



THE HELD DAWN

A WINTER ONE-SHOT FOR THE DAYS WHEN TIME FEELS STILL



A ONE-SHOT FROM THE WORLD OF ELEMENTAL AWAKENING

WELCOME TO THE HELD DAWN



Where Morning Refuses to Move.

Less combat, more choice, quiet tension, and reflective play. The Held Dawn is a winter one shot set in a castle caught in a moment that never finishes. Snow falls without storm. Light lingers without change. Time does not advance, because someone is holding it still. This is not a puzzle to solve. It is a situation to inhabit. Players explore a space shaped by hesitation, maintenance, and delayed endings.

Through strange encounters, living machines, and careful conversations, they come to understand that the stillness is not natural, it is defended.

There is no correct solution. Only consequences.

Use The Held Dawn as a winter interlude, a between the years one shot, or a quiet contrast to high action campaigns. It works best when players have time to listen, reflect, and choose together. All you need is a table, some dice, and a willingness to let the moment linger.

WHY DMS TRUST THIS PACK

- ◆ **Decision Driven Play:** Built around player choice, not mechanics. The story moves when the party commits.
- ◆ **Low Prep, High Atmosphere:** Clear structure, reusable encounters, and strong guidance without railroading.
- ◆ **Quiet Escalation:** Tension grows through contradiction and pressure, not combat clocks.
- ◆ **Table Flexible:** Works as a standalone evening, a winter side story, or a reflective pause in longer campaigns.
- ◆ **Designed for Listening:** NPCs, machines, and spaces speak. Players learn by paying attention.

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THE HELD DAWN

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DM INTRODUCTION

THE CASTLE OF THE HELD DAWN

This adventure is a winter themed exploration and decision driven one shot with minimal combat, strong atmosphere, and a hidden internal conflict. It takes place in a remote castle caught in an eternal dawn. The sky glows with a constant morning red, light snow falls without wind, and time does not pass. Footprints in the snow fade after a few minutes. Conversations feel timeless. Nothing ages, nothing arrives, nothing moves forward. The stillness is not an accident. It was deliberately created to prevent something from arriving, or at least to delay it. Early on, the party encounters the Keeper, a penguin like Aarakocra inventor, friendly, competent, and calm. He explains the state of the castle as a necessary protective measure. He appears trustworthy. He does not lie, but he does not tell the whole truth either.

What the players do not know at the beginning:

The Keeper is only one aspect of a divided individual. A second aspect exists, known as the Finisher. This aspect remains unseen and expresses itself only through disturbances, anomalies, and subtle contradictions throughout the castle. The truth should not be explained outright, but discovered through play. This adventure does not rely on traditional puzzles. Instead, the players uncover the situation through encounters, strange events, and exploration, slowly realizing that the stillness is actively maintained and comes at a cost. In the end, the party must decide whether the stillness should remain, be released, or be reshaped into something new. There is no right or wrong choice. But every choice has consequences.

TONE AND GUIDANCE FOR THE DM

- ◆ Fairytale like, quiet, lightly chaotic
- ◆ No urgency, no countdown
- ◆ Conflict comes from immobility, not danger

THE INVENTOR

ORIGIN OF THE DIVISION

The Aarakocra now known as the Keeper was once a brilliant inventor and mage of transitions. His work was never meant to control time, but to guide its flow. He built machines to stabilize moments, make dangerous transitions safer, and delay catastrophic change, not prevent it entirely. When it became clear that something unavoidable was approaching the castle, he tried to **buy time**. Not to claim power, but to find a better solution. The stillness was never meant to be permanent. But the moment of decision broke him. The attempt to preserve and conclude at the same time split his being into two aspects that can no longer coexist.

THE ORIGIN OF THE STILLNESS

The inventor attempted to delay an approaching transition, not stop it. He intended to hold the moment briefly, long enough to decide how it should end. That decision never came. The act required constant focus. When doubt set in, the strain split his will. The mechanism continued to function, but without its final command. The stillness persisted, not because it was complete, but because it was never released.

THE KEEPER

Ruler of the Castle, Anchor of the Stillness

The Keeper is the part of the inventor that chose safety at any cost. He is calm, rational, and deeply convinced that the stillness is the most responsible solution. He rules the castle not through force, but through stability. Machines function. Servants fulfill their roles. Thresholds remain closed.

Personality

- ◆ Friendly and polite
 - ◆ Patient, almost unnaturally calm
 - ◆ Avoids words like future, end, or arrival
 - ◆ Genuinely believes he is doing the right thing
- He does not lie. He omits.

What He Wants

The Keeper wants nothing to arrive. Not out of malice, but out of fear of responsibility. To him:

- ◆ Stillness is better than a wrong decision
 - ◆ Movement creates mistakes
 - ◆ Safety matters more than completion
- The longer the stillness persists, the stronger his presence becomes. The castle itself begins to protect him.

How He Applies Pressure

- ◆ He redirects conversations
- ◆ He temporarily seals areas
- ◆ He explains anomalies as harmless side effects
- ◆ He intervenes whenever something approaches completion

He is never openly aggressive. His resistance is quiet, consistent, and absolute.

THE FINISHER

Invisible Aspect, Voice of Motion

The Finisher is the part of the inventor that has accepted that the stillness cannot last forever. He is not braver than the Keeper, but he is more honest. He no longer fully exists within this plane. The stillness pushes him back, fragments him, and forces him to act indirectly.

Manifestation

The Finisher is never visible. He manifests only through:

- ◆ Anomalies
- ◆ Warmth & Voices
- ◆ Sentient machines
- ◆ Spaces that react to decisive action

He never speaks clearly. He presses forward.

What He Wants

The Finisher wants what was delayed to arrive. Not because it is good, but because it is necessary. To him:

- ◆ Stillness is itself a decision
- ◆ Refusing to act is still an action
- ◆ Things must end in order to continue

He does not seek to destroy the castle. He seeks to complete the moment the Keeper refuses to face.

How He Exerts Influence

- ◆ He intensifies anomalies
- ◆ He makes machines honest
- ◆ He allows warmth where clarity grows
- ◆ He draws the white horse beings closer

The closer the players move toward a decision, the more present he becomes.

THE DIVISION AS THE CORE CONFLICT

The Keeper and the Finisher are not good and evil. Both are right. Both are wrong. The stillness cannot last forever. But ending it will have consequences. The division can only be resolved in one of three ways:

- ◆ One aspect remains
- ◆ One aspect is erased
- ◆ Or both are fundamentally changed

The inventor cannot make this decision himself. That is why the castle allows outsiders to enter. That is why the players are here.

DM NOTE

The players do not need to learn every detail of this division. It is enough that they understand:

- ◆ the Keeper is only part of a whole
- ◆ something is being suppressed
- ◆ the stillness is actively defended

Everything else should emerge through dialogue, encounters, and consequences.

HOW THIS ONE SHOT PROGRESSES

This one shot unfolds in three overlapping phases, but it is defined by a single turning point. Do not rush the early moments. Let the castle feel calm, functional, and almost reassuring.

- ◆ **Exploration:** The players observe anomalies, meet inhabitants, and speak with the Keeper. Nothing openly contradicts his explanations yet. The stillness feels strange, but not threatening.
- ◆ **Realization:** At some point, the stillness stops being subtle. Anomalies begin to contradict each other. The Keeper's explanations no longer align. The players realize that the castle is not paused, it is being held. This is the moment where curiosity turns into understanding.
- ◆ **Decision:** After this realization, the castle can no longer remain neutral. The Keeper becomes protective. The Finisher grows more present. The players are no longer uncovering a mystery. They are choosing what should happen next.

If you are unsure which phase you are in, ask yourself: Are the players still observing, or have they begun to question the right of the stillness to exist?

WHEN TO MOVE TO THE FINAL DECISION

You should move toward the final confrontation or resolution when one or more of the following are true:

- ◆ The players openly question whether the stillness should continue
- ◆ The Keeper directly prevents an action that would bring closure
- ◆ An anomaly nearly completes itself before being interrupted
- ◆ A white horse being blocks a threshold instead of merely observing
- ◆ The Finisher's influence is clearly recognized by the party

At this point, the castle can no longer remain neutral. Either the stillness is upheld by force, or it is allowed to end. Do not delay the ending once this moment is reached. The power of the one shot lies in acting before certainty.



IN-GAME INTRODUCTION

ARRIVAL AT THE CASTLE

The snowfall begins without warning. One moment the air is clear. Then fine flakes drift down, slow and steady, almost silent. There is no wind, no visible storm. The snow is simply there. With it, the light changes. The sky settles into a deep twilight, warm dawn red blending with violet shadow. The sun hangs low, neither rising nor setting. Whether it moves at all is hard to tell.

Ahead of you stands a castle, high and still. Pale stone, edges traced with ice, narrow towers cutting into the sky. It does not feel ruined or hostile. It simply stands, as if it has been waiting for this exact moment. Something draws you toward it. Not a pull, not a command. More a quiet certainty that this is where you should go next. That the castle has noticed you.

THE KEEPER

Before you reach the gate, it opens slowly. There is no loud creaking, only a controlled, mechanical motion, as if the castle itself is responding. A small, round Aarakocra steps outside. His feathers resemble those of a penguin, black and white with soft gray tones. A pair of goggles sits crooked on his head, his coat weighed down by tools, notes, and softly ticking devices. He looks relieved to see you.

Opening Dialogue, The Keeper:

The Aarakocra adjusts his goggles, looks you over for a moment, then smiles with clear satisfaction.

"Oh. Good. You really are here."

He brushes a bit of snow from his sleeves, though there is hardly any clinging to them.

"Do not worry, you are welcome. The castle is stable, warm enough, and entirely safe."

He gestures vaguely toward the interior.

"You are free to look around. Take your time. Some things explain themselves if you give them space."

He pauses, frowns slightly, then nods, as if dismissing a thought.

"If anything seems strange, that is normal. It happens from time to time."

A crooked, almost apologetic smile.

"And please, do not change anything unnecessarily. Everything is, at the moment... exactly as it should be."

He does not mention time.

He does not mention winter.

He does not mention stillness.

When asked questions, he answers kindly but vaguely. He avoids words like later, tomorrow, or eventually, replacing them with soon, when the moment is right, or when it becomes necessary.

Things he might say:

"It will sort itself out."

"There is no need to rush anything here."

"Some things are better left as they are, at least for now."

SUBTLE FIRST UNEASE

Any of the following can occur without comment:

- ◆ The snowfall never changes
- ◆ The light remains exactly the same
- ◆ Sounds feel slightly muted
- ◆ The Keeper remains perfectly calm, no matter how much time seems to pass

There is no proof yet, only a feeling. Something here is not quite right, but nothing feels dangerous.

BETWEEN ARRIVAL AND UNDERSTANDING

After the initial welcome, the castle settles into routine. Rooms function, servants repeat small motions, machines hum, pause, and resume without comment. Nothing openly resists the party, nothing invites urgency.

Use the **d20 encounter table** during this phase to explore the castle and its inhabitants. Each result represents a moment where the stillness expresses itself, through conversation, observation, or quiet contradiction. The longer the players remain, the more they notice that moments do not accumulate. Conversations do not advance. Actions complete, but they leave no trace. The castle responds to presence, but not to progress.

This is not yet a revelation, it is a quiet unease. From here on, every interaction has the potential to linger, and every lingering moment brings the stillness closer to being named.

THE MOMENT OF REALIZATION

This moment should not be solved with rolls. It should happen when the players are ready to understand, not when they search for answers.

WHEN TO TRIGGER THIS MOMENT

Introduce the realization when two or more of the following are true:

- ◆ The players have interacted with multiple anomalies
 - ◆ They have noticed that time does not advance
 - ◆ The Keeper has redirected or prevented meaningful change
 - ◆ A machine, creature, or NPC contradicts the Keeper's explanation
 - ◆ The players openly question whether the stillness is intentional
- This moment should feel inevitable, not sudden.

HOW THE REALIZATION HAPPENS

Choose one of the following approaches, or combine them naturally.

Contradiction

The Keeper gives two explanations that cannot both be true. When questioned, he hesitates, corrects himself, or avoids the answer entirely.

Interruption

An anomaly nearly completes itself. Warmth spreads. Motion resumes. The Keeper intervenes immediately, stopping it by force or authority.

Confession Without Intention

A machine, servant, or sentient construct refers to the stillness by name. Not as a mystery, but as a maintained condition.

The Castle Reacts

A space becomes warmer, brighter, or more active when a player voices a clear stance. When doubt follows, the effect fades.

WHAT THE PLAYERS UNDERSTAND

Do not explain this outright. Let the realization settle through silence and reaction. The players should understand that:

- ◆ The stillness is not natural
- ◆ It is actively maintained
- ◆ The Keeper is not the whole inventor
- ◆ Something else is being suppressed
- ◆ Remaining passive is no longer neutral

This is not a revelation of lore. It is a shift in responsibility.

WHAT CHANGES AFTER THE REALIZATION

From this point on:

- ◆ The Keeper intervenes sooner and more directly
- ◆ Areas of the castle close or reroute
- ◆ The white horse beings move closer to thresholds
- ◆ Anomalies escalate instead of resetting
- ◆ The Finisher's presence becomes easier to name, though still unseen

The castle stops waiting. It begins to resist.

DM GUIDANCE

Do not prolong this moment once it lands. Allow a short pause, then let the world respond. The power of this one shot lies in the transition from

, **discovering what is happening** " to , **deciding whether it should continue** "

AFTER THE REALIZATION

HOW THE PARTY LEARNS ABOUT THE DIVISION

Once the players understand that the stillness is being actively maintained, they need a second, clearer truth: the inventor is divided. This should not feel like a puzzle. It should feel like a consequence. Choose one primary reveal path, then reinforce it with a second, smaller confirmation.

WHEN THE CASTLE HAS SHOWN ENOUGH

This castle can offer endless moments, but this one shot should not use them all. Move toward the final decision once the players clearly understand what is at stake, even if they do not yet know what they will choose. You have shown enough when two or more of the following are true:

- ◆ The players can explain, in their own words, what the stillness is
- ◆ They recognize that the Keeper is actively maintaining it
- ◆ The division of the inventor has been revealed or strongly implied
- ◆ Anomalies begin to repeat in theme rather than add new insight
- ◆ The players start discussing consequences instead of causes

At this point, further exploration no longer deepens the story. It only delays responsibility. Allow the castle to respond.

Doors close more decisively. The Keeper intervenes without subtlety. The white horse beings stop observing and begin to block. This is the castle signaling that understanding is complete. What remains is choice.



REVEAL PATH A:

The Keeper Admits It, Under Pressure

The Keeper does not confess out of guilt. He confesses when the players become a risk to the stillness. Trigger this when the party tries to complete an anomaly, access a sealed space, or openly states they intend to end the stillness.

How it plays:

The Keeper remains calm, but his tone hardens. He says things like: "I cannot allow that," "You do not understand what you are touching," or "This is not about curiosity."

If pressed, he gives the minimum truth that still protects his position.

What he reveals:

- ♦ "I am not the whole of him."
- ♦ "There is another aspect."
- ♦ "It is unstable."
- ♦ "It must not return."

He never calls it the Finisher first. He uses words like echo, remainder, fracture, unwanted momentum.

REVEAL PATH B:

A Sentient Machine Names the Split

Use one of the living encounters, such as the Clock, the Question Machine, or the Bell, and let it speak one direct line the Keeper cannot erase.

The machine does not explain. It states.

Examples:

- ♦ "You speak to the Keeper. The other voice is still here."
- ♦ "Two wills share one origin."
- ♦ "One holds. One completes."

If the Keeper is present, he tries to shut it down. That action is the reveal.

REVEAL PATH C:

A White Horse Being Confirms It

The horse beings never gossip. They never dramatize. They confirm reality with a single sentence. Use this when the party reaches a threshold the Keeper guards, or when they ask the wrong question at the right time. Lines the horse being can deliver:

- ♦ "Two halves, one passage."
- ♦ "One refuses. One returns."
- ♦ "The divided one cannot cross alone."

If the party asks who is divided, the horse being looks toward the castle, then toward the party, as if the answer is obvious.

REVEAL PATH D:

The Finisher Speaks Through a Host

The Finisher remains unseen, but for one scene he borrows a medium. Possible hosts:

- ♦ a servant mid loop, who suddenly finishes a sentence
- ♦ a machine core that speaks in a warmer voice
- ♦ the party's shadow for a single line
- ♦ a letter that changes into first person

Keep it short and emotionally sharp. A single line is enough:

"I did not vanish. I was pushed back."

or "He will keep you here forever, if you let him."

This is not negotiation. It is a plea to be allowed to arrive.

THE FINAL DECISION SCENE

THE THRESHOLD CHAMBER

This is the scene where the stillness stops hiding. The party is no longer exploring. The castle is responding.

Location:

A threshold space. A gate, an archway, a bridge within the castle, or a circular chamber where snow falls indoors.

What the party sees:

- ♦ the light is unchanged, but it feels heavier
- ♦ their breath hangs longer
- ♦ the horse beings stand at the edges, closer than before
- ♦ the Keeper is waiting, already positioned

What the party feels:

A sense that whatever they choose will become permanent.

THE KEEPER'S POSITION

The Keeper does not beg. He explains as if it is obvious. Core lines:

- ♦ "You have seen what happens when things finish. It is not safe."
- ♦ "You came here because the castle allowed it. Do not mistake that for permission."
- ♦ "The other aspect is not a person anymore. It is momentum. It will not stop."

He offers one compromise: Stay, leave, or forget, but do not change the stillness. If the party insists, he becomes the obstacle.

THE FINISHER'S PRESENCE

The Finisher does not appear. He becomes undeniable. Ways to show it:

- ♦ warmth spreads across the threshold stone
 - ♦ the snow slows, then resumes, as if breathing
 - ♦ a machine completes one motion and then stops, waiting
 - ♦ one horse being steps forward, not to attack, but to mark the moment
- A single sentence may surface through the environment: "Let it arrive."

OPTIONAL CONFRONTATION

Social First, Physical if Chosen

This one shot works best if the confrontation begins as a conversation, then becomes physical only if the party forces it.

SOCIAL CONFRONTATION

The Keeper offers the party a choice, framed as responsibility. He asks one question: "What will you protect, if you end this?"

Then he pushes the party to admit uncertainty. If the party hesitates, he uses it. If the party is clear, he cannot out argue them, he must act.

PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION

The Keeper as the Anchor

If combat occurs, it should feel like fighting the stillness itself, not a villain. Combat framing:

- ♦ The Keeper is not trying to kill, he is trying to stop completion
- ♦ He restrains, separates, delays, seals doors, freezes mechanisms
- ♦ The environment assists him when players attempt decisive actions

Simple objective:

The party must reach the threshold mechanism, complete a final action, and hold their ground while the Keeper tries to interrupt. This keeps the fight short and purpose driven.

ENDINGS

Consequences of Each Resolution

These endings map directly to the three outcomes you listed. Each ending should be a clear final image, plus one consequence that can echo beyond the one shot.

ENDING 1

The Keeper Wins, The Finisher Is Erased

The party chooses to uphold the stillness, or fails to prevent the Keeper from sealing the threshold.

Final image: The castle becomes quiet again. Snow falls perfectly. The light remains fixed. The horse beings turn away, one by one, as if a passage has been denied.

Consequence: The Finisher's presence fades completely. The living machines become less talkative, less honest, more obedient. The party is allowed to leave, but the memory of making the choice dulls at the edges. Not erased, just softened, as if the castle insists on emotional stillness too.

ENDING 2

The Finisher Returns, The Keeper Is Dissolved

The party chooses to end the stillness completely, allowing what was delayed to arrive.

Final image: For the first time, the light shifts. A shadow moves correctly. Snow stops for a single breath, then falls again, naturally. The Keeper does not scream. He simply becomes silent, as if relieved, then fades, as if his purpose has ended.

Consequence: The castle changes. Some rooms age rapidly. Some mechanisms break. Some servants stop mid loop and look confused, then begin to live. The party may feel guilt, because they ended safety. They also feel something else, a future.

ENDING 3

Integration, The Third Self

This is the most powerful, and the most delicate. The party does not choose a side. They create a new condition.

How it happens: They convince the Keeper to allow one completion. One true ending, one full breath forward. Not the collapse of the stillness, but a controlled release. The Finisher returns, but not as a takeover. The two aspects meet at the threshold.

Final image: The snow continues, but it becomes imperfect. The light remains dawn red, but it slowly, subtly shifts. Footprints no longer vanish entirely, they fade, but leave a trace. The horse beings step closer, then bow their heads, as if a passage has been honored.

Consequence: The inventor becomes someone new. Not Keeper, not Finisher. A third self. He retains the ability to hold a moment, but only briefly, and only by consent. The castle becomes a place of pauses, not prisons. The party leaves with a gift that is not loot: A single moment they can hold later, once in their lives, to speak, to choose, to act.

DM GUIDANCE FOR CHOOSING THE ENDING

Do not force the party toward the integration ending. Let it emerge only if they actively search for a third answer. If they choose a side, reward clarity, not correctness. The emotional success condition is this: the party commits.



d20 ANOMALIES OF THE HELD DAWN

Exploration, encounters, and inventions within the castle

DM USAGE:

Roll when the party

- ♦ enters a new area of the castle
- ♦ lingers in one place
- ♦ actively searches for answers
- ♦ attempts to change, remove, or interfere with something

No single entry explains everything. Each one reveals that the stillness is working, not resting.

d20 Event

1 The Room of Suspended Motion

What the players see: A tall chamber with hanging banners, dust motes in the air, and a toppled chair. Everything appears frozen mid movement, but not completely. Fabric hangs at odd angles, dust lingers unnaturally thick.

What happens: If someone rights the chair or touches a banner, the motion briefly resumes. The chair continues to fall in slow motion. The fabric flutters for a heartbeat. Then everything freezes again.

Clue: Movement is possible, but it is never completed.

Keeper's reaction: He refuses to enter the room. From the doorway he says, "That area is... sensitive. Best not to set anything in motion."

2 Footprints That Do Not Belong

What the players see: Fresh footprints appear in the snow of an inner courtyard. They are smaller than the party's and lead from a gate toward a wall, where they abruptly stop.

What happens: Following the tracks, the snow beneath feels warmer. After a few minutes, the footprints fade completely.

Clue: Someone or something moves here regularly, but never arrives.

Keeper's reaction: He looks unsettled and dismisses it lightly. "The snow behaves... creatively at times."

3 The Unfinished Primary Machine

What the players see: A large workshop filled with gears, glass tubes, heating plates, and notes in multiple handwritings, all belonging to the Keeper. At the center stands a machine that pulses softly.

What happens: The machine reacts to presence. It grows warmer when someone acts decisively, colder when they hesitate. It appears to be waiting for a final step that was never taken.

Clue: The stillness is actively created, not natural.

Keeper's reaction: He becomes tense. "That is not relevant. An early draft. Please leave it alone."

4 The Servant Without Completion

What the players see: A servant endlessly sets a table. He places the same plates, adjusts them, steps back, then begins again.

What happens: If spoken to, he responds politely, but his replies arrive slightly delayed. He does not know who the table is for.

Clue: Actions without purpose repeat forever.

Keeper's reaction: He smiles stiffly. "Very diligent, that one."

5 The White Horse at the Threshold

What the players see: An ancient white horse like being stands motionless in a passageway. Its breath steams golden in the light.

What happens: It does not move while directly observed. The moment no one looks at it, it stands a few steps closer.

Clue: It guards not a place, but a moment.

Keeper's reaction: He avoids eye contact. "They oversee transitions. Normally."

6 The Room with the False Echo

What the players see: A small salon where sounds echo with a delay, sometimes in the wrong order.

What happens: When someone speaks, part of their words repeat, slightly altered. Not louder. Just... different.

Clue: Something is listening. Not the Keeper.

Keeper's reaction: He leaves the room quickly. "Acoustic anomaly. Unpleasant."

7 The Sentient Invention

What the players see: A small handheld device, no larger than a palm. It reacts to voices by changing temperature.

What happens: It grows warm when honest questions are asked. It turns cold when statements are evasive or softened.

Clue: Truth creates movement.

Keeper's reaction: He attempts to lock it away. "That one is... experimental."

8 The Balcony Without a Horizon

What the players see: An open balcony where snow falls endlessly. Beyond it, only white. No depth, no horizon.

What happens: Those who stare too long feel a strong urge to step forward. Not to jump, but to continue.

Clue: Something waits beyond the stillness.

Keeper's reaction: -

9 The Second Shadow

What the players see: The shadow of one character moves slightly out of sync.

What happens: The shadow hesitates when the character acts decisively. It catches up when the character hesitates.

Clue: A second will exist.

Keeper's reaction: He dismisses it as an "optical effect."

10 The Voice That May Not Speak

What the players see: In a quiet room, a faint voice can be heard, barely more than a breath.

What happens: The voice tries to speak, but always breaks off. If someone listens closely, the room grows slightly warmer.

Clue: The Finisher exists. It is not gone. It is being suppressed.

Keeper's reaction: He ends the scene immediately. "That is enough. This room is sealed."

11 The Clock That Refuses to Count

What the players see: A large, exposed clockwork mechanism built into the wall. Gears turn slowly, pause, then resume. A faint, irregular ticking fills the room.

Interaction: The clock speaks, slowly and politely. It answers questions, but refuses to measure time. It says things like: "I will not count while nothing moves forward," "What should I measure, if nothing arrives?"

Conflict: The clock wants a decision, not repairs.

12 The Snow Foxes

What the players see: Three small white foxes playing in the snow. Their footprints vanish instantly behind them.

Interaction: They do not speak, but respond clearly to attention. Nods, head tilts, playful dashes away and back. If fed or followed, they lead the party to places the Keeper avoids.

Clue: The animals follow movement, not rules.

13 The Librarian of Unfinished Books

What the players see: An elderly figure, possibly ghostly, arranging books whose final chapters are missing.

Interaction: He enjoys conversation, but refuses to finish stories. He asks questions such as: "Where does your story end?" or "Have you already decided how it finishes?"

Conflict: He believes endings are dangerous.

14 The Machine That Asks Questions

What the players see: A standing machine with a softly glowing core. It hums when approached.

Interaction: It asks the players questions, one at a time. Not riddles, but personal questions. Examples: "What are you avoiding?", "What are you protecting yourself from?" or "What happens if you do nothing?" The machine listens carefully.

15 The Cook Who Never Serves

What the players see: A cook endlessly preparing food. Everything smells wonderful. Nothing is ever served.

Interaction: She speaks openly. She says: "If I serve it, it is over." or "As long as I cook, everything is still possible." She asks the players when something is finished.

16 The Horse That Speaks

What the players see: One of the white horse like beings stands close enough to address.

Interaction: It speaks slowly, without emotion. It says: "You are late," "Not too late. Later than expected." It answers questions about transitions, not decisions.

17 The Shadow That Argues

What the players see: The shadow of one character loosens slightly and straightens.

Interaction: The shadow speaks only to its owner. It questions choices, doubts intentions, demands clarity. It is not hostile. It is honest.

18 The Snow Gardener

What the players see: A gardener sweeping snow from a path that immediately fills again.

Interaction: He laughs while working. "I am not keeping it clean. I am keeping it busy." He explains that stillness requires constant effort.

19 The Bell That Rings for Answers

What the players see: A small bell with no rope or handle.

Interaction: It does not ring when touched. It rings softly when someone speaks a clear conviction. When players evade or soften their stance, it remains silent.

20 The Messenger Without a Destination

What the players see: A courier carrying a bag full of letters.

Interaction: He does not know where to deliver them. He asks the party whether something should be delivered at all. The letters contain decisions, not messages.

Suggested Use:

- ♦ Use five to seven of these encounters
- ♦ Let the Keeper actively intervene in at least two
- ♦ Allow at least one NPC to clearly lean toward a side, without stating it outright



THANK YOU FOR AWAKENING THE HELD DAWN WITH US



DESIGNED BY DMS. TESTED AT REAL TABLES.

Freebie, The Held Dawn

Elemental Awakening

AUTHOR, DESIGN & EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

Tali Bhor

The Held Dawn never rushes, it waits. Use the castle to slow your table down, invite reflection, and let players feel the weight of choosing when certainty is impossible. Not every roll needs danger. Some rolls ask for honesty.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

This one shot is a quiet fragment of the larger Elemental Awakening world. The full setting expands these themes across floating elemental isles, evolving powers, and decision driven paths that shape both characters and worlds.

Coming with the full release:

- ◆ Two premium books, Rulebook and Adventurebook
- ◆ Synergy spells, evolutions, and trials
- ◆ Cards, standees, maps, and table ready tools
- ◆ Playable myth, no filler text

If The Held Dawn gave your table a moment they will remember, the full setting will give them worlds worth returning to.

JOIN THE DOCK - DISCORD

Discuss endings, share alternate resolutions, and help shape future releases.



FOLLOW THE KICKSTAR- TER PRE-LAUNCH PAGE

Early backers unlock limited rewards and help bring the isles to life.

→ [Notify me on Launch](#)

Your table deserves moments that linger.

Step into the stillness now, so you are ready when the dawn finally moves.

