

THE HAND OF DOMINION

by Arnold Kemp at [Goblin Punch](#)

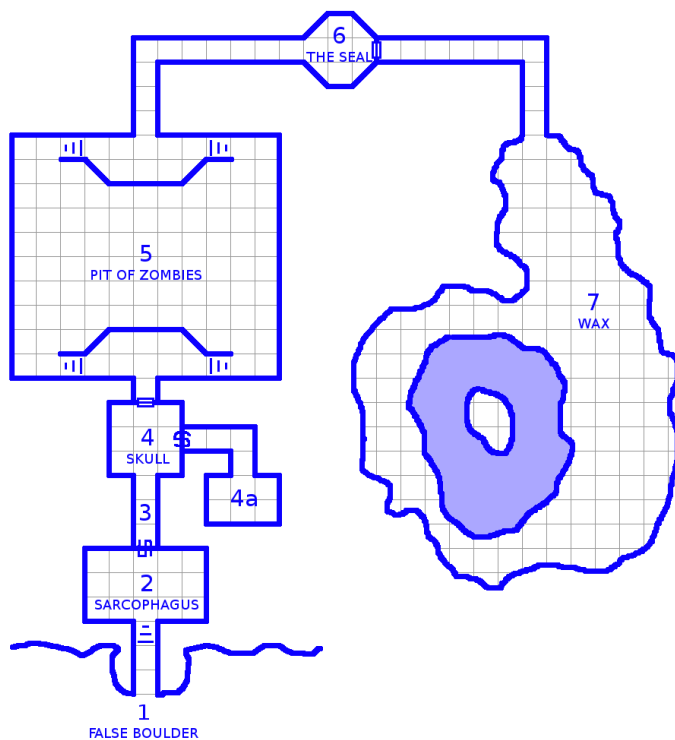
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BORING BACKSTORY

This stuff is all common knowledge. Someone in the party will be familiar with it.

Once there was the empire of Niv, the greatest in the world. Zulin, god of the Upper Air, bestowed a magic sword upon the first emperor, Mozar I. The sword was called the Hand of Dominion, and it signified that the wielder was the rightful ruler of the world.

The unconquerable Nivian empire later became slothful and degenerate. Zulin withdrew his blessings, and their tributary states began to break away. The Nivian emperors were only overthrown in a series of assassinations and coups. So many were killed in their sleep that it was known as the Long Midnight. It was during this time that the Hand of Dominion disappeared from history.



DUNGEON SUMMARY

It's a linear 7-room dungeon with the Hand of Dominion in the last room. It's a game-changing artifact, and once the last room is opened, your campaign *will* revolve around it.

The dungeon monsters are pacifists. They were all killed in the wars surrounding the Hand of Dominion loathe violence. The dungeon only becomes deadly once the Hand has been looted; players are more likely to be killed on the way out.

If you want a small dungeon where you can stash a potent item, use this one. You can also just graft it onto a preexisting dungeon level somewhere, but be aware that

without the halflings, it's not obvious that there is a secret door next to the 2 SARCOPHAGUS.

THE HOOK

There was an earthquake a few days ago, causing rock slides in the mountains. One of the narrow mountain roads has washed out, and the party has had to take a small detour, just a couple of miles out of the way.

1 FALSE BOULDER

Two chubby ponies tied to a tree. **Saddlebags:** 6 days of cheese rations, small cask of decent beer, fishing pole with 3 hooks.

A **female halfling** repairs tattered arrow fletching. Her bow sits beside her, with three arrows stuck in the dirt. **Her name is Jeffina**, and she is cautious, polite, and worried about her brother (named Shamby) who entered the false boulder over an hour ago, despite her protestations.

Backpack: 15 copper, dagger, clay pipe, tobacco.

Jeffina HD 1 AC leather Bow 1d6

The **false boulder** lies split open by the earthquake. Bricks spill out of the seam. Fresh dirt and grass clumps litter the inside. **Stairs** lead down.

If the fifth stair is stepped on (60 lbs pressure) an audible click is heard in both walls, but nothing happens.

AFTER THE HAND HAS BEEN LOOTED

The trap is inactivated now, but will be active once the Hand of Dominion is looted. When triggered, spears shoot out of both walls and skewer for 3d6 damage (save for half).

2 SARCOPHAGUS

A **small sarcophagus**. The lid depicts a battlefield and can be opened with a combined strength of 24. Inside:

- small-sized platemail (painted black)
- halfling skeleton (inside the platemail)
- small-sized spear
- small-sized stiletto (poison, 1d6)

- hand mirror made from clay and steel (a steel key is hidden in the clay, see room 4 SKULL)
- 2 silver signet rings (each worth 25c to a jeweler, or 250c to a historian). A historian or sage can identify the rings as those belonging to Sangelus, one of the nine conspirators.

The sarcophagus can be pushed aside with a combined Strength of 36. A hidden hollow in the floor holds a **painted canoe**. The stone canoe is plastered in holy scriptures, and has a stubby metal rudder imprinted with the holy symbol of Hesaya on both sides.

A **mural** made from simple tiles depicts an enormous pair of weeping, feminine eyes. A small **plaque** says "We have mourned enough." in the Old Tongue. Pushing on a pupil causes an audible click. Pushing on both pupils simultaneously causes both halves of the secret door to swing open.

AFTER THE HAND HAS BEEN LOOTED

When the Hand of Covenant is taken, the inert skeleton turns into a revenant that attacks the party as soon as it sees them. If the party left the armor and weapons on the skeleton, update the wight's stats accordingly. The wight's only goal is to keep the Hand of Dominion from escaping back into the world, and it may try to negotiate that. However, those who are magically obsessed with the sword will be unpersuadable (something that the wight is perfectly aware of). His name is Sangelus

If the revenant is trapped inside the sarcophagus, it is not strong enough to free itself, but it will speak to the party as they exit.

If the skeleton is smashed to pieces, it will still reassemble and regenerate into a revenant.

Revenant **HD 4 AC** leather **Claw** 1d6+agony
Regenerate – 2 HP per round, even from 0 HP. Holy damage stops regeneration for 1 minute and is the only thing capable of permanently killing the revenant.
Agony – save, or for the next 1d6 rounds, you take 1d6 damage whenever you take an action. If you take no action, you take no damage.

Unless he is destroyed, Sangelus will continue to campaign against the PCs as he seeks to re-entomb the Hand of Dominion. He may become a recurring opponent. He still has allies he can call on, and knows secrets that the rest of the world have forgotten.

3 HALLWAY

Twin murals cover the walls of this hallway. They depict dead soldiers lined up in rows.

A **halfling** lies facedown in the middle of this 30' hallway. He looks dead (his limbs are at odd angles) but his chest is slowly rising and falling. This is Shamby, Jeffina's brother. An unlit torch (half used) sits beside him. In his **backpack**: lockpicks, waterskin, 10' of copper wire.

Shamby **HD 1 AC** leather **Sword** 1d6

In fact, this middle 20' of this hallway contains a zone of unconsciousness. Any limb extended into this zone becomes numb but not unresponsive. Any brain that enters this zone becomes similarly insensate, and the unconscious person's head will be filled with images of war and mourning. It has no effect on animals or undead.

Shamby took one step forward and passed out. If he is pulled out of the zone of unconsciousness, he will revive. Shamby will want to leave the dungeon immediately.

Possible solutions: hook a stone on the far side and build a pulley, slide someone across on a shield, get a pony to pull someone across, push them across with a 20' pole, etc.

4 SKULL

A **pedestal** holds a **child's skull**, yellowed and cracked. Anyone gazing upon it must make a save vs charm or be unable to approach it and unwilling to touch it. Anyone who succeeds on this check can approach and interact with it. The effect ends if the skull is covered or shattered (which is as simple as shooting an arrow).

If the skull is looted, treat it as a magic item that emanates a form of the *antipathy* spell that affects humans, elves, halflings, and dwarves. When the person carrying it wants to use it, they must succeed on a save vs fear or be unwilling to pull it from their backpack. They must also succeed on another save vs fear when they want to pick it back up.

A **mural on the left** wall depicts rows of empty farms.

A **mural on the right** wall depicts four men, a woman, and a donkey walking along a road with heavy packs. Everyone, even the donkey, is crying. If the woman's eye is pushed, the secret door to 4a SECRET swings open.

A **steel door**, polished to a mirror-like finish. The engraving reads "Lovers of peace, abandon this place." The lock is difficult (-4) and the key is nowhere to be seen. (The key

is hidden inside the clay handmirror from inside the 1 SARCOPHAGUS.) The stones above the door are cracked, probably from the recent earthquake. The crack extends into the ceiling.

The stone around the door can be smashed with 4 man-hours of labor. This causes the steel door to fall out of its stone frame, but it also causes the ceiling to collapse. Everyone in the room takes 2d6 damage (Dex for half).

4a SECRET SCROLLS

- Three diaries dating from the Long Midnight and the wars of succession (treat as history books). They include accurate descriptions of the Hand of Dominion, its history, and its powers.
- A scroll of *invisibility*.
- A scroll of *control emotions*.
- The saddle of Ferrocephalus, Mozar III's warbull, worth 1000c. Adorned with a dozen types of different horns and tusks.

5 PIT OF ZOMBIES

A **tall candle**, as tall as a child, irregular and melted onto the floor. Beside the door.

A **pair of chandeliers**. In order to make a continuous rope path over the pit, the players will need 3 grappling hooks with 40' ropes. That's how far the railings are from the chandeliers, and how far the chandeliers are from each other.

Stairs lead down into this **pit of zombies**. On the far side, stairs lead up from the pit of zombies. There are **620 zombies** in the pit. The zombies will not leave the pit. The zombies are pacifists.

Zombie HD 2 AC none Bite 1d6 Move 9 Int 1 Mor 12
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The zombies are the victims of war. A few soldiers, but the majority are non-combatants (women, children, elderly). They just stand there, their empty eye sockets following your actions, cocking their heads in order to hear you better.

Instead, anyone who comes within reach of the zombies will be forcibly crowdsurfed back onto the ledge leading out, while loose items will be grabbed and smashed.

The canoe hidden underneath the 1 SARCOPHAGUS is

actually built to allow passage through this room. If it is thrown on top of the zombies, the zombies will crowdsurf the canoe along as they strive to get the holy symbol away from them. The long rudder (painted with the holy symbol) can even be used to steer.

AFTER THE HAND HAS BEEN LOOTED

If the zombies are presented with the Hand of Dominion, they will strive to get away from it, cramming themselves into the corners of the pit and trampling themselves into fearful dust that continues to flee the blade.

Once the Hand of Dominion has been looted, the chandeliers burst into flame.

6 THE SEAL

A **door made from white wax**. On the surface of the door, arranged in a circle, are six different wax seals (like on a letter). These are from the six surviving conspirators who decided to seal the sword away.

The wax door must be destroyed in order to proceed.

As soon as the door is destroyed, two things happen immediately.

- the zombies in the last room all begin moaning (assuming the players didn't just burn them).
- the sword's magic escapes the room. Everyone senses that treasure is at hand, and that great power can be obtained here. Everyone loses all discouragement points. Everyone must make a save vs charm or be compelled to venture deeper, refusing to leave until the sword has been claimed. The default mood is "giddy with excitement" but players can roleplay whatever mood they wish.

7 WAX

A natural cave holds a **small lake**, which holds a **small island**. Every stone surface has been covered with **white wax**, and the lake appears milky. The lake is about 10' deep at its deepest. It is about 40' to the island.

A **cluster of stalagmites**, beside the lake.

On the island is a **cloth pavilion**. Beneath it is a **stone chest** that holds the Hand of Dominion, the symbol of the Nivian emperors. Its lid can be moved with a combined Strength of 16.

As soon as someone sets foot on the island, the stalagmites ignite as candles, the milky water turns into blood that deals 1d4 points of psychic damage per round of exposure, and the giant skeleton rises up from the water. The giant skeleton is a pacifist at first: it just wants to keep the sword inside the chest and carefully move people off the island, safely on the far shore.

Giant Skeleton HD 8 AC chain Fists 1d8/1d8 or grab/grab Move 12 Int 1 Mor 12 Double damage from bludgeoning.

The giant skeleton starts trying to kill people once reduced to half HP, or once the Hand of Dominion is looted.

AFTER LOOTING

The Hand of Dominion is a powerful magic sword that marks the bearer as the rightful ruler of the world. (If the bearer changes, then so does the mark. So goes destiny.)

A full write-up of the sword is on the next page, but here's the quick version:

It's a magical +1 sword. Everyone who sees it wants it. (All of the PCs save vs charm.) Those who fail, must then fight over the sword. They can't help themselves.

The fight doesn't have to be lethal. It doesn't even have to be a fight. It can be checkers. It can be a discussion over who touched it first. Whatever it is, the PCs who found the sword need to settle who the sword belongs to, because it's important.

The exact reason of "why my PC wants the sword" is determined by the PC. Maybe they want to right some wrongs. Maybe they want to bring peace by uniting the different peoples of the world. Maybe they want to overthrow a tyrant. Maybe they want to be a tyrant. Maybe they just want sheet, unadulterated power.

The basic rule of the sword is this: if you are under the sword's influence, then you will unswerving loyal to the bearer, until you think you that they are weaker than you and less deserving. Then you *may* challenge them for it, or try to assassinate them. Under no circumstances will you form conspiracies or networks. It's personal. You'll achieve it by yourself or you won't achieve it at all.

As soon as you walk out of the dungeon with the sword in your hand (and assuming you get past the revenant and the stair trap), the whole game becomes about the sword. The sword is the primary way by which all NPCs will interact with you.

You cannot hide the sword. If you wear it under you cloak,

people will still notice you when you walk into a room. They'll know that you're carrying something important, and that you are someone important. They won't know how they know.

Anonymity is impossible.

You cannot hide the sword as easily as you discovered it.

If you bury it, it will call out to a local turnip farmer, who will come and dig it up. Shit, the turnip farmer might show up before you're even done throwing the last shovel of dirt on top of the hole.

The sword calls out to everyone. Loudly.

If you throw it in the ocean, some merman will soon raise an army. The only volcano in Centerra is called Lady Hellfire, and you sure as hell don't want to give it to the Lady in the Lake of Fire. It's too referential.

Outside of the false boulder, you'll probably meet the two halflings. One or both of them will probably fall victim to the sword's influence, and then you'll have to interact with them the way you're going to have to interact with everyone from here on out: by dominating them into vassalhood or suffering their attempts to steal the Hand of Dominion for themselves.

But once the cat is out of the bag, expect the news to travel fast.

By definition, whoever wields the Hand of Dominion is the rightful ruler of the world. No king is going to let that sort of thing float around in the hands of some muddy imbeciles.

THE HAND OF DOMINION

It's a **+1 sword**. It has willpower, ambition, and clarity. It is not verbal; it is not sentient. It has three abilities: Desire, Domination, and Kingsclaw.

Desire – Everyone who sees the sword wants it. If the sword has no master, everyone will fight over it, lethally, non-lethally, or even verbally. It's impossible to see the sword and not want to possess it, or at least serve the person who has it. A successful Save vs charm allows you to act rationally, but you still *want* it.

Everyone in a 1 mile radius is drawn to it. If you are wielding it in a city, expect a steady stream of gawkers.

Domination – Everyone you defeat is compelled to swear fealty to you. Enemies that fail their morale check against you swear obedience instead of running away. Save vs charm negates both of these effects.

They get a new save if ordered to act against their deepest convictions.

The DM should be liberal about what constitutes defeat. Having your large army conquer a small city counts. Beating the dwarven king in a hammersmithing contest counts.

Roll the save vs. charm when the loyalty is tested, not when it is sworn. So of course, the tiny village will swear loyalty when a huge army demands their obedience. But when they have the opportunity to desert or betray you to their advantage; that's when you roll the save.

This ability has no effect on animals or anyone incapable of swearing loyalty. It also has no effect on clerics, paladins, or anyone who already has a lifelong dedication to something.

Kingsclaw – When the Hand of Dominion is thrust into the ground, your loyal servant Kingsclaw appears. He manifests for as long as the sword remains thrust into the ground. Once unsummoned (for whatever reason), he cannot be called upon for 24 hours.

Kingsclaw appears as a tall, androgynous figure in a white robe. Between his white horns is a golden disk.

Kingsclaw HD 1+X AC plate Fists 1d6+X Fly 18 Int 18 Mor 12

Kingsclaw knows the history of the blade, its powers, and its destiny (to conquer the whole world). He is utterly obedient to whoever holds the sword, and he is utterly apathetic to everything. He *does not care*. He does not

sigh, but he is weary in a way that only immortal creatures can be weary. Unless ordered otherwise, he'll stand there and allow himself to be killed.

If he is killed, he can be resummoned in 24 hours.

If the Hand of Dominion is thrust through a crown (or multiple crowns) into the ground, Kingsclaw becomes more powerful. For each crown thus impaled, he gains +1 HD and deals +1 damage. Additionally, he can cast a number of spells per day equal to the number of crowns, and more crowns give him more versatility:

1 crown: *cure light wounds*

2 crowns: *bless*

3 crowns: *protection against chaos*

4 crowns: *heroism*

5 crowns: *dispel magic*

These must be actual crowns from actual kings and queens, that you have defeated and/or whose loyalty you have accepted.

ACCEPTING THE OFFERED HAND

The Desire ability of the sword means that you cannot travel discretely with the sword. It also means that it's very tough to leave it in the hands of a trusted lieutenant.

The game goes into domain play really quickly.

It might be easiest to let the wielder become a pseudo-NPC, while the player creates a new character. Then the party goes off and performs missions for the nascent monarch.

REJECTING THE OFFERED HAND

Well, you can't bury it, throw it in the ocean, or melt it in a volcano.

It can be sealed behind wax, but you're going to need a large supply of sacred wax. The only people with that much sacred wax are the Church. You could raid the warehouses in the Holy City of Coramont, or you could ask the Pope nicely.

Good luck with that; the Pope is famously ambitious.

You could also just leave it in the woods, but expect some rather serious consequences from that.

I'm sure that there are other solutions, but they're beyond the scope of this short document.