

High Adventure #12 by Chris B.

Dungeon World: The Witch-Keep of Drakenmoor

Introduction

Sitting in the foothills of the Wyrmspines, west of the city of Drakenmoor, is the home of the King and Queen of that downtrodden city. Once known as Drakenkeep, it is now called “Witch-Keep” by the locals. Rumor has it that a curse has descended upon the keep, and that the King and Queen have gone mad.

No one knows for sure what has befallen the rulers, but it seemed to start several months ago when the King apparently went insane and had the keep searched high and low for an intruder he claimed he had seen in the royal chambers. No intruder was found, but the King could not be satisfied. He had the watch doubled, and for some unknown reason banished the Queen to the keep’s guest chambers the next morning.

Things have continually gotten worse since then. After it later became known that the Queen was with-child, an event that should have surely brought joy to the King, he instead seemed to grow even more mad. He became sullen and morose, creeping around the keep at all hours – until the night of his accidental fall down the stairs. Now he is crippled and remains unseen, spending all of his time in the royal chambers, and the Queen has taken a greater hand in ruling the kingdom. Her rule is cold and impartial – even cruel at times. Some claim that she has gone mad as well, while others whisper that she is possessed by an evil spirit or a demon.

Most of the keep’s servants and men-at-arms have fled, and a few have disappeared. It’s from them that most of the rumors have come, as few outsiders have been allowed in the keep over the last few months. The few servants and soldiers who have remained in the keep are said to have changed as well, being less sociable or even downright hostile to visitors.

As the arrival of the Queen’s child approaches, the situation at the keep only seems to worsen...

The Hook

How do the player characters become involved with the cursed keep? Here are a couple of possibilities:

- Forced to travel after nightfall, the PC’s find themselves in the atypical “dark and stormy night” scenario: forced to seek shelter from the elements. They are on the outskirts of Drakenmoor proper, and the only suitable place nearby is the keep.
- The PC’s are hired by a priest of Lisse to recover a valuable artifact belonging to the Church of Lisse from the chapel within the keep: “The Reliquary of the Shining Dodecahedron.” (See “The Chapel” entry in the Ground Floor section of the Map Key.)
- The PC’s are hired by a sorcerer to steal a magic item from the keep: “The Gazing Glass of Glyrob.” (See “Scrying Chamber” entry in the Upper Floor section of the Map Key.)
- If the PC’s are evil (or just a very uncaring level of neutral) they may be hired by one of the King’s emissaries to assassinate the Queen. (Good luck with that!)

Ultimately, it’s up to the game master to decide how best to get the PC’s involved with the goings on at the keep. I’m just presenting the location for you to use – *how* you use it is entirely up to you.

The Unhappy History of the Witch-Keep

The once-prosperous Kingdom of Drakenmoor has fallen under a curse. The kingdom has struggled to survive since the Day of Tears, and like most of the realms of the land it has seen its ups and downs. For many years, it was ruled by King Enkor the Fair, an even-handed and benevolent ruler. When he passed, his eldest and most power-hungry son, Prince Lyartis of Drakenmoor, assumed the throne. Lyartis ruled with an iron fist for 40 years. In that time he had three wives, none of which were able to bear him a child. The first two wives paid for this shortcoming with their lives. (It’s always the wife’s fault, you know.)

The King's third wife, Esmina, vowed not to allow herself to suffer the same fate. She had a chapel dedicated to the Dead God Lisse built inside the royal keep, and had it overseen by live-in clergy of the Caregiver Goddess. She prayed in the chapel daily for a child to be blessed upon the family, she consulted the wisest auguries, and she paid for the best fertility potions she could lay her hands on. Despite her best efforts, though, she could not bear the King a child.

As the years passed, and it became ever more evident that she would never conceive a child with her husband, the Queen became desperate and began to seek the counsel of darker forces. Her search led her to a warlock who told her he could solve her problem, but the price would be high. So obsessed had the Queen become that she swore to pay any price to ensure that she bear the King a child. The warlock sliced the Queen's hand and made her sign a contract with her blood. "On the next black moon," he told her, "The king will come silently to your bed. Do not speak to him, do exactly as he commands, and you shall conceive a child."

On the next black moon, the prophecy came to pass, and the Queen did as she was told. When the act was done, the King rose and left through the southern doors of their bedroom – and almost simultaneously entered through the doors to the Lissan Priest's chambers. The Queen looked at him in disbelief as he saw the bedroom doors close and his wife staring at him in shock from their disheveled bedsheets. He assumed immediately that he had been cuckolded and raged after the intruder, throwing the Queen to the floor when she ran after him and tried to explain (not that she really understood yet what had happened).

No intruder was found, despite the enraged ruler's commands that every nook and cranny of the keep be searched.

From that moment on, the King would not speak to his unfaithful wife. She was moved into the guest quarters, and kept under house arrest. On the rare occasion that they should see one another, his eyes cut through her like cold steel. None but she and the King knew of her betrayal, and neither would speak of it.

And, as the warlock had promised, she became pregnant.

News of the Queen's condition drove the King from rage to madness. For days he wandered the keep in silence. Then, late one night, he happened upon the Queen atop the stairs outside her chambers. Without a moment's pause he threw himself at her, lifted her into the air, and prepared to hurl her to the floor below.

Before he knew what was happening, the King found himself careening down the stairs. He landed hard at the bottom, and stared up at his wife – still standing at the top of the stairs – in the dim torchlight. For just a moment, before he passed out, he could swear that her eyes were glowing yellow, like a cat's eyes.

As a result of his fall, the King's right leg and left hand were crippled. He walks – hobbles, actually – with a cane, and his left arm curled up to his chest. He became convinced that the Queen bears a demon-child, and has tried to have her killed twice more. Each time, the prospective killer ran afoul of his own murderous intentions: one fell on his own poisoned dagger, and the other – somehow – was found strangled by his own garrotte. It seems that the unborn child has a strong desire to live, and won't allow itself or the Queen to be injured.

The King has since turned to the black arts to find a solution. He has converted his secret library into a laboratory, and his secret personal chambers into a scrying chamber where he attempts to commune with dark powers. He has little care for anything else; his only care now is his monomaniacal desire to destroy his wife and her unborn demon-child.

Meanwhile, the Queen has begun acting more strangely – almost as if she has a split personality. She has assumed more control of the keep (and the city itself) as her crippled husband has become less interested in such things. She ordered that the Lissan chapel be desecrated, and the chapel's clergy be thrown in the dungeon. Oddly enough, she can still be found in the ruined chapel every evening praying to the Caregiver for help.

Many of the keep's servants and men-at-arms have fled. Some, those inclined to be most loyal to the Queen, have fallen under the evil magic of the Queen's pact. These poor victims have begun to mutate into horrid creatures, their minds and wills broken, their bodies becoming twisted and their flesh pustulant and foetid. They captured some of the others who tried to flee, and locked them in the dungeon.

The Queen has had a large, unused secret chamber in the cellar converted into a temple dedicated to Clairfax. She can be found here every night, at the darkest hour, praying to He Who Knows. Every third night, she takes a victim from the dungeon and sacrifices him or her in the temple as a blood offering to the Dead God.

When the next black moon rises, the Queen will go into labor in the temple of Califrax. The cascading magical power of the birth will create all manner of weirdness in the area. The warlock will return to the castle to watch over the arrival of the child. The crippled King will attempt to use what little magic he's learned to destroy his wife and her child. Oh, and – ideally – the PC's should arrive right around this time as well. Should be quite a shindig...

The Residents of Witch-Keep

Servants

The servants remaining in the keep have been twisted by the growing magical power of the Queen's dark pact. They are barely recognizable as human, but continue to perform their duties as before. Treat them as goblins in terms of game stats.

Men-at-Arms

Like the remaining servants, the men-at-arms have become twisted and monstrous. They have also become cruel and aggressive – treat them as orcs in terms of game stats.

King Lyartis of Drakenmoor

The king is crippled and half-mad. His only concern is finding a way to destroy the Queen and her child, at whatever the cost. Anyone interfering with his monomania will be dealt with severely. Treat the King as a normal human.

Queen Esmina of Drakenmoor

The Queen acts as if she's suffering from split personalities – one weak and despairing at her circumstances, and the other willful and evil. The second “personality” is really that of her unborn daughter, who is actually the reincarnated spirit of the warlock's late wife, Griselda. The warlock used the unfortunate Queen's desire for a child to his own ends, and the “pact” was no more than a mere fabrication to convince the Queen of the warlock's veracity. On the night of the conception, he cast a charm to make himself look like the King, laid with the Queen (who he knew would be fertile at that time) and used a spell to teleport from the keep afterward. As Griselda's physical form grows inside the Queen, so does her power over her, weaker-willed people in the keep, and the local environment. (It's now regularly stormy and foggy around the keep.)

The Queen dresses in the most exquisite finery. She wears two magical rings, has the key to the “Treasure Chamber” (see the Cellar/Dungeon section for details) on a fine chain around her neck, and her crown (1,000gp) upon her head.

Victims

Locked in the keep's dungeon are the victims of the Queen's “madness”: a variety of servants and clergy (treat as normal humans) and men-at-arms (treat as, well, men-at-arms).

Map Key

Ground Floor

The Road (and Bridge)

A slightly overgrown road leads up the steep side of the hill to a ravine that surrounds the front and sides of the keep. An arched stone bridge provides the only access to the keep, as the deep ravine is impassable and the back of the ledge upon which the structure sits is a jagged, 300'-high rock face.

Although crumbling at the end nearest the keep, this stone bridge is safe to pass over. (Players should not be aware of this, however – feel free to make them completely paranoid when crossing over the bridge – slippery surfaces, high winds from the ever-present storms, and stones randomly falling the 100' or so to the ravine below should really give players a sense of dread when approaching the keep.

Outside the main doors to the keep, two elite guards stand watch (see “Elite Guard Barracks,” below) during the day. They are disinclined to let anybody pass, so the characters better have a good story (or a fair amount of gold) handy. At night, the doors are barred from within, and these guards can be found just inside the doors. (Where they are equally disinclined to allow anyone to leave the keep.)

Entry Hall

There are four men-at-arms guarding this room. They will challenge any who enter via the main doors (usually kept unlocked during the day, but barred from within after dark) unannounced, and likely attempt to throw them out regardless of their explanation for doing so. Characters entering engaging in melee with these guards will also be fired upon by men-at-arms wielding crossbows from the arrow slots 10' up on the east and west walls (1d6 men-at-arms per side).

Servants' Quarters, Kitchen, Great Hall, Feast Hall, Sitting Room

Somewhat rundown and unkempt, in each of these rooms can be found the expected accoutrements, as well as 1d4 servants. Any food or drink present will be spoiled. Unless the characters have been exposed as enemies by the Queen, they will be left alone by the room's occupants. There is no treasure to be found in these rooms.

Guard Barracks

There will be 2d6+4 men-at-arms here, 50% of whom will be sleeping. They will engage any character entering without an authorized escort. Only individual treasure (carried by the room's occupants) will be found here.

Officers' Barracks

As above, but there will be 1d6+2 men-at-arms here, treated as hobgoblins in terms of game stats.

Elite Guard Barracks

As "Officer's Barracks," but the men-at-arms are treated as bugbears in terms of game stats.

Captain of the Guard

Unless called out due to a combat elsewhere in the keep, the captain of the guard will be found here. (Treat as an ogre in terms of game stats; he wields a magic weapon and carries one miscellaneous magic item.) In a lockbox under his bunk can be found: 150gp, a map of the non-secret rooms of the keep, and a potion of healing.

Great Hall

This is the royal throne room, once well-appointed but now looking shabby and decayed. 1d4 men-at-arms guard this room, and 1d3 servants may be found here (making a poor attempt at cleaning the tapestries) at any time.

Chapel

Once an ornate chapel to Lisse, the Caregiver Goddess, this room has been zealously desecrated by the keep's servants and men-at-arms. The idols and icons have been smashed, the tapestries torn down and burned, and the floor mural ripped up. The lingering odor of blood and feces is pervasive here. The only thing of value untouched by this destruction – "The Reliquary of the Shining Dodecahedron" – has been moved to the "Treasure Chamber" (see the Cellar/Dungeon section).

If it is dawn, the Queen will be found here, kneeling in prayer. If disturbed, she will seem confused for a few moments – then she will rise and launch into a tirade at the interlopers. If left alone immediately, she will not pursue them; otherwise she will summon the watch and have them thrown in the dungeon.

Upper Floor

Guard Barracks

Same as "Guard Barracks" on the Ground Floor.

Armory

Four men-at-arms and an officer (see "Officers' Quarters" on the Ground Floor) guard the armory from the southern portion of this room. The key to the iron-barred door of the armory itself is hanging from the officer's belt. The armory contains enough standard swords, crossbows, and ammunition to supply 50 men. All of the items herein are serviceable but uncared for – they would fetch about 30% less than normal market value if sold.

Guest Quarters (west)

The westernmost guest quarters have been converted into the Queen's chambers. They are ornate and well-kept, and a large number of expensive dresses, jewelry, and other finery can be found within (game master's discretion). The Queen spends little time here, so is unlikely to be found in this room. However, servants come and go regularly, so there's a 5 in 6 chance each turn that anyone in this room will be discovered by 1d3 servants. Any character(s) caught here will be thrown in the dungeon.

Guest Quarters (south)

The guest quarters on the south side of this hallway are empty. Although well-appointed and prepared for guests, they have been neglected, so everything within is covered in a layer of dust and draped in cobwebs. If allowed to stay the night, characters will be divided among these two rooms.

Acolytes' Chamber, Priest's Chamber

Once housing the clergy of the chapel below, these chambers are now empty. They have been thoroughly torn apart, their contents destroyed and befouled. Although there is a lot of debris to search, there is nothing of value to be found here.

King's Private Chambers

This grand room now sits in utter neglect. Only the disheveled bed sheets, trays of moldering food and spoiled drink, and un-emptied chamber pots tell of anyone inhabiting this room. Anything that was once of value here has been destroyed, either in one of the King's fits of madness, or by neglect, or by the rats and other vermin that stalk the keep. The only exceptions are the King's crown (1,500gp) which can be found under the bed, and the ring bearing the royal seal (900gp) which is submerged in the chamber pot.

The King will not be here, as he now spends all of his time in his library/laboratory.

Scrying Chamber

The floor and ceiling of this room have been painted black, and the walls draped in heavy black velvet. The only feature of this room is a single pedestal of black wood, atop which sits an upturned pewter hand that once held something. (Specifically, a lens-shaped, piece of quartz 7" in diameter – the "Gazing Glass of Glyrob." It has been removed – by the Queen's captain of the guard – to the "Treasure Chamber" (see the Cellar/Dungeon section). This magic item once per day allows the user to see and hear events up to 100 miles away for 10 minutes, or – if the user inflicts at least 1 hit point of damage to himself – to ask a single question of a power on a higher plane. The answer received, of course, is entirely up to the game master.)

Library/Laboratory

The contents of this once well-stocked library have been mostly destroyed. The books and scrolls have been shredded by the mad King in his search for magical knowledge. The large, ornate desk at the center of the room is littered with alchemical apparatus, its once-beautiful finish scarred and pockmarked by various chemical reactions. Nothing in this room is of any real value, as all of the "real" magical knowledge the King has learned has been taught to him by beings contacted in the "Scrying Chamber" before the Queen stole his Gazing Glass.

If the Queen is not in labor in the temple (see the Cellar/Dungeon section) the King will be here, babbling quasi-hermetic nonsense under his breath as he shuffles through leaves of paper and adjusts the elements of his latest alchemical process. If he's not interfered with, the King will pay little attention to any characters in this room. He will answer any questions distractedly, and his responses will mostly be unintelligible gibberish. If anyone interferes with his workings, or touches his alchemical equipment, the King will fly into a maddened rage and attack him or her.

If the Queen is in labor, the King will be in the temple attempting to destroy her (see that room's description for details).

Cellar/Dungeon

Food Storage

The boxes, bags, and barrels of food here have spoiled. There are several large objects covered in bloody sheets hanging from meat hooks in the southwest corner of this room: a trio of skinned human bodies (the missing acolytes from the chapel). The residents of the keep have found that only human flesh sates their hunger, and only human blood quenches their thirst.

Wine Cellar

A pair of servants can be found here, amidst dozens of bottles that have been emptied of their contents. (The ground is saturated with spoiled wine.) They are draining the blood from a hanging victim's corpse (the Lissan priest) into several of the bottles. They are unconcerned with the characters unless they try to stop them.

Servants' Quarters

In each of these rooms can be found the expected accoutrements, as well as 1d4 servants. Unless the characters have been exposed as enemies of the Queen, they will be left alone by the room's occupants. There is no treasure to be found in these rooms.

Guard Room

There will be 1d6+2 men-at-arms here. They will engage any character entering without an authorized escort. Only individual treasure (carried by the room's occupants) will be found here.

Empty Chamber

This is an unused room. It is filled with the belongings of generations of the royal family. Although stocked from floor to ceiling, there is nothing of any real value here.

Treasure Chamber

This room is behind a set of locked iron double doors. The key is on the Queen's neck. Inside is the royal family's paltry fortune: 1d6 x 2,000gp, 1d4-1 magic items, the "Gazing Glass of Glyrob," and the "Reliquary of the Shining Dodecahedron." (The "Reliquary" is a heavy wooden box with carvings of flowers and trees adorning its sides and hinged lid. Inside it is lined with fine white silk. A small, soft suede pouch with a worn leather drawstring sits within, much too large for its contents: a single faceted gemstone – no more than an inch in diameter – made of some unknown, translucent blue material. No one knows what the powers of the stone are, but it said to have been a revered possession of the Caregiver Goddess herself. As such it is an important relic to the Church of Lisse, who will likely pay a high price to have it returned to them.)

Crypt

This room is essentially an indoor graveyard containing generations of deceased members of the royal family. It is packed with monuments and headstones. The evil magics with which the keep is awash have saturated the ground here; each turn the characters spend here roll a d6: on a 1 or 2, 1d4 skeletons claw their way from the ground. They may be attacked free for one turn while they pull themselves free, but fight normally thereafter. This continues until the characters leave the room, or until 1d8x8 skeletons emerge. (If the characters leave, any skeletons that have already emerged will pursue them.)

There is nothing of value to be found here.

Dungeon

Four elite guards (as bugbears) watch this room. Unless accompanied by the Queen, they will attack any character that enters.

Cells 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8

These cells each contain 1d3 victims. Roll a d6 for the condition of each: 1, the victim is dead; 2-4, the victim is alive but comatose or nearly so; 5-6 the victim is alive and in fair health.

Cells 4, 9, 10

These cells are empty – unless one or more of the characters have gotten themselves thrown in the dungeon, in which they may be found herein. (Their possessions will be locked in the "Armory" on the Upper Floor.)

Cell 7

This cell contains a pair of skeletal human remains manacled to the south wall. The wall behind these remains hides a secret door providing access to the temple below. The door is activated by twisting one of the wall manacles 180 degrees, but it will not open if the cell door is open.

Dungeon Keeper's Quarters

The dungeon keeper (treat as an ogre) can be found here in his dirty quarters. The only treasure is individual treasure carried on the occupant.

Dungeon Guards

There will be 1d6+2 men-at-arms here. They will engage any character entering without an authorized escort, and will respond in 1d4 turns to any commotion in the dungeon area. Only individual treasure (carried by the room's occupants) will be found here.

Temple of Califrax

This room has been painted red (that Dead God's favorite color) – even the ornate marble pillars are covered in red paint. A single granite slab (draped in a heavy red velvet cloth bearing darker stains) sits in the center of the room. On the inward facing side of each of the pillars is a single iron torch in a sconce.

If it is the deepest hour of the night, the Queen will be found here praying to He Who Knows, provided she's not in labor. If it's a third night (game master's call), she will be preparing to sacrifice a victim upon the altar slab with a silver dagger (which is normally hidden under the altar cloth). She is accompanied by six elite guards (treat as bugbears). She will order any intruders to be immediately put to death.

If the Queen is in labor, she will be here with her aforementioned guards. She will be atop the altar, and the warlock (treat as a sixth-level magic-user) will be holding her hand. The King will be lurking in the shadows, waiting for the child to emerge from her womb. When it does, he will attack with his "magic" – which turns out to be non-existent. (Oh how those higher powers love their practical jokes...) When he sees that it does nothing, he will attack her with one of the iron torches (and likely kill himself in the process as his attacks rebound).

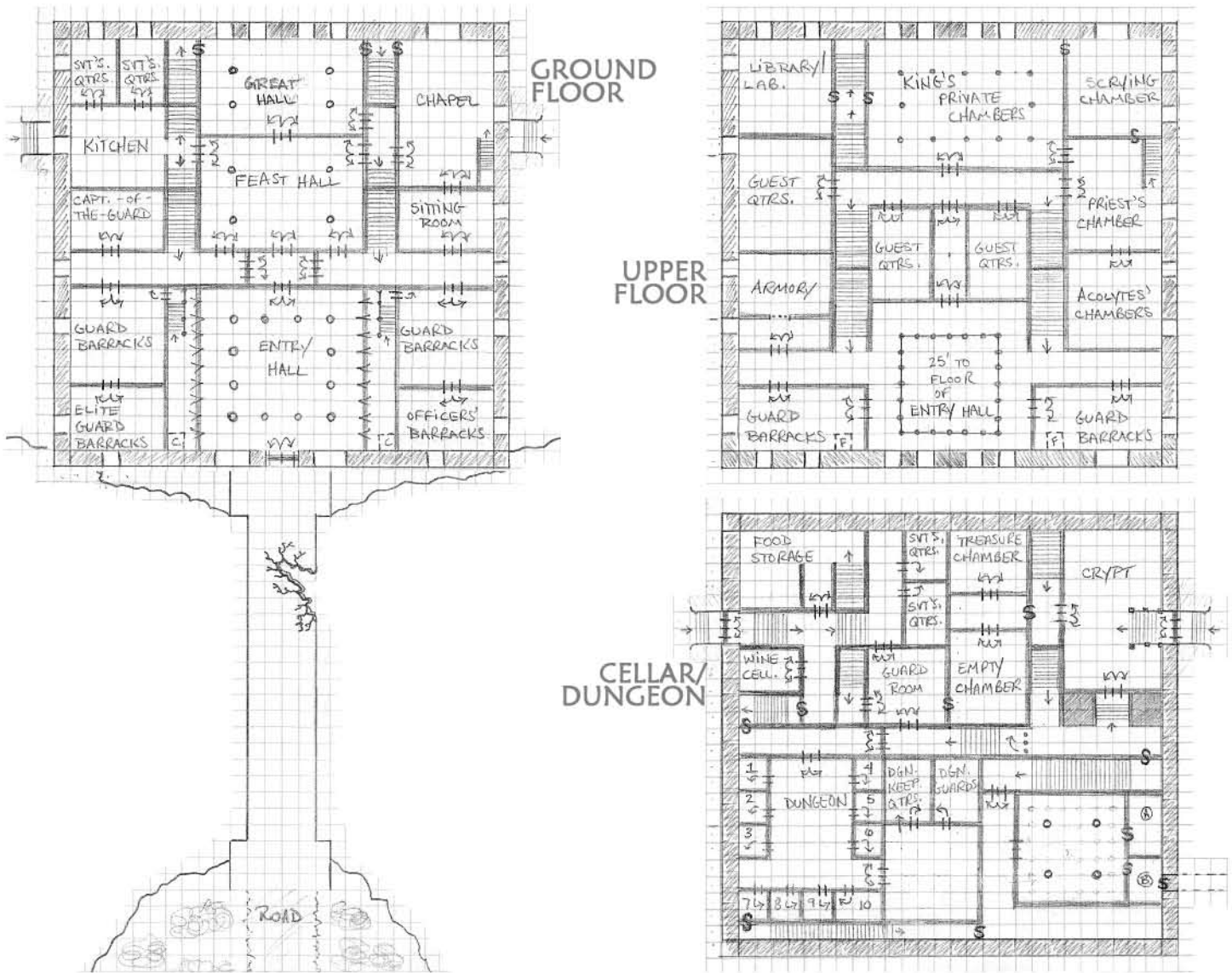
The Queen is a normal human, but she is protected by the magic of her unborn child (Griselda) – the attacker suffers the effects of any non-magical attack that lands on her. If the attack is magical in nature, roll a d6: 1-4, the attack rebounds; 5-6, it affects the Queen.

Once the child has emerged and the warlock has cut its umbilical cord, the Queen is no longer protected by the magic – nor is the child. The Queen lapses into catatonia and the warlock's sole interest is in the child's safety. Ideally, he would keep the King and Queen alive but powerless while he raises the child as the rightful heir to the throne of Drakenmoor. If that does not seem feasible, he will attempt to take the child to safety in his tower in the swamps south of the city.

If the Queen feels threatened, she will shout the magical phrase: "Tekelili! Tekelili!" One turn later, her protector – a troll – will emerge from the secret room ("A"). If still feeling as though her life is in danger, she will use the secret escape tunnel ("B") to flee to the ravine floor and the wilderness beyond.

It takes 1d6 days for the effects of the curse to wear off, during which time the keep and its residents slowly return to normal. The King and Queen, if either survive, suffer from permanent dementia from the affair. It won't be long before distant relatives arrive to dispute the line of succession.

Thus ends this Dungeon World installment. Be sure to stay tuned for future installments...



Wandering Monsters

Be sure to check for wandering monsters on a regular basis. Roll 1d6 per turn, a "1" equals an unexpected encounter. Roll 1d20 (add 4 if the Queen is in labor) – use the sound to describe to the players what the characters hear as they approach the encounter:

1. Whispering (1d2 servants)
2. Footsteps (1d2 men-at-arms)
3. Moaning (just the wind)
4. Chattering voices (1d4 servants)
5. Footsteps (1d4 men-at-arms)
6. Dripping water (just a leaky roof)
7. Whispering (just the wind)
8. Voices and a scream (1d6 servants)
9. Footsteps (1d4+2 Men-at-arms and 1 Officer (as hobgoblin))
10. Something knocked over (just the wind)
11. Strange shadows (1d2 shadows)
12. Moaning (1 ghost)
13. Flickering candles/torches (just the wind)
14. Something knocked over (1d6 giant rats)
15. Moaning (2d4 Zombies (ex-men-at-arms))
16. Flickering candles/torches (1d4 shadows)
17. Something knocked over (1d3 ghosts)
18. Whispering (1 imp)
19. Dripping water (1 ochre jelly)
20. Chattering voices (3d6 giant rats)