

Sinister Solstice D

A holiday-themed adventure, created by Ray Otus for Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel's *Dungeon World*, www.dungeon-world.com. The format was inspired by Marshall Miller's *Dungeon Starters*, www.finemessgames.com.

Overview

You will need an understanding of *Dungeon World* to make complete sense of this adventure format, though the content can be used with any system.

The adventure is detailed in three parts. The first two parts are creative tools, containing questions, impressions, and threats for two distinct environments. The third part contains an adventure "front" (a *Dungeon World* term). The DM should adjust the dangers described therein, or scrap them entirely to make room for the player's ideas and character concepts.

A number of elements in this adventure have the potential for comedy. The DM is free to dial the humor up or down, but it may be better to err on the side of sinister or weird rather than silly, since many groups tend toward humor during play anyway.

1. The Frozen Waste ❄️

In which the characters explore a wasteland and try to avoid the evil clutches of the Ice Elves.

Questions

- ❖ What massive natural barrier marks the threshold of the waste? How did you cross it and what did you lose in the crossing?
- ❖ What incident made you realize you might never get out of the waste alive?

- ❖ Why are you looking for Kringle Castle? What do you hope to find there?
- ❖ What did the flea-bitten trapper say you would see in the skies above Kringle Castle?
- ❖ What are you just getting ready to do when you first hear the wolves howl?

Impressions

- ❖ A sluggish gray sea, choked with blocks of ice that grind against each other with maddening creaks, squeaks, and cracks.
- ❖ The ribs of a rotting leviathan, arched around the remains of a fire and a ring of huge vertebrae that were obviously set on-end as makeshift camp stools.
- ❖ Patches of sparkling snow that leave behind floating, multi-hued spots in your vision.
- ❖ A bridge of nearly transparent ice above a terrible abyss. The chasm walls are pockmarked with caves.
- ❖ A somber forest of immense fir trees coated in thick, sticky sap.
- ❖ Ice Elves running over the snow under the unblinking stars and coruscating aurora.
- ❖ A half-starved bear with shining eyes pacing you from a distant ridge.
- ❖ A lone Ice Elf, cornered by slaving ghouls.
- ❖ Voices hidden in the relentless wind whisper secrets to you.

Custom Moves

- ❖ **When you listen to the voices in the wind**, roll+WIS. On a 10+ choose 1; the DM will tell you something that's true. On a 7-9 choose 1; you are compelled to find out *if* it is true.
 - You learn a weakness of one of your sworn enemies.

- You learn of a useful treasure that is hoarded within Kringle Castle.
- You learn that one of your companions is bitter toward you. Write a bond with that character explaining why you think this is so.
- ❖ **When you hear the ice wolves howl for the first time**, roll+Cha. On a 10 your fear turns to an icy resolve. On a 7-9 choose 1.
 - Hide or flee in terror.
 - Take -1 forward against ice wolves.

Threats

- ❖ **Ghouls** – group. Talons d6 damage, 1 piercing. 10 HP/ 1 armor. Instinct: to devour dead flesh. Moves: gnaw off a body part, gain the memories of their meal.
- ❖ **Greater Snow Bear** – solitary. Claws d10+2 damage. 14 HP/2 armor. Instinct: to hunt. Moves: burst from the snow, death hug, swim away with prey.
- ❖ **Ice Elves** – group, intelligent, organized. Bone spear d8 damage, reach, thrown. 6 HP/1 armor. Instinct: to trap and kill. Moves: lure into a trap, dance out of range.
- ❖ **Ice Elf Patrol** – As Ice Elves, but riding wolves (below) and wielding bone harpoons. Moves: ride down, drag behind.
- ❖ **Ice Elf Shaman** – solitary, divine, intelligent, organized. Bear jaw club d8 damage. 12 HP/0 armor. Special: divine connection. Instinct: to deceive. Moves: weave illusions, cloud minds with despair, call the storm.
- ❖ **Ice Wolf** – horde, organized, intelligent. Bite d6+1 damage, 1 piercing. 7 HP/1 armor. Instinct: to hunt. Moves: track, hamstring, terrifying howl.

2. Kringle Castle

In which the characters encounter the denizens of the castle, and perhaps Lord Kringle himself.

Questions

- ❖ How did the castle itself fight you when you tried to enter and how did you finally get in?
- ❖ Who or what, really, are Lord Kringle's "elves?" How did he collect his workforce?
- ❖ What frightening rumors have you heard about Lord Kringle's powers?
- ❖ What horrible things do you find in the castle that are destined for delivery on the solstice?

Impressions

- ❖ In a vast room, squat humanoids chained to workbenches are feverishly constructing gadgets. A huge fireplace is slowly consuming an entire fir tree in its maw.
- ❖ A warehouse, shelves sagging with both raw goods and finished, wrapped toys.
- ❖ An intricate, streamlined sleigh, constructed from solidified moonbeams and black ice.
- ❖ A stable of reindeer with red eyes, greedily feeding at troughs of bloody meat.
- ❖ A bottomless well into which drains the toxic, iridescent runoff of Kringle's magic.
- ❖ Kanker, who lords his power over the other workers and wears razor-tipped shoes.
- ❖ A Clockwork Knight, made from castoff parts, leading a covert band of rebel constructs.

Custom Moves

- ❖ **When you try to infiltrate the workforce** or speak with a worker, roll+Cha. On a 10 choose two. On a 7-9 choose one.

- The worker you speak to is not a snitch.
- The worker who first sees you does not immediately cry out in alarm.

- ❖ **The first time Krampus whips you**, roll+WIS. On a 7-9 choose one.
 - You do not suffer an embarrassing flashback to a time you were naughty.
 - You are not entangled.

Threats

- ❖ **Carnivorous Flying Reindeer** – group, stealthy. Rend d6+1 damage. 7 HP/1 armor. Instinct: to run wild. Moves: attack from above, snatch and drop, infectious bite. Defy Danger Con to resist the effects of the bite or take the Weak (-1 STR forward) Debility.
- ❖ **Christmas Pudding** – solitary, amorphous. Corrosive touch d10 damage, ignores armor. 15 HP/1 armor. Instinct: to dissolve. Moves: eat away metal, flesh, or wood; ooze into a troubling place. (Like your armor or stomach!)
- ❖ **The Clockwork Knight** – solitary, construct. Greatsword d8+2 damage, forceful, messy. 10 HP/3 armor. Instinct: to replicate. Moves: use a built-in tool, out-logic someone, command mechanicals.
- ❖ **The Krampus** – solitary, planar. Chain whip d10, ignores armor. 12 HP/3 armor. Instinct: to torture. Moves: torture with glee, take a captive, return to whence it came. At this time of year, the Krampus naps in the shed by Kringle's sleigh and can easily be mistaken for a pile of rusty harness chain.
- ❖ **Kringle's Helper Mob** – horde, small, organized, intelligent. Hammers, saws, and other makeshift weapons d6 damage. 1 HP/0 armor. Moves: dogpile, sound the alarm. 1 in

6 is a Fanatic with glass spheres of brightly colored acid, d10+1 damage, ignores armor. 1 in 12 is a Pit Boss, 4 HP/1 armor, who whips and commands the others. Without a boss, the horde loses the organized tag.

- ❖ **Lord Kringle** – solitary, magical, intelligent, cautious, hoarder, construct. Magical force d10+3 damage, ignores armor. 16 HP/5 armor. Instinct: to un-live (he's a lich). Moves: cast a perfected spell of icy death or destruction, set a ritual or plan in motion.

Wondrous Items

The following magical items may be found in Kringle's Castle.

- ❖ **Hat of Revivification** – a green felt hat with a red feather that revives any dead person, so long as he or she wears it. The hat does not reverse decay, merely arrests it. When the hat is removed, a body will decay rapidly, as if making up for lost time.
- ❖ **Clockwork Jelly** – d6 jars of honey-colored goo, small quantities of which are used to power Kringle's clockworks. If consumed, a jar will nourish a person for a week and heal d8 HP.
- ❖ **The Pudding's Bezoar** – a stony walnut-sized secretion in the Christmas Pudding that looks like a black opal. If successfully swallowed, it protects a person from all poisons.
- ❖ **Kringle's Sleigh** – a remarkable conveyance that grants anything in it or harnessed to it the power of moving at near light-speed, though the sleigh must still be "pulled" to move. The sleigh forms a life-support bubble around living creatures touching it. If left out in sunlight it will quickly deteriorate.

3. Dangers

In which the DM is provided with optional portents and dooms for the personalities, powers, and factions within the waste and castle.

The Ice Elves are Restless

- ❖ **The Ice Elves** need “sacrifices” for a ritual taking place on the winter solstice.
- ❖ **Grim Portents:**
 - Ice wolves are spotted south of the waste for the first time in years.
 - Probing attacks are made on human towns near the edge of the waste.
 - Captives are taken!
 - The tribes gather at the Spire.
 - The ritual is completed, tainting the captives with an “infectious laughter” against which the elves have been magically inoculated.
- ❖ **Impending Doom** – The giggling idiots are carried back into civilized lands and released to begin infecting others.
- ❖ **Bad to Worse** – If the magical plague is loosed in the world, the players will have to warn and organize the free peoples against it. Only the Ice Elves know the inoculation formula.

Elves vs. Ghouls

Ice Elves are fierce, tribal creatures who have a deep-seated hatred of outsiders. They are not secretive or xenophobic, just elitist. The only thing they despise more than interlopers from the so-called civilized lands is the ghouls of the waste. The war between the two species has been going on for decades. The elves seem to be losing ground to the fast-multiplying ghouls.

Lord Kringle’s Rule

- ❖ **Lord Kringle** must maintain absolute control and secrecy at any cost.
- ❖ **Grim Portents:**
 - Once inside, the castle gate disappears.
 - A disgruntled worker warns the party, “No one is allowed to leave!”
 - Kringle’s detection spells warn him of intruders in the castle.
 - Kringle methodically scours the castle.
- ❖ **Impending Doom** – Kringle enslaves the party, finding a place for them in his production process, or simply eliminates them.

Who is Kringle?

Kringle is an ancient, lawful-neutral, power that reinforces good with material wealth (gifts) and evil with punishment (via the Krampus). He focuses on children because adults are already stuck in their ways. He doesn’t worry about the ratio of good to evil in the world because he has lived long enough to know that there will always be each in some measure; normal fluctuation is meaningless. Though not inherently evil, Kringle has a great affinity for his prolonged life, and he is not to be joked or trifled with! He guards his secrets and his treasures mercilessly. No intelligent creature has ever escaped his castle.

Like Clockwork

- ❖ **The Clockwork Knight** wants to replace the races of flesh and blood, which he believes are irredeemably flawed, with mechanicals.
- ❖ **Grim Portents:**
 - The Knight seems to talk an awful lot about the virtues of “mechanicals.”

- The toys are heard to stir and click ominously in their packages.
- The Knight tries to persuade the party to help him take over the castle once Kringle leaves to deliver the toys.
- The Knight turns on the characters if they try to stop Kringle from leaving.
- The Knight turns on the characters at some point during the takeover.

- ❖ **Impending Doom** – The Clockwork Knight has sabotaged Kringle’s toys; they will be activated at dawn and attack their “owners.”
- ❖ **Bad to Worse** – If the Knight takes over and replaces Kringle, he will use his clockwork lieutenants to re-enslave the workforce and build an assembly line to construct soldiers for his genocidal agenda, initiating a rise of the robots! The characters may find themselves in an epic struggle against powerful mechanical armies and/or a secret network of synthetics.

Proud to Be a Mechanical

Kringle has been tweaking his clockwork designs over centuries. The Knight was a design Kringle discarded due to inconsistent (i.e. unpredictable) performance. The truth is, he was unpredictable because he developed the capability of re-scribing his own magical runeset. The Knight and his created followers are obsessed with self-modification, both of their magical runesets and their hardware. They see themselves as the forefathers of a new and more perfect species.

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