

# Haunted Keep by Tom Cartos

## Background

As a reward for their valiant efforts, the adventuring party are awarded a keep just outside the city limits. Its high walls, generous size, and clifftop location make it an ideal home-base for any group of would-be heroes. There is just one small problem, it's haunted. Surely though, for a group with such storied deeds a few ghosts will be of little concern.

The Keep used to belong to another similarly renowned band of adventurers but was quickly abandoned for unknown reasons almost exactly one year previously. Despite their local fame, the former group disappeared overnight. They had built the keep around an existing chapel that had stood on the spot for centuries. Most assumed they chose the location for its strategic qualities and the existence of the chapel was happenstance, but some whisper of dark rituals that occurred there in the distant past.

Investigation of the Keep reveals that its founders discovered a hidden tomb beneath the chapel, before construction even began, and within it a relic that held a lost magic – the ability to imbue sentience to any inanimate object. The potential uses of such a power are enormous, but the relic could not be removed from the tomb without the power fading. The Keep was built to allow them to time to find a way to replicate its capabilities without it falling into the hands of others. The relic however had been sealed away for a reason, its power was cursed and over time this curse has taken hold of the Keep.

## Grid Information

**GRID SIZE – 34x44 (300DPI)**

**VTT SIZE – 4760x6160 (140DPI)**

**RECOMMENDED PRINT SIZE – A0/ANSI E**

## Design Notes

### Dungeon

- **S – Sealed Walls** – In an attempt to keep the curse within the Keep, the former group sealed several inner walls as they fled. All of the stone walls of the Keep have been infused with some sort of arcane ward, holding the curse back from escaping its confines, but the protection is starting to break down.
- **01 – Lower Hallway**
- **02 – Storage Room** - A hatch above leads to the outer bailey.
- **03 – Cells** – The relics curse has begun to effect some of the lower life forms that reside within the keep. A nest of spiders has been transformed, greatly increasing their size and making them unnaturally aggressive.

- **04 – Armoury** – A small forge within the armoury glows with an eerie red light. As the party enters the broken and rusted weapons that line the walls start to shake and rise into the air.
- **05 – Sealed Vault** – The vault has been emptied aside from one chest that is magically sealed. Within is *The Awakener*, the single successful attempt to replicate the relics power. Although not as powerful as the original, it can imbue an object with a semblance of life for a short time.
- **06 – Collapsed Tunnel** – Like much of the Keeps lower level, the tomb was sealed to stop the spread of the curse, but part of the surrounding rock has collapsed creating a tunnel.
- **07 – Hidden Tomb** – A statue at the far end of the room holds the relic, the same red pulsing light is emanating from it that can be found throughout the keep. Lining the walls are what look like stone corpses. If watched for a while, it can be noticed that they are moving almost imperceptibly slowly, as though in writhing agony. In front of the statue is a stone coffin and a book on a stand.  
The book explains that the relic does not create sentience for the objects it imbues, but instead can transfer the soul of an intelligent living creature between the relic and the chosen object. The stone coffin houses the body of the mage who created the relic, and it is his soul that currently exists within the gemstone. The stone wraiths contain the souls of people sacrificed centuries ago to power the relic, before the mage succumbed to old age and transferred his own essence into it instead.
- **08 – Cavern** – This tunnel seems to have been carved out by the gnarled, spiked roots that inhabit it. They twist like worms ready to grab anything that comes near. The tunnel leads outside the castle walls, and if left alone the curse may now be able to spread beyond its confines.
- **09 – Laboratory** – This is where research was carried out on the relic, and where the attempted copies of it were crafted. Scattered notes explain that initially the founding party wanted to recreate its power as they felt it could greatly help society, providing ways to automate many gruelling tasks and developing powerful new technologies, but they wanted to keep it hidden for as long as possible as they were concerned it would become a weapon in the wrong hands.  
Although they knew from the book that the original relic required humanoid souls to work, they were confident they could find an alternative method. After countless failed attempts, including trying to use the souls of beasts and monsters, one of their number gave in and sacrificed a local vagrant to trap their soul in secret, convincing themselves that it was for the greater good. They succeeded and created *The Awakener*, but the sacrifice ritual had an unexpected effect on the relic in the tomb, causing the curse to spread throughout the Keep.
- **10 – Dock** – After sealing the Keep, the founders must have fled by boat. A diary in one of the upper bedrooms suggests they were going to seek help dealing with the curse, but as they were never seen again the boat must have sunk. Storms are common around the headland, and they wouldn't be the first to succumb to its depths.

## Courtyard

- **11 – Gatehouse** – The gates are locked and barred from the inside. A spell of protection is embedded in the walls, but it does not seem to be designed to keep anyone out.
- **12 – Outer Bailey** – A small training yard, and access points to the ramparts above and storage room below.
- **13 – Servants Quarters** – The room is in disarray. There are few personal items or belongings, and the furniture is damaged as though the room was ransacked. On closer inspection it looks like the beds and wardrobes were lifted or suspended in the air and dropped repeatedly, causing some of them to break. This was most likely an effect of the curse.
- **14 – Guards Dormitory** – The room is in a similar state to the Servants Quarters.
- **15 – Stewards Quarters** – The room is in a similar state to the Servants Quarters and Guards Dormitory. A letter in the desk states that there have been a series of strange occurrences in the Keep for the past few days, culminating in the death of one of the guards. The staff are going to flee by ship with the Keeps owners once they have completed their ‘task’ below, but it was never sent.
- **16 – Courtyard** – A huge dead tree dominates the centre of the courtyard. An eerie red light radiates from its roots, and it seems to be swaying and creaking in the wind, but if approached it suddenly lashes out with its hefty limbs. Two stone wraiths guard the doorway to the chapel in the south-east corner. They move almost impossibly slowly, unless someone gets within arm’s reach. If they do, the wraiths arms whip out pulling the intruder in and holding them in place with a vice-like grip.
- **17 – Stables** – Although clearly intended to keep horses, it looks like other creatures were imprisoned here.
- **18 – Great Hall** – In contrast to the silence in the rest of the Keep, music and laughter fills the great hall, but it is an insidious facsimile of the real thing. The flickering red light from the sconces cast human-like shadows around the room, feasting, dancing and cavorting. If anyone enters the room, the shadows all turn to face them and attack, laughing uproariously the entire time. One of the guards or staff must have been left behind when the Keep was abandoned. Their body can be found in the privy at the southern end of the great hall, next to a book with a note scrawled in the corner of the open page. “*Make It Stop*”
- **19 – Conservatory** – This room must once have been beautiful, filled with colour and light. Somehow most of the plants are still alive, but faded and wilted as though their life force is being drained.
- **20 – Chapel** – The chapel is clearly a much older structure than the rest of the Keep, with the newer stone walls built around it. More of the stone wraiths drag themselves around the room, ready to grab anyone who gets too close. Blood on the chapel floor suggests the ritual sacrifice that created *The Awakener* occurred here.

- **21 – Graveyard** – The graveyard is as old as the chapel and was once used to bury those ritually sacrificed here. Their souls now inhabit the stone wraiths that slowly pull themselves along in endless circles.
- **22 – Cavern Exit** – The sentient roots have tunnelled out from below the Keep and unless dealt with quickly will allow the curse to spread. However, they seem possible to permanently kill, if any are chopped or burned away new ones appear from below the earth to replace them.

## Quarters

- **23 – Ramparts**
- **24 – Bedrooms** – These rooms belonged to the founding party members. Most personal items and valuables were taken when they fled, but some things may have been forgotten in the rush.
- **25 – Bedroom** – This room seems to have belonged to *The Awakeners* creator, the one who betrayed the others and carried out the ritual sacrifice. There are countless scrolls detailing his findings and experiments. A scroll on their desk notes in detail how he believes the curse can be lifted: by destroying any creature or items in the keep affected by it, appeasing or banishing the soul of the mage in the tomb below, removing the relic from the grounds causing it to become inert, and finally cleansing the chapel of his sinful act.  
The scroll goes on to explain that he attempted to convince his fellow party members to undertake these tasks without telling anyone, but as a group they chose instead to seal the Keep and go for help in case they were unsuccessful, and the curse was allowed to spread. This scroll was left as a fail-safe if they were unable to get aid.  
The scroll also explains that *The Awakener* can be found in the sealed vault by the armoury below. It is free of the curse, and he wishes for it to be used so the vagrant's life was not taken in vain.
- **26 – Library** – Hurried whispers fill the air, talking over one another. Each too hard to hear individually, but together creating a cacophony. If anyone enters the room, ethereal visions appear of mystical creatures and historical warriors, as though brought alive from the pages of the books.  
A hidden wall in the fireplace leads to a ladder that is connected to the Great Hall below.
- **27 – Private Dining Room** – Part of the ceiling has collapsed, crushing the table.
- **28 – War Room** – Charts and maps line the walls. The scroll on the table has two words 'For' and 'Against'. There is a single mark below 'For' and four marks below 'Against'.
- **29 – Chapel Gallery** – A viewing gallery looks down on the chapel below.