disliked so you know for next time.
- ▶ Pat yourself on the back for a job well done!

ICON REFERENCE

👁 This is something **interesting or useful**, for when your players spout lore or discern realities.

⚠ This is a **custom move**. When the trigger occurs, describe the effects and make the players roll to find out what happens.



Introduction

You knew you couldn't take the elves at their word when they said this castle's been abandoned for generations, but here you all are: up to your necks in peril. Again.

One of you figured out the key was able to magically change shape, granting access to the secret room. One of you kept everyone together during that ambush in the smoke-filled room. And one of you (there's always one!) is currently pinned to the wall by a poison barb trap. Decide who did what, now.

If you solved the puzzle of the first key, describe what you found glittering in the bundle of tattered rags in the secret room, and why you took it (1 weight). You've got first dibs, but the other players are aware what it is and that you took it. You also have the key (1 weight.)

If you kept everyone together, tell the group who or what tried to ambush you in the smoke-filled room. Luckily you spotted them first and got everyone out without injury - almost. You took a nasty cut to the sternum that just won't heal properly, even with magic. Hold 1 right now, and hold 1 again every time you do something physically straining (a sprint, a leap, holding a heavy door, a dodge from a blow, etc.) up to a maximum of 3. **When an enemy strikes you in the sternum**, spend all your hold and suffer an additional d4 damage for each hold spent.

If you're the poor fool stuck to the wall, here's the good news: mark experience. Here's the other good news: the half-dozen bolts trapped you against the wall, but none of them pierced your skin. Everything else is bad news: you can't reach the bolts unaided, the rest of the party are on the far side of the room, and one bolt is dripping bright green ichor onto your shoulder, which stings like crazy. Take 1d4 damage (ignoring armour) right now, and you'll suffer more if someone doesn't get you free in the next couple of minutes.

By the sounds coming from the corridor, your ambushers from the smoke-filled room have caught up with you. Everyone who isn't hanging around - what do you do?

CREATURES

The Ambushers.....Horde, Intelligent, Organised

♥ **3 HP 1 Armour** Crystal blades (d6 damage) close, 1-piercing

Instinct: to ensure Yhagni is never awakened

The Rival Party.....Group, Intelligent, Organised, Hoarder

♥ **6 HP 1 Armour** Cold and pitted steel (d8 damage) reach

Instinct: to get to the heart of the castle first

Yhagni, the demi-god.....Solitary, Planar, Intelligent, Large

♥ **20 HP 0 Armour** Maddening touch (d10+3 damage), close

Instinct: to enact great change, for better or worse

QUESTIONS

- ▶ What are you attempting to do for the elves in this castle? Why do you need to do it?

For the Fighter or Barbarian:

- ▶ You know you're not the first party sent on this task. Who do you know who came here before you, and what was their fate?

For the Wizard, Cleric or Paladin:

- ▶ The elves locked away *Yhagni, the demi-god* in this castle. What was the half-god's domain, and why do the elves wish to unleash it now?

For the Thief or Bard:

- ▶ This castle is filled with ancient elven relics. Who might be interested in fencing it for you?
- ▶ The ancient tales of this castle say the elves used it as a 'pillar of last resort'. Last resort against what?

For the Druid or Ranger:

- ▶ Long ago, the surrounding forest rose up against this very castle, deeming it an abomination. The castle itself resisted this. What evidence still remains of this battle?

IMPRESSIONS

- ▶ Glowing stone, hovering uncertainly
- ▶ The roots of a great tree weaved amongst a ritual room
- ▶ A place of power, all but drained by another interloper
- ▶ Others who attempted this task now just dust and rags
- ▶ The sense of being watched by many eyes
- ▶ The feeling of a heavy weight upon your mind, the deeper downwards you go
- ▶ The room containing Yhagni, criss-crossed with psychic wards to contain his physical essence on this plane



Locations

THE ANCIENT GATE

A great stone gate, ripped apart by thick roots and branches.

- 👁 Numerous geodes and crystals, pulled up from deep below along with the roots, dot the area.
- 👁 A corpse, twisted into impossible angles, can be spotted within the seemingly-dead roots

⚠ When you dodge away from a reawakened root, roll+DEX. On a 10+, it blocks your path, but you keep out of it's grasp. On a 7-9, the root wraps around your arm, leg or chest (GM's choice.) On a miss, the forest starts to awaken.

THE OLD GARDENS

Remains of what was once a tranquil grove.

- 👁 More crystals, embedded into the ground, stone and bark. Perhaps they have some kind of magical use?

⚠ When you try to unlock the power of the crystals, roll+INT. On a 10+, you see a vision of the central chamber, where Yhangi is kept. On a 7-9, you see one of the other rooms instead. On a miss, someone sees you instead.

THE HALF-FINISHED CAVERNS

An area that looks only half-complete - or half-demolished. What were they trying to do here?

▲ **When the cave-in begins**, roll+CON. On a 10+, you're a little shaken, but basically whole. On a 7-9, the sharp crystal debris rips great holes in leather and steel alike - take -1 armour ongoing. On a miss, the crystal makes it through to your skin too - take d6+2 damage.

THE ORACLES' PROMONTORY

A spartan living space where the castle's keepers rest.

👁 Rifling through the occupant's personal effects results in d3 supplies (rations, bandages or adventuring gear.) The fact they have these items also suggests they're mortal...

YHANGI'S CHAMBER

A stained stone pit, lined with psychic wards. In the centre is Yhang's physical essence, locked in place.

👁 Yhang can communicate with the adventurers. If they wish to *parley*, his freedom could be used as leverage but destruction of the elves is more likely to enrage him.

Other Dungeon Moves

- ▶ A cave-in separates and disorients the party
- ▶ A magical effect thought defunct reactivates
- ▶ The ambushers track the parties' progress
- ▶ The forests' war begins anew
- ▶ More bloody elves turn up

(I recommend you create your own fronts based on the answers your players give. But if you want some ideas, here's what my playtest group came up with. -Joe)

YHANGI AWAKENS

The elven scripts tell of a great doom that nearly befell their race, and the demi-god they made - Yhangi - designed to rebuild the earth in their image. Yhangi's power proved too difficult to control, so the creature was locked away. But the elves' war against the desert ants goes poorly, and some factions have decided Yhangi must be unleashed once more.

Cast

- ▶ Yhangi, demi-god of creation, blessed with the powers of eternal growth
- ▶ Nathanos & Robinel, twin elf rangers who believe the key to the ant's demise lies in Yhangi
- ▶ The ants of the ashlands, attempting to destroy the elves' neighbouring desert homes
- ▶ The wild elves of the forests, attempting to hold their own and bring fresh life to the ashlands.

Danger: The power of creation

Impulse: to terraform the ashlands

Portents:

- ▶ Yhangi is released
- ▶ The ant's ziggurats are overrun by rampant growth
- ▶ The fire wyrms of the mountains are quenched
- ▶ The elves set up new colonies in the ruins of the ziggurats