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PLACES OF POWER: DRAGONMARCH KEEP



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PLACES OF POWER: DRAGONMARCH KEEP

A lonely edifice built atop a rocky crag at the edge of civilisation, Dragonmarch Keep guard over the borders of three formerly warring kingdoms. Men and women of noble birth from three kingdoms serve at the keep in a show of unity. They push back the raiders and marauders emerging from the wastelands and strength the bonds of friendship between the three kingdoms. While the keep's walls provide formidable protection, the surrounding farms are open to attack, usually in retaliation for a recent foray by the garrison. Dragonmarch Keep is, thus, a place of great adventure and great danger. Here, those of stout heart willing to stand against the forces of evil and chaos are in high demand.

Designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

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DRAGONMARCH KEEP AT A GLANCE

Ruler Countess Liana Van de Vore

Population 42 (25 humans, 5 dwarves, 7 half-elves, 2 half-orcs, 3 halflings)

Alignments LN, N

Languages Common, Orc

Resources & Industry Defence, farming

Dragonmarch Keep stand at the point where the border of three kingdoms intersect. Overlooking blasted, monster-infested land, the fortress serves as a monument to the hard-won treaty brokered by the kingdoms' 37 years ago. This compact derived not from a mutual desire for peace, but rather from the pragmatic need to counter marauding monsters raiding the kingdoms' easy-to-plunder lands weakened by years of fighting. The keep stands as a bastion against the waste's denizens. Its garrison—largely comprised of nobles from the three realms—frequently patrols the surround territory. Their actions act as a check to the many raiding parties creeping forth to pillage the civilised lands beyond.

LORE

A PC may know something about Dragonmarch Keep, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains everything revealed by a lesser check.

DC 15: Dragonmarch Keep is the destination for low-ranking nobles who must prove capable of cooperating with their peers from other kingdoms to battle against wasteland creatures.

DC 20: Niles Van de Vore founded the keep over 100 years ago after he slew the powerful red dragon, Glitterfang.

DC 25: The strategically vital keep switched owner frequently until the three kingdoms reached a lasting accord.

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than ordinary folk.

- **Appearance** Many of the nobles are young, but a few veterans call the keep home. The working folk supporting the keep are all middle-aged or older. Dragonmarch's dangerous nature keeps couples from having children.
- **Dress** Most residents carry weapons and wear chainmail and heavier armour; during downtime, they wear simple tailored clothing. Workers wear functional, sturdy clothing.
- **Nomenclature** *male* Algar, Denys, Fandral; *female* Calexia, Hilde, Terese; *family* Garyan, Nemmic, Van de Vore.

Some of the inhabitants, however, are notable:

Countess Liana Van de Vore (location 6; LN female human fighter 11) Liana chose to stay at the keep after her five-year stint rather than deal with political machinations at home.

Kameda Garyan (location 4; N female dwarf **guard**) Kameda is the newest arrival to Dragonmarch Keep.

Kelban Nemmic (location 5; N male human **berserker**) In lieu of exile, Kelban volunteered to serve as training sergeant.

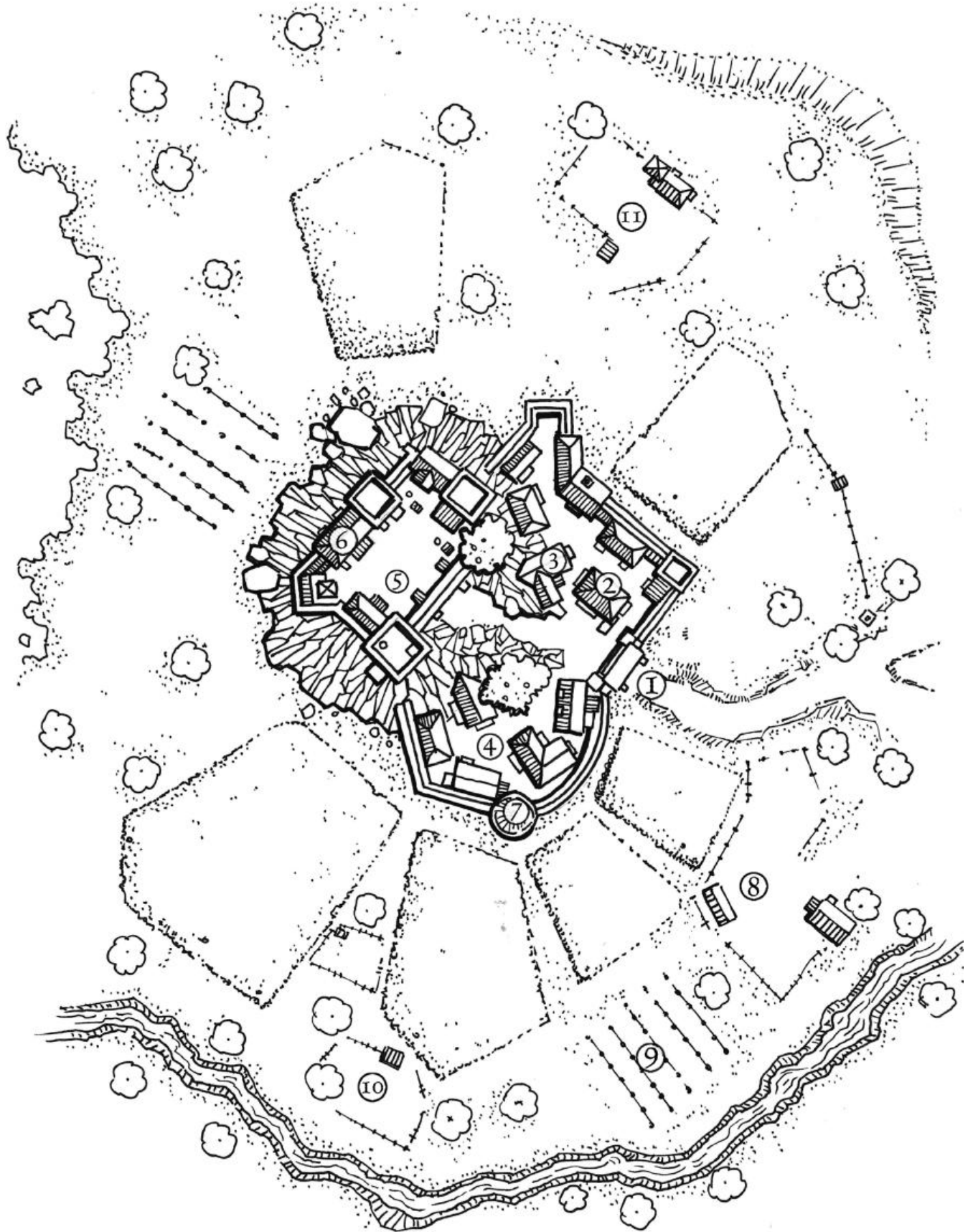
Phedra Klauff (location 2; LN female half-orc **commoner**) Arguably the most important non-noble in the keep, Phedra fashions weapons and armour for the garrison.

Ralson Indra (location 8; N old male halfling **commoner**) The oldest resident of the keep, Ralson along with his assistants grow barley and craft regionally renowned ales.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of Dragonmarch Keep comprises locations of little interest to adventurers. A few locations, however, are notable:

1. **Main Entrance:** A portcullis and two guards protect the gate.
2. **Smithy:** Constant battle readiness requires new armour and weapons, as well as repairs, on a regular basis.
3. **Eagle, Hart and Wolf:** The sign on this tavern displays the animals from the three kingdoms' standards.
4. **Residences:** Each of the buildings hold cramped, semi-private rooms to house the nobles stationed at the keep. Visiting adventurers without credentials quarter here after the guards have questioned them.
5. **Practice Yard:** When not out in the wasteland or celebrating a victory, the keep's residents train on archery targets and training dummies. A hidden trapdoor to the north leads to a large cellar where the residents retreat if creatures overrun the keep.
6. **Manor House:** Currently the home of Countess Van de Vore, the manor house is the residence of the keep's leader. Largely unused wings stand ready to receive visiting dignitaries.
7. **Watchtower:** The highest point of the keep affords a view of the neighbouring land, allowing guards to sound the alarm in case of imminent attack or raid.
8. **Ralson's Farm and Brewery:** This stretch of farmland has given over to growing the barley used by Ralson for his ales.
9. **Staple Crops:** Several farmers grow a variety of grains and beans used to feed the keep's residents.
10. **Abandoned Farm:** This weed-choked farm is rumoured to be haunted; five years ago, the crops growing here suddenly became blighted and the farmer and his family died from a wasting disease shortly thereafter.
11. **Stables and Kennel:** Horses and hunting dogs rest here when they are not out with their owners on patrol. The non-nobles grumble the animals are better treated than themselves.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Inside the keep, activity depends on the current mission or lack thereof. During downtime, the residents spend their days training and their nights nursing cuts and bruises at the Eagle, Hart and Wolf tavern. The tavern gets particularly rowdy after a successful attack against marauders, especially if much treasure is liberated. Treasure is proportioned equally among the sortieing group according to an individual's station and stored in the vault beneath the practice yard. Countess Liana Van de Vore keeps a record of all treasure, so it can be dispensed when a noble ends his or her service at the keep.

Outside the keep, life is fraught with fear, since the workers don't enjoy the same protection as the keep's residents. The garrison do their best to protect the workers. Day-to-day labour is easier than in the kingdoms, though, making it worthwhile to work the land here.

1: MAIN ENTRANCE

The area supporting Dragonmarch Keep has little protection, but the keep itself is inaccessible other than a track cutting through the surrounding fields. The road ends at a portcullis, where two guards (NG male human **guard**) are stationed, in eight-hour shifts. Visitors from the three kingdoms carry writs from their leaders to gain entrance to the keep. The guards challenge other arrivals to determine whether they are friend or foe. Dignitaries, or those obviously wealthy, receive an audience with Countess Van de Vore. Adventurers are shown to quarters in the Residences (location 4).

2: SMITHY

Phedra Klauff (LN female half-orc **commoner**) manufactures weapons and armour and oversees her two assistants (N human). The half-orc was part of a lord's retinue and remained here when her lord was slain. Continual sorties into the badlands keeps her busy crafting new armaments and repairing notched swords, broken links in chainmail, dented plate mail and the like.



While Phedra prefers the smithy to herself, the demand is large enough to warrant help. Her assistants have earned her trust, and she harangues any customer who critiques their work. (The half-orc and her staff cannot enchant weapons and armour, though.)

3: EAGLE, HART AND WOLF

As a sign of the three kingdoms' peace, this tavern features the animals from the individual kingdom's standards. To not show favouritism for a particular kingdom, the eagle, hart and wolf rotate relative position among all the signage in the tavern. Visitors here can learn much about the keep's goings on after drink has loosened tongues.

The barkeep—Algar Longbeard (NG old male human **veteran**)—is a veteran of many border skirmishes who, although aged, could not completely give up frontier life. This tavern is his compromise. A gregarious fellow much given to storytelling and boasting he loves welcoming new guests and is an inveterate consumer of news. Consequently, he knows much of interest about the surrounding lands and events occurring therein.

Ralson's Ale (location 8) is the favoured drink here, but a wide variety of wine vintages are available. Meals are less-than-sumptuous affairs, since the keep doesn't have access to high-end poultry or livestock and the cooks must make do with the wild sheep grazing untended fields.

- **Food & Drink** meal (turnip, ale and mushroom pie or parsnip and onion stew with bread) 3 sp, Ralson's Ale 1 sp, wine (pitcher) 2 sp.
- **Accommodation** None; guests usually stay at location 4 or the Manor House (location 6) if they are wealthy or important enough.

IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Dragonmarch Keep presents opportunities for adventurers to gain favour with one or more of the three kingdoms supporting the keep. It stands as a way station at the edge of civilized land, allowing the PCs to replenish their supplies before making their way into the wasteland.

If your campaign setup does not have three warring kingdoms next to one another simply change the kingdoms to the powerful noble houses of a single kingdom. These nobles—perhaps dukes or earls—require their tenant lords—barons, knights and the like—send their youth to Dragonmarch to strengthen the bonds to friendship between the three noble camps.

4: RESIDENCES

Each of the three kingdoms has a residence hall here. An additional hall houses visitors who aren't important enough to warrant a bedchamber in the manor house (location 6).

Fifteen years ago, Helvar Garyan, the then lord of Dragonmarch, attempted to shuffle the residents together to promote unity. The experiment was unsuccessful and almost resulted in a bloody battle as complaints about preferential lodging grew into shouting matches and escalated to bloodshed.

5: PRACTICE YARD

When the nobles aren't out on patrol, they train in the ample space outside the manor house. Kelban Nemmic (N male human **berserker**), due to an indiscretion with a prominent noble's daughter, took on the role of sergeant rather than face exile in the wastes. He guides training and breaks up fights between practicing nobles. The keep's founders carved out a space beneath the practice ground, which serves as vault and refuge if the keep's walls are breached. An **iron golem**, programmed to obey the keep's ruler, guards the vault as a final line of defence.

6: MANOR HOUSE

Having space to oneself is one of the perks of being the highest-ranking noble at the keep. The manor house serves as the residence for the keep's ruler and provides the greatest

protection, since it only has easy access from the practice grounds. The cliff wall flanking the house to the west is difficult to scale and flying creatures have a tough time avoiding the arrows of the guards stationed on the house's battlemented roof. The house has a staff to serve the occupants and important dignitaries. Countess Van de Vore (LN female human fighter 11) prefers to be out among the garrison, so her staff comprises only a butler and cook. Visitors to the manor house are few, as higher ranking nobles dare not risk their necks visiting the frontier keep, despite its strategic importance.

- **Countess Can de Vore:** Except for their monarchs, all nobles from the three kingdoms have a five-year commitment at Dragonmarch Keep. Countess Van de Vore decided to stay after her five years were up, as she much preferred the straightforward nature of life here to the political machinations back home. She has remained a steadfast ruler of the keep for eight years now. Her disdain for separation between the keep's ruler and the residents (particularly in contrast to her predecessor who viewed everyone as his personal staff) make her a popular figure. Despite her relatively egalitarian nature, and her presence on frequent forays into the wasteland, the countess brooks no insubordination and quickly reminds those who overstep their bounds of the chain of command. Commanding when she must be, Liana can also put her subordinates at ease and celebrates with them after a momentous victory.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Dragonmarch Keep, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Witch lights appeared at the abandoned farm again. I'm certain a coven of hags is hiding there.
2	The wizard who just arrived to enchant Phedra's latest batch of swords doesn't look like the one we've had the past several times. His porcelain mask and all-red attire give me the heebie-jeebies.
3*	Garret Van de Vore was spotted talking to a woman who cast a bat-winged shadow in the light of the full moon.
4	The latest expedition to the Torrid Caves uncovered leathery red eggs, which radiated intense heat.
5	For the past year on a fortnightly basis, a ghostly figure leaps from the top of the watchtower at midnight.
6*	A hidden sub-basement directly beneath the keep leads to a dangerous but treasure-laden dungeon.
*False rumour	

EVENTS

While the PCs are at Dragonmarch Keep, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	A fire blazes in the Garyan residential hall; it appears someone deliberately started the fire.
2	A pair of young nobles mock a beggar and turn him away; he pronounces a curse on the keep before leaving.
3	A force of fifty goblins, led by a massive bugbear, advances on the keep.
4	Horses escape their stalls and run around the grounds in a panic. Residents attempt to corral the horses to no avail; Liana demands someone with a rapport with animals calm down the terrified horses.
5	Elves from the nearby Susurating Forest arrive to discuss joining forces with Dragonmarch Keep for mutual protection; a past misunderstanding has fostered bad feelings on both sides and may require a neutral party to successfully negotiate a deal.
6	A massive earthquake strikes the region, threatening to topple the watchtower.

7: WATCHTOWER

The watchtower was a recent addition to the keep after a group of ogres destroyed a squat tower standing in the same spot. Taking advantage of the necessity for reconstruction, the residents erected a tower to give a clearer view of the land to the east. One sentry stands guard during the day. A seasoned veteran stands watch with a novice at night to ensure at least one person remains awake and alert.

8: RALSON'S FARM AND BREWERY

An unspoken agreement grants Ralson Indra (N old male halfling **commoner**) and his farm extra protection during the occasional monstrous incursion. The halfling, who is approaching seventy, spends more time overseeing field hands than working the fields himself, a situation which makes him unhappy. More importantly to everyone at Dragonmarch Keep, Ralson has not relinquished his brewing process to anyone. Ralson's Ale has increased in popularity over the forty years since the halfling began producing it, and he has become wealthy because of its success. Part of the ale's appeal is that few merchants make the trek here to sell their wares. However, increasing numbers of folk from the neighbouring kingdoms trek to the keep for samples or pay large sums of money for a cask.

9: STAPLE CROPS

The crops grown in these two fields often become the first casualties of raiding monsters, who usually set fire to the fields. Khevellin Monard (N male half-elf **druid**), an adventurer who was the only survivor from his party, decided to remain here

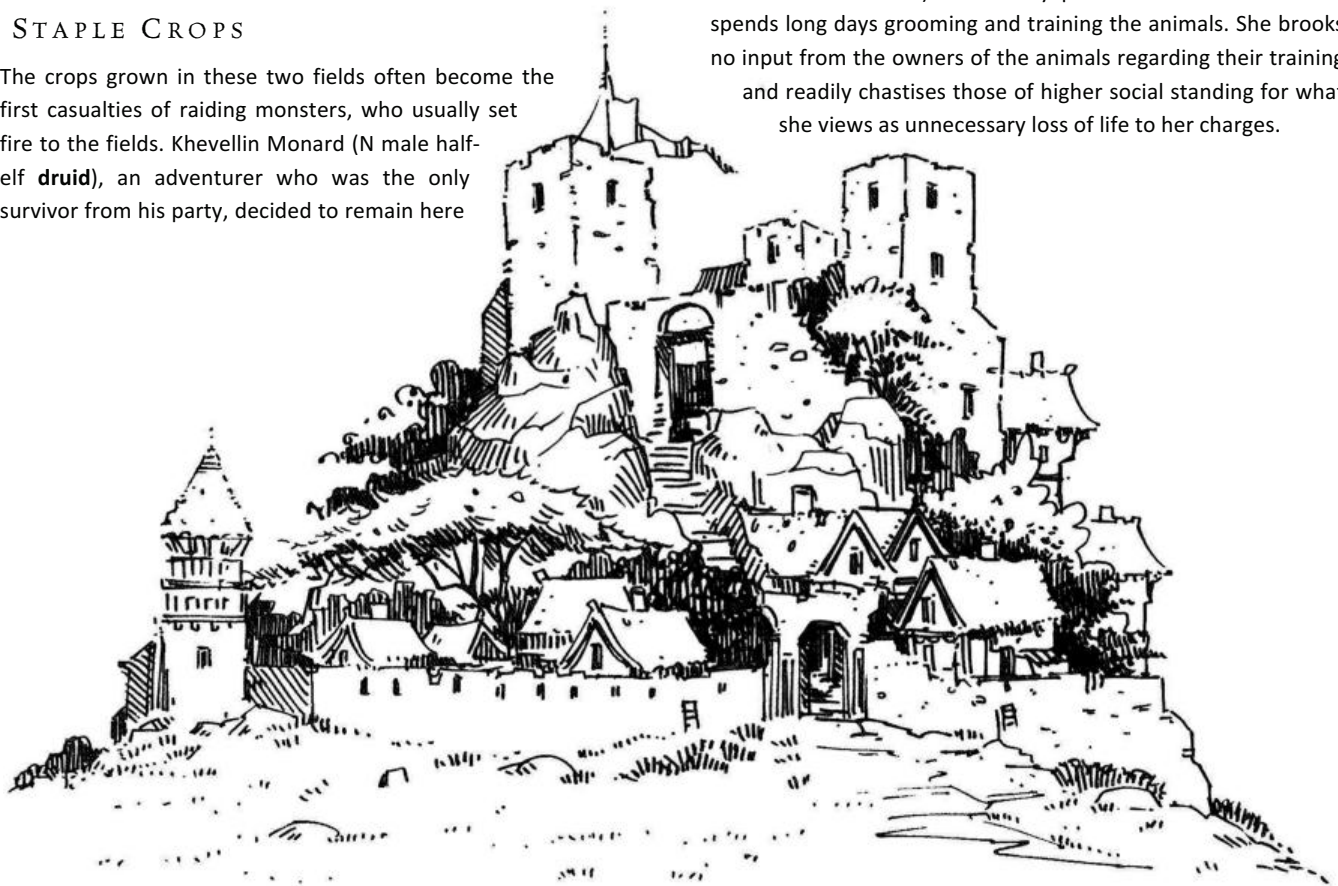
and protect and enrich the plants. Corn and beans provide sustenance for the keep's garrison, while oats feed the horses. Khevellin ensures the rotation of crops, should they survive a growing season, to keep the land fertile. The fields are a destination for doe-eyed, adolescent farmhands who believe this is their chance to achieve a secret destiny.

10: ABANDONED FARM

Rumours of a curse surround this farm after a horrifying event seven years ago during which several farmers died under mysterious circumstances. Seemingly the farmers participated in a mass suicide but enough evidence points to a spree killing by one of the keep's residents to keep tongues wagging. The following year, locusts descended on the fields and devoured the plants growing here, but the other fields remained untouched. Animals and people developed wasting diseases after merely walking across the land. The farm has been cordoned off and the keep's residents stay away from the area.

11: STABLES AND KENNEL

The keep does not provide ample space for its residents and the dogs and horses necessary for hunts. This land is set near a sheer cliff, affording some protection from invaders. Viana Cullain (N female human **scout**) is the only person who lives here. She spends long days grooming and training the animals. She brooks no input from the owners of the animals regarding their training and readily chastises those of higher social standing for what she views as unnecessary loss of life to her charges.



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