

# Theestusick



A Borough Bound City

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## Reclamation

My dearest Elizabeth,

How I long to return home. This backwater rubbish heap has infested my very soul, and I fear a thousand baths will not rid me of its influence. How any of these wretched fenfolk tolerate the endless eels and snails is beyond me. The medley of putrid stench seeping out of the bog, the creek, and the perilous watchtower continuously amaze: were the smells not so offensive to my sensibilities, I may hope to write a treatise on the incredible olfactory diversity of this hellish swamp. With any luck, these new "specialists" Lord Fandry has employed will handle our remaining woes in due time. Let's pray the duke's recruiters have better judgment now than they had when they were putting together his pathetic ensemble of lackeys.

I shall be with you soon. Please purchase as much soap as we can afford.

*Yours truly,*

*Edmund Algrove*

## THE PEACEFUL FISHING VILLAGE IN THE HAUNTED FEN

For decades, the tiny village of Thestwick-on-Alderham has been an afterthought. Once a military outpost of minor note, the marshy fishing village quickly drifted into obscurity once tensions with the neighboring duchy faded into memory. In the years that followed, a scant few residents decided to remain in the quickly abandoned town, living simple lives in thatched-roof shacks. Fishermen caught eels with the aid of their trained moorwings, and the once great watchtower slowly sank into the endless fen. For Alderham peasants seeking to enjoy peaceful lives far from the watchful eyes of the duchess, Thestwick was an unusual but reliable haven.

All of that changed when the current duchess married. Lady Mabel Fandry had always been a cruel overseer of her meek territory, but at least those living in far-off Thestwick could avoid the brunt of her despotism. Unfortunately, her new husband has established Thestwick as the central hub of his grand schemes. Lord Nathaniel Fandry, Duke of the Alderham Fen has sunk incredible resources into the village, and now Thestwick is the epicenter of a grand infrastructural endeavor. As the water levels continue to fall, life in Thestwick is changing rapidly.

With one simple change, Lord Fandry and his gang of thugs have upended the way of life for every villager in Thestwick and the surrounding fen. Though he believes that a successful reclamation will yield nearly 100,000 acres of newly arable farmland, the fen dwellers who are losing their livelihoods don't see it that way. If they wanted to be farmers, they'd live somewhere else—despite the duchess's awful reputation, she supposedly treats her own serfs quite well. Thestwick's residents live in the fen because that's the life they have chosen. No amount of valuable soil will change that.

As the reclamation approaches completion, Lord Fandry's lead surveyor tells him that low-lying Thestwick will be the last village to be completely drained. With his goal in sight, it seems all but inevitable that the bleak but independent fishing village will soon be a cozy farming town. There's just one problem: the Alderham Fen is haunted.

A quartet of supernatural creatures have harried Lord Fandry every step of the way, and now that his success is close at hand, he has summoned a group of

RB



adventurers to ensure that the villainous residents of his duchy won't interfere with his schemes. As guests of the duke and duchess, the party of adventurers will have to determine how best to confront the Lowland Reclamation Corps' greatest foes: Anise Bloodbirch, Black Alfe, Bulgreck, and Sin Ranulf.

## ALDERHAM FEN

The duchy of Alderham Fen is just one of many such territories in the Veglenic Kingdom. With nearly 2,000 square miles of land, the Alderham Fen is one of the largest duchies, though it is also among the sparsest and poorest. This is due, in no small part, to the eponymous fen. Over half of the duchy's area is dominated by uncultivated marshland. It is difficult to live in the fen and even harder to find a way to make the fen valuable. As such, the duchy has always remained largely irrelevant in the politics of the great kingdom. Small border skirmishes occasionally brought attention to the sprawling duchy, though Alderham Fen has been at peace for decades now. While neighboring territories exert their political will in the Kingdom's capital, Lady Mabel has struggled just to keep her subjects well-fed and free from disease.

Thestwick is Alderham Fen's southernmost population center. Beyond it lies 20 more miles of murky marshland. Somewhere in this stretch of fen lies the border with Talmouth, a far wealthier duchy. The exact location of this border is occasionally disputed, but as it sits somewhere in an unlivable marsh, the two duchies mostly ignore the ambiguity. When Lady Mabel's great-great-grandfather ruled over Alderham Fen, this territorial dispute was a flashpoint. He was so concerned that the Talmouth knights would attempt to annex his worthless marsh that he erected the Thestwick Watch, a stone garrison that later spawned the surrounding village.

The capital city of Alderham Fen is Lotthingham, a city of some 15,000 residents 60 miles to the north of Thestwick. Lord and Lady Fandry maintain Surley Manor, a quaint estate in Lotthingham Heath, high above the drudgery of the fen that they oversee.

## FEN DWELLERS

Many of Thestwick's permanent residents are descended from soldiers once stationed at Thestwick Watch. After Alderham Fen and Talmouth peacefully resolved their border dispute, a few soldiers chose to remain in

the lowlands. Some even brought additional family from Lotthingham to join the nascent community. Gradually, they built up the fishing village in the shadow of the abandoned watchtower.

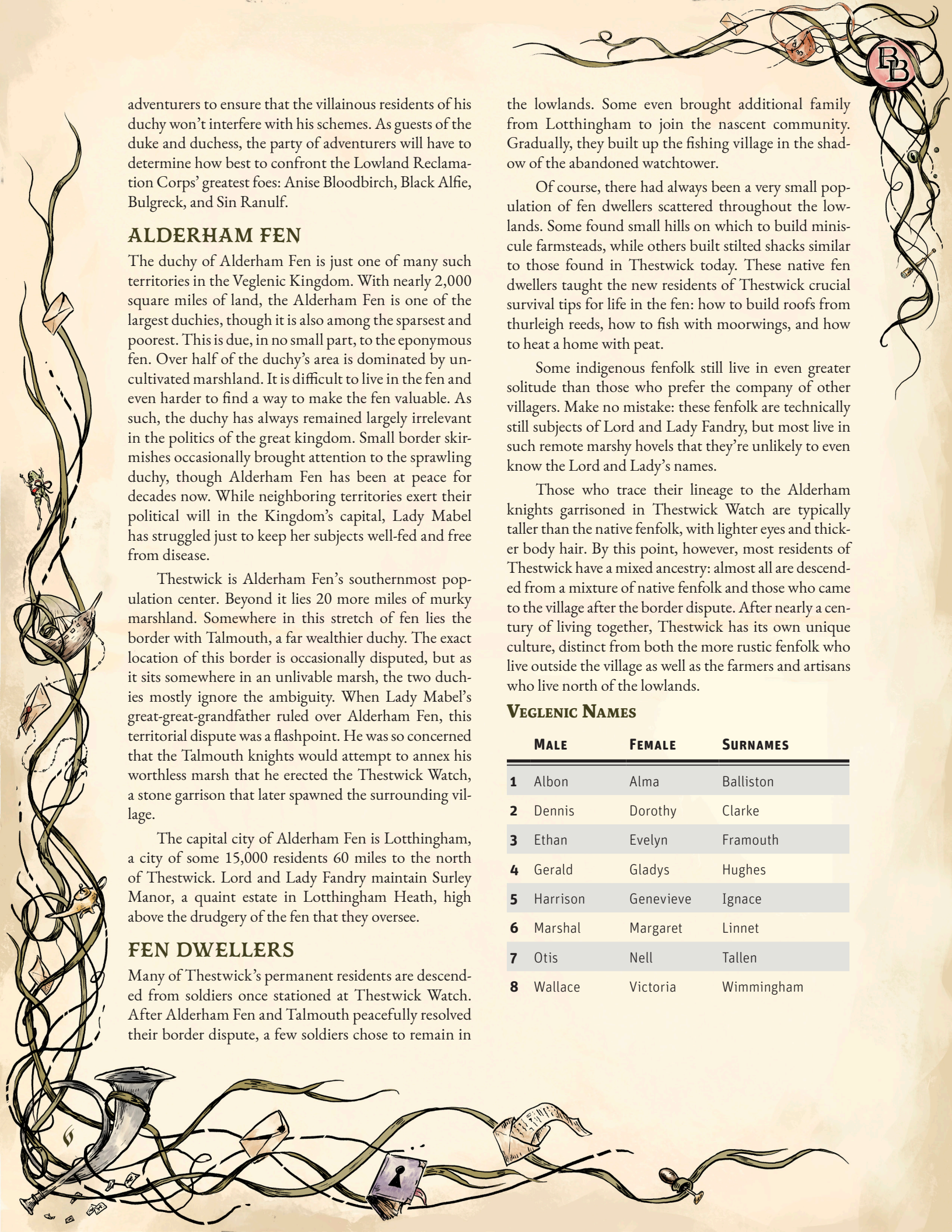
Of course, there had always been a very small population of fen dwellers scattered throughout the lowlands. Some found small hills on which to build minuscule farmsteads, while others built stilted shacks similar to those found in Thestwick today. These native fen dwellers taught the new residents of Thestwick crucial survival tips for life in the fen: how to build roofs from thurleigh reeds, how to fish with moorwings, and how to heat a home with peat.

Some indigenous fenfolk still live in even greater solitude than those who prefer the company of other villagers. Make no mistake: these fenfolk are technically still subjects of Lord and Lady Fandry, but most live in such remote marshy hovels that they're unlikely to even know the Lord and Lady's names.

Those who trace their lineage to the Alderham knights garrisoned in Thestwick Watch are typically taller than the native fenfolk, with lighter eyes and thicker body hair. By this point, however, most residents of Thestwick have a mixed ancestry: almost all are descended from a mixture of native fenfolk and those who came to the village after the border dispute. After nearly a century of living together, Thestwick has its own unique culture, distinct from both the more rustic fenfolk who live outside the village as well as the farmers and artisans who live north of the lowlands.

## VEGLENIC NAMES

	MALE	FEMALE	SURNAMES
1	Albon	Alma	Balliston
2	Dennis	Dorothy	Clarke
3	Ethan	Evelyn	Framouth
4	Gerald	Gladys	Hughes
5	Harrison	Genevieve	Ignace
6	Marshal	Margaret	Linnet
7	Otis	Nell	Tallen
8	Wallace	Victoria	Wimtingham





## GETTING TO THESTWICK

There are exactly two ways to arrive in Thestwick-on-Alderham: the hard way, and the much harder way.

Wise travelers will hire a riverboat. Though the fen is slowly draining, the Lowland Reclamation Corps is doing “everything they can” to ensure that Alderham Creek is unaffected. This has decidedly not been the case, but the assurance persists nonetheless. It is still possible to travel by boat with minimal disruption from just outside of Lotthingham to Thestwick proper. Riverboat travelers are encouraged to pack *exceedingly* lightly. The river runs low, and heavy cargo will necessitate frequent portaging over particularly swampy sections of the creek. The 60-mile journey from the duchy’s capital can take as few as three days or as long as a week, depending on the height of the river, the weight of the cargo, and any necessary detours.

Those who choose to walk or ride horses to Thestwick will have a much harder time. The fen may be drying out, but there are no roads, and what solid ground a traveler may find is still deceptively moist and difficult to traverse. Every year, there are new reports of people going missing in the fen. Though the swath of bog may appear to be a minor annoyance to the unwary, the Alderham Fen is in fact a voracious quagmire. Accidental drownings are common. A *strong* adventurer may even have a *harder* time freeing themselves when sinking into the mud. The stronger the traveler, the more likely it is that they will simply dig themselves a deep hole. Travelers are advised to wear a pack that is easy to doff, carry a walking stick, and trek in groups.

Various predators also stalk the fen. Wolves, snakes, and swarms of bloodbeetles make the voyage far riskier than it might at first seem. If rumors are to be believed, travelers may have to contend with goblins, hobs, bog witches, ogres, bugbears, wights, and redcaps. There are plenty of corroborated tales that seem to prove the existence of one or more of these creatures, though which are genuine threats is anyone’s best guess. Fenfolk are a superstitious lot, and their own judgments and guidance may not be 100% reliable.

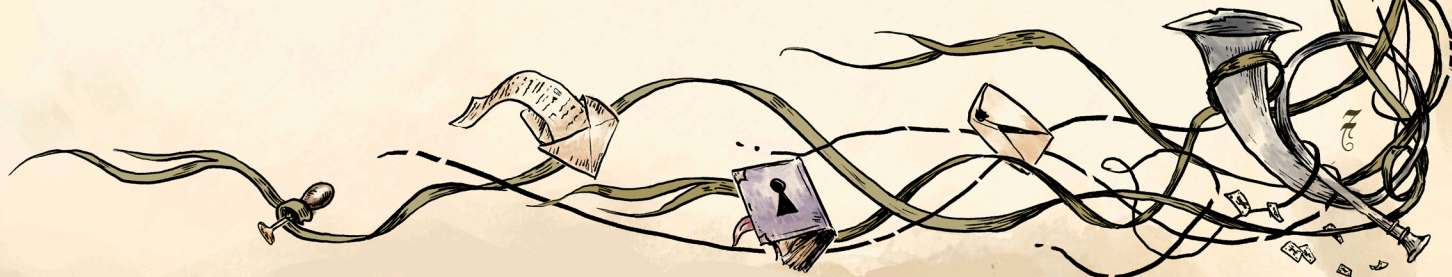
**GM NOTE:** “Canonically,” your players’ characters have been summoned to Thestwick-on-Alderham by the duke himself. The party of adventurers have been paid to ensure the monsters of the Alderham Fen don’t interrupt the drainage operation. There will be occasional reference to this fact throughout the borough guide, but adventures in Thestwick need not begin at the behest of the duke. It is entirely possible for the players to stumble on Thestwick while trudging through the fen, or perhaps they’re seeking out the aid of someone else in town. “The duke’s request” is a useful framing device for this guide, but it should not be prescriptive to your own storytelling. If that’s not how you want your Thestwick adventure to begin, ignore it entirely!

## THE DUKE AND DUCHESS

At the center of Thestwick’s rapid transformation, one finds exactly what one comes to expect in Veglenic politics: a bold scheme, aristocratic maneuvering, and two nobles who despise each other. Throughout the Veglenic Kingdom, duchies are passed down matrilineally. It is the duchess’s firstborn daughter who inherits the territory. Nevertheless, the Veglenic Kingdom is highly patriarchal in almost every other way. Men are to be the soldiers, the merchants, and—rules of succession be damned—the proper monarchs. As such, a duchess is often extremely limited in what she is able to accomplish on her own. Most noble parents only pass their territory to their daughter once said daughter is wedded. The duchess is then able to rule with a great deal more authority. Without a husband, many citizens view a duchess as unfit to lead.

Lady Mabel assumed her position far earlier than she had expected. Both her parents died within the span of a month. Mabel was only 17 years old. Though most duchies would fall into immediate chaos with such a perilous power vacuum, the Alderham Fen managed just fine. Some minor barons tried to make bold claims about twisted family trees as a limp attempt to usurp the duchess, but most were happy to leave the poor duchy in Lady Mabel’s hands.

For the first few years, Lady Mabel sought out potential suitors to lend credibility to her rule. Some presented themselves, but none met the duchess’s high standards. It wasn’t until Nathaniel (then Baron Na-



thaniel Lemmith of Chestwick) pitched Lady Mabel his grand scheme for reclaiming the Alderham Fen that she decided to settle down.

Theirs was a marriage of strategy. Nathaniel offered no impressive title or valuable land, but he had a vision for the duchy that would be lucrative. He also had a band of cronies that showed him infinite loyalty. These ruffians were more valuable to the duchy than the well-trained knights who swear fealty to the duchess. Knights *could* fight on behalf of the dukedom, but they would be just as likely to defect or attempt a coup. Strong and faithful comrades might lack title or proper armor, but loyalty is far rarer in Alderham Fen.

The duke and duchess *do not like each other*, though few noble pairings in the Veglenic Kingdom do. Lady Mabel gave Lord Nathaniel the resources and the legitimacy to carry out his plan, and Lord Nathaniel has promised Lady Mabel a stronger future for her duchy. Beyond that, there is no affection. He fears her irredeemable cruelty, and she loathes his pathetic need for attention. Their union would make no sense outside the world of conniving royals.



## LORD NATHANIEL FANDRY, DUKE OF THE ALDERHAM FEN

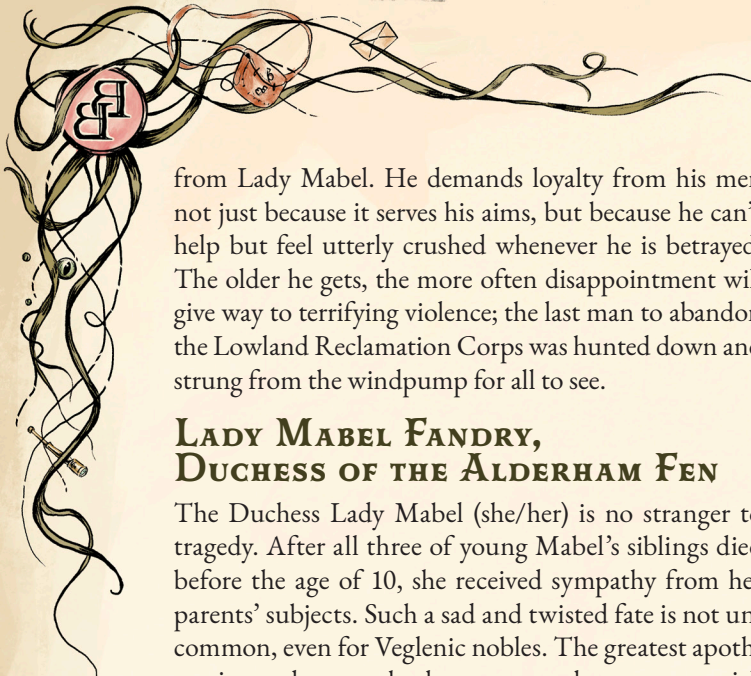
Despite his impressive station, Lord Nathaniel Fandry (he/him) had an inauspicious rise to royalty. The second son of a lesser baron, young Nathaniel was strongly encouraged to join the Alderham knights. His father paid for swordmasters to train Nathaniel from childhood, and when the boy came of age, Nathaniel's father purchased him a horse and a pricey set of plate armor. Fearing a lifetime of pointless border skirmishes, Nathaniel promptly sold both and moved to the city.

It was in Lotthingham that Nathaniel finally found his footing. He joined a gang, moved in with the Lotthingham Rotters (a ragtag assemblage that would later become the Lowland Reclamation Corps), and started conning travelers. He made a pittance, but it sure beat being a knight. Hell, most knights in Alderham Fen didn't even receive land, and if they did, it was some flooded plot of marshland to the south.

When robbing a carriage traveling from Talmouth, Nathaniel met one Louisa Terrowin, a watchmaker who was en route to Surley Estate to fulfill a commission for Lady Mabel. Louisa pleaded with Nathaniel not to hurt her or her companions, and Nathaniel gave her the same ultimatum he gave all his marks: "give me something more valuable to do, and I'll have no reason to bother you." Quick on her feet, Louisa pitched Nathaniel an idea she was workshoping for a wind-powered water pump that could theoretically drain a small plot of land. Tantalized by the idea, Nathaniel commandeered the carriage, rode on to Surley Estate, and presented Lady Mabel with a compelling reason to marry him.

Nathaniel does not think of himself as a bad man. He regrets his immoral behavior and the harm he and his gang brought to so many people, but he also recognizes the futility of life for so many in the godforsaken duchy. The Alderham Fen is a hopeless bog for so many. Louisa Terrowin and her ingenious contraption presents a way forward for the entire region. With high-quality, arable farmland, so many second sons will be able to live honorable lives tending to fertile fields instead of joining a purposeless defense force or a despicable gang.

More than anything, Lord Fandry desperately craves affection. His father was a tough and brutal man, and life with his gang was the closest he ever felt to being loved. Despite the total absence of romance in his marriage, he expresses a constant need for gestures of love



from Lady Mabel. He demands loyalty from his men not just because it serves his aims, but because he can't help but feel utterly crushed whenever he is betrayed. The older he gets, the more often disappointment will give way to terrifying violence; the last man to abandon the Lowland Reclamation Corps was hunted down and strung from the windpump for all to see.

## LADY MABEL FANDRY, DUCHESS OF THE ALDERHAM FEN

The Duchess Lady Mabel (she/her) is no stranger to tragedy. After all three of young Mabel's siblings died before the age of 10, she received sympathy from her parents' subjects. Such a sad and twisted fate is not uncommon, even for Veglenic nobles. The greatest apothecaries and pagan healers cannot always save a sick child, let alone three. After the sudden death of her parents and her first fiancé, however, the people of Alderham Fen instead declared the duchess cursed. Everyone Mabel had loved was now dead, and the young woman was immediately expected to grieve in private while ruling her duchy and finding a "replacement betrothed."

Lady Mabel is now 32 years old, hardly young given the short life expectancy of those living in the fen. She cherished her simple life in Surley Manor, relaxing on her *chaise longue* and pressing flowers from her garden into treasured booklets. Lord Fandry, needy as always, stole her away from that peaceful existence. He dragged her alongside his cronies all the way out to Thestwick-on-Alderham to help him "oversee the operation." Of course, the real reason she was relocated to the middle of the marsh was so that Nathaniel never had to feel alone. As she withers away in the fetid swamp, Lady Mabel is beginning to wonder whether she actually is cursed after all.

Nevertheless, Lady Mabel refuses to resign herself to months of misery. She is dedicated to using her time in Thestwick to improve her image. Mabel has transformed herself into a bona fide errand boy, attempting to tackle any minor task that her subjects need. She'll fetch leashes for the eelers, she'll jot down measurements for Louisa, and she'll pour drinks for Nathaniel's cronies. And yet, no matter how simple the task, Lady Mabel always seems to fumble.

If anything, Lady Mabel's reputation has only further deteriorated throughout her tenure in Thestwick. Every person she helps ends up worse for it. She is clumsy, unlucky, forgetful, and—despite her good inten-

tions—lazy. Whenever she can cut corners to fulfill her "daily good deeds," she does so, and people often end up hurt because of it. It remains unclear whether Mabel is aware that she is failing miserably, or whether she believes that she is slowly making progress.

### IS LADY MABEL CURSED?

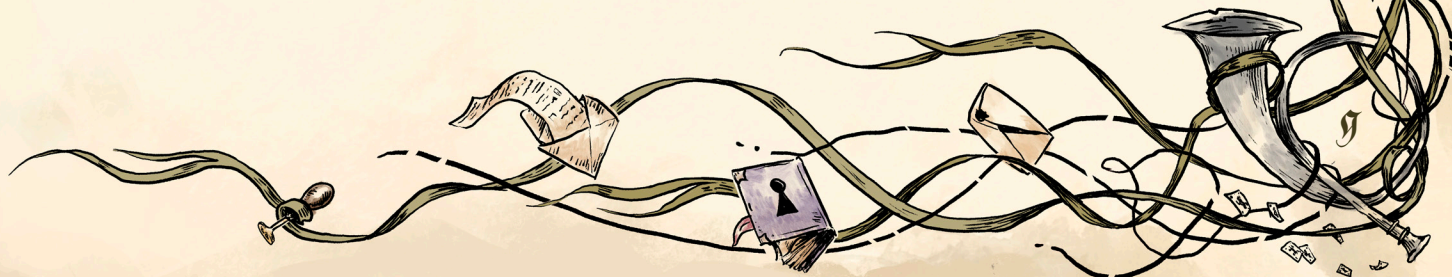
Lady Mabel has had her fair share of tragedy. Her parents, siblings, and first beloved died before she was 18. Her entire duchy is a boggy wasteland. She married a man she can't stand, and now she has to live in the middle of nowhere, failing at task after task. The people say she's cursed. Is she? Does it matter?

In Thestwick-on-Alderham, curses are very real. Resident witch Anise Bloodbirch practices varieties of black magic that could be responsible for Lady Mabel's tribulations, but was she present years ago when the duchess's woes began? Are there other witches in the duchy that could be responsible? Has one of her vocal opponents weaponized dark magic against her?

The answer is ultimately up to you. Perhaps your narrative is stronger if the "curse" is simply a self-fulfilling prophecy. Tragedy begets tragedy, and it's hard to escape from a downward spiral of bad luck and worse decisions. Then again, coincidences cannot be "solved," whereas a curse may be lifted. It would be a great kindness if the party could ascertain the nature of Lady Mabel's hex and dispel it. The bigger question is whether Lady Mabel is worthy of redemption.

## THE LOWLAND RECLAMATION CORPS

Once a dirty Lotthingham gang, the Lowland Reclamation Corps now acts as Lord Nathaniel Fandry's right-hand crew. While the duchess demanded that Nathaniel bring a skeleton crew of Alderham knights as well, the Lowland Reclamation Corps—often referred to as simply "the Corps"—act as laborers, guards, and drunken lackeys.



Louisa Terrowin, the tinkerer who inspired the fen's reclamation, may have exaggerated how easy it would be to drain the marsh. The windpump is a powerful machine, but it's only effective if the Corps can successfully build and maintain dikes to keep the water from sloshing back in. The process of slowly building up mounds of earth around huge swaths of the fen took months and months of work, even after conscripting many of the duchess's serfs. Now that that first batch of work is nearly completed, the Lowland Reclamation Corps mostly just bullies around the locals, sees to Nathaniel's needs, and occasionally sends squads to various leaking embankments.

There is an uneasy power differential at play among the Lowland Reclamation Corps. Lord Fandry was *not* the leader of the gang prior to their departure from Lottingham. He has assumed a leadership position along with his sudden elevation in title, but there are some among the Corps' ranks who don't particularly enjoy obeying the unlikely duke. Lord Fandry is not a born leader, despite his clever business sense and endless ambition. Members of the Lowland Reclamation Corp mock and belittle Nathaniel endlessly behind his back, and many of the delays in dike construction were due to wanton disregard of the duke's orders.



## LOTTHINGHAM LICE

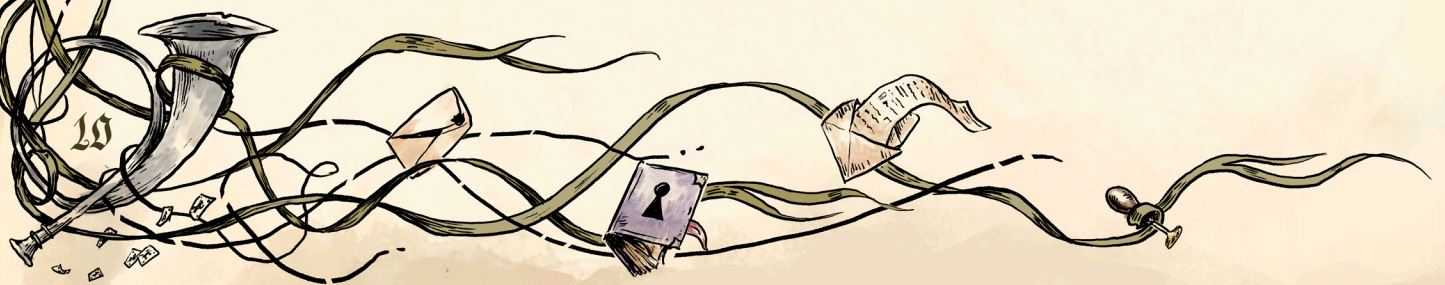
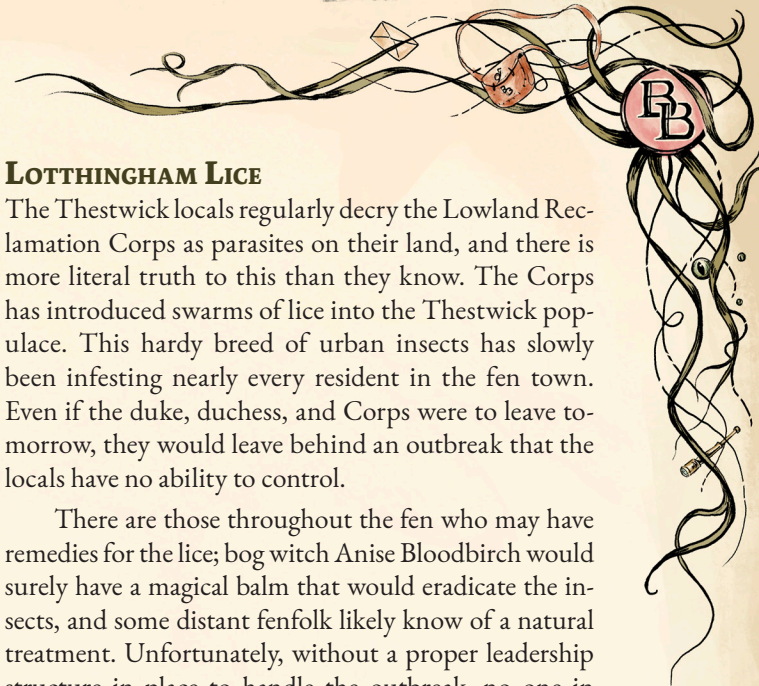
The Thestwick locals regularly decry the Lowland Reclamation Corps as parasites on their land, and there is more literal truth to this than they know. The Corps has introduced swarms of lice into the Thestwick populace. This hardy breed of urban insects has slowly been infesting nearly every resident in the fen town. Even if the duke, duchess, and Corps were to leave tomorrow, they would leave behind an outbreak that the locals have no ability to control.

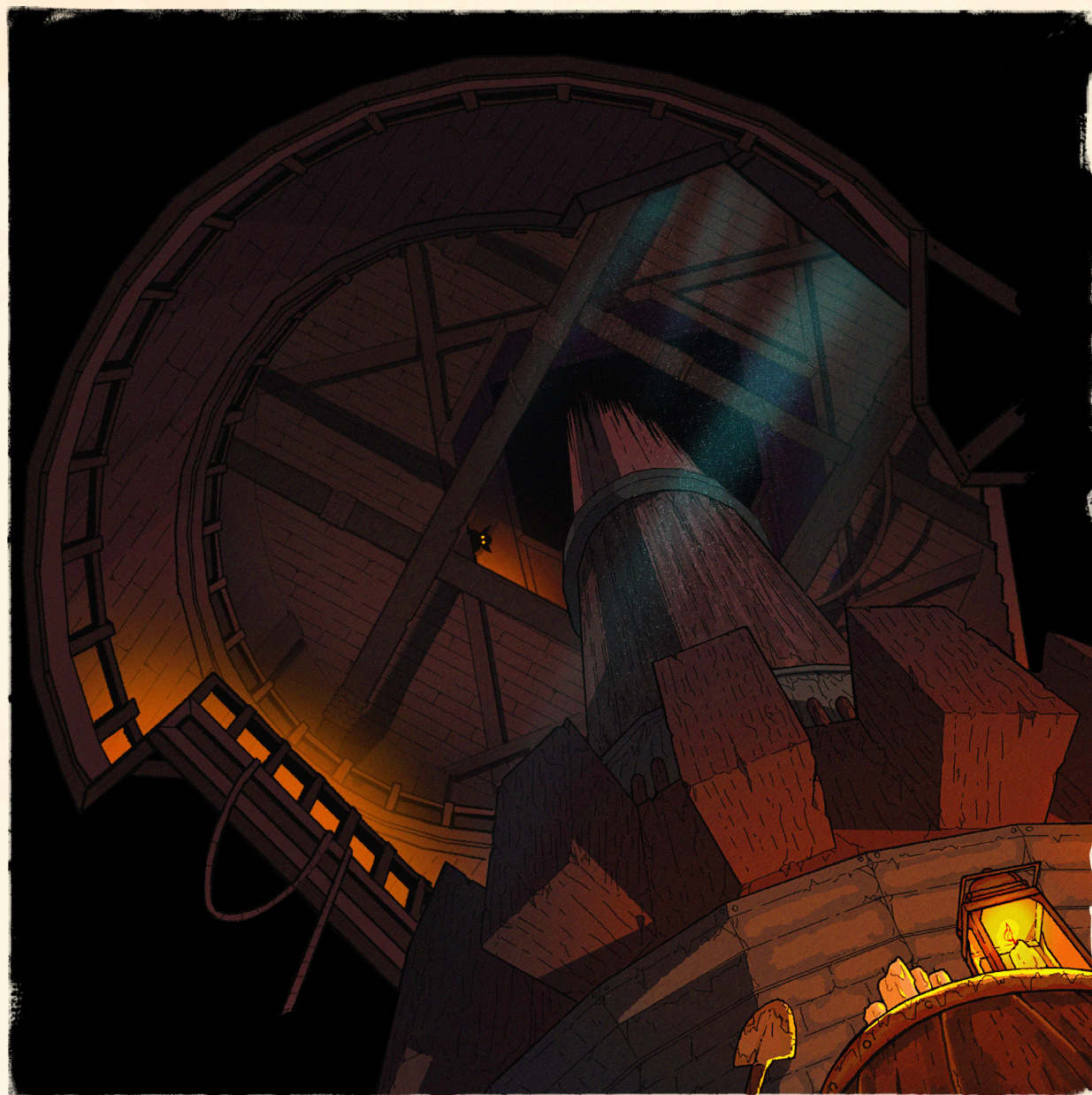
There are those throughout the fen who may have remedies for the lice; bog witch Anise Bloodbirch would surely have a magical balm that would eradicate the insects, and some distant fenfolk likely know of a natural treatment. Unfortunately, without a proper leadership structure in place to handle the outbreak, no one in Thestwick is making any effort to quell the spread. If no one takes action, this infestation may become uncontrollable.

## THE FANDRY WINDPUMP

The cornerstone of the Alderham Fen reclamation is the mechanical marvel that looms over the surrounding marsh. The Fandry Windpump—so-named despite objections from Lady Mabel and the architect herself—is a surprisingly simple contraption. The reliable winds throughout the fen spin the blades which turn a series of rods and gears. At the base of the windmill, a water screw pulls water up out of the basin on which Thestwick sits. From there, the water drains west past an embankment and eventually into the ocean beyond. Once the initial drainage is complete, the windpump should function for years to come with minimal maintenance, ensuring that nearly 100,000 acres of farmable land remain free from surging floodwaters.

The burdensome construction of the Fandry Windpump was the first indication that Lord Fandry's scheme may not be so easy to complete. Wood is hard to come by in the Fen. What few trees once lived in the marsh have mostly been cut down. Lumber is *scarce*, and the fishing village had already exhausted much of the surrounding timber. As such, wood was slowly shipped into the village over the course of months. Project-lead Louisa Terrowin was not able to convince Lottingham smiths and tinkerers to join her in Thestwick, so many of the gears and gizmos were constructed off-site, prompting laborious and expensive tweaks and fixes. And of course, while Thestwick locals had become expert at





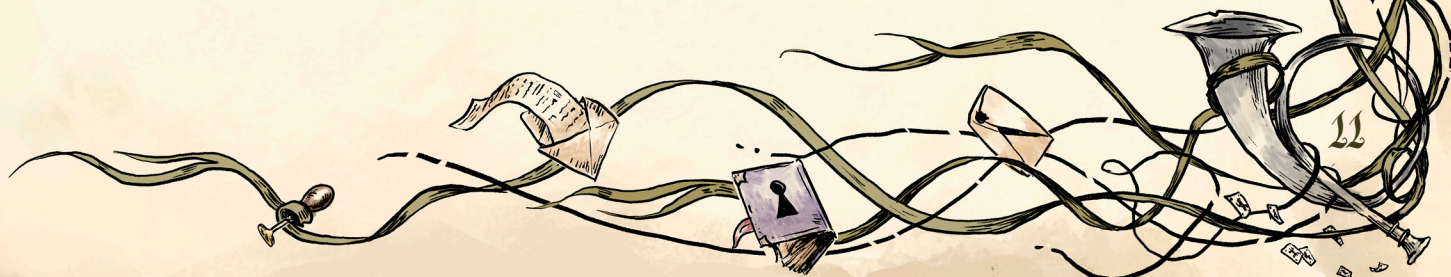
building and maintaining their small creekside shacks, the scale of the windpump exceeded their abilities.

Eventually, however, the pump was completed and began malfunctioning immediately. Louisa's blueprints severely underestimated the sediment in the water, leading to frequent clogs within the water screw. The wind was also never quite as reliable as she'd hoped, and without constant monitoring, a strong gust could crack a blade in a matter of seconds. Likewise, a week of minimal winds and heavy rain could undo days of work.

The windpump is also surprisingly dangerous. At

least three of Nathaniel's drunken lackeys have lost fingers to the iron gears. Moorwings adore perching atop the tower, invariably ruining the hats and overcoats of any brave enough to approach the structure.

Despite its faults, the Fandry Windpump is slowly but surely accomplishing its singular task. The water level across the fen is falling, and Lady Mabel is already bequeathing plots of land to her few loyal knights to farm. Assuming there are no catastrophic failures, Louisa predicts that the entire polder will be farmable in six months.





## LOUISA TERROWIN

The second-worst mistake Louisa (she/her) ever made was traveling to Lotthingham. The worst was telling Nathaniel her plans for the windpump. There is nobody Louisa hates more than Lord Nathaniel Fandry, Duke of the Alderham Fen. Prior to being robbed by the gang that would later become the Lowland Reclamation Corps, Louisa was a respected watchmaker, honoring commissions from many of the nobles throughout the Veglenic Kingdom. Her services were in high demand, and she was lucky enough to have the flexibility to turn down as many commissions as she accepted. Like so few in the kingdom, Louisa could enjoy hours upon hours of true, uninterrupted, leisure time. It was in these free hours that she could let her mechanically minded thoughts wander. It was in these free hours that she devised her unmaking: the “Fandry” Windpump.

Louisa is a prisoner to a contract. When she and Nathaniel pitched Lady Mabel their idea to reinvent the duchy, she was simply trying to avoid the violence threatened by Nathaniel and his gang, and maybe earn some favor with the duchess. Instead, she got locked into a

contract: live in Thestwick and oversee the reclamation through to its completion. Had she known the process would take so long, she would have known better than to sign the document. Unfortunately, a Veglenic watchmaker is a slave to reputation. If word were to spread that she reneged on a contract, it would severely hamper her ability to find new work throughout the kingdom.

Despite her outward hostility to Nathaniel, Thestwick, and the entire project, Louisa desperately wants to see the reclamation through. Notwithstanding the misery of living in the fishing village, she’s exceedingly proud of what her contraption has already accomplished. Consequences be damned. She will drain this fen.



**WRONK:** No one knows where Wronk (he/him) came from. The day after the windpump was completed, this big-nosed goblin just showed up, crawling around the rafters holding a small sign reading “WILL WORK FOR EELS.” Wronk claims to be a “windmill spirit,” or “kilmoulis” as they are known in certain corners of the fen. So long as Louisa keeps Wronk fed, the creature acts as a diligent worker, monitoring wind speeds, greasing the gears, and helping out with measurements.

Curiously, Wronk has no mouth. Instead, he has an enormous nose through which he inhales his food. As such, Wronk can’t speak, but he gets on just fine by writing on his signpost. Despite rampant illiteracy across the fen, Wronk has an impressive capacity for language.

Wronk has an incredible work ethic, but he is loyal to Louisa and Louisa alone. As such, he scurries away into rafters whenever Nathaniel or a member of the Corps comes to check on the operation. Many around Thestwick don't even believe Wronk exists. Despite his shyness, Wronk loves pranks. Louisa suspects he may be responsible for the loss of one or more Corps fingers—accidents that are currently attributed to drunken carelessness.



## ANISE BLOODBIRCH

Those who whisper of dark secrets in the fen are not simply peddling superstition. There are, and always have been, strange creatures who inhabit this damp dark corner of the kingdom. Most famous of all is Anise Bloodbird (she/her), the bog witch of Thestwick. Mabel, Nathaniel, and Louisa all grew up with the threat of Anise Bloodbirch looming over them. There were dozens of variations of the fairy tale.

- ◆ If you don't finish your oats, Anise will replace your tongue with an eel.
- ◆ If you never learn to read, someday you'll make a wrong turn and end up in Anise's bog.
- ◆ If you curse your mother, Anise will come and steal your dreams.

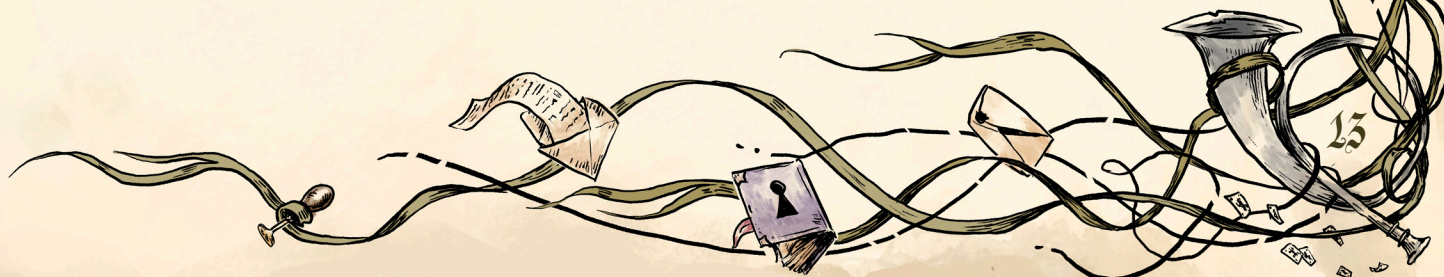
Anise Bloodbirch takes the rumors in stride. *Yes*, she's a bog witch. *Yes*, she practices dark magic. But *no*, she does not have any interest in cursing children or stealing dreams. Anise has goals of her own, and while she may resort to nefarious means as necessary, she does not believe that any of her aims are wicked. Make no mistake: there *are* witches who delight in malice for malice's sake. The matriarch of Anise's coven—the witch who taught Anise everything she knows—is one such elder hag. While Anise can understand the thrill of such aimless evil, her goals are loftier.

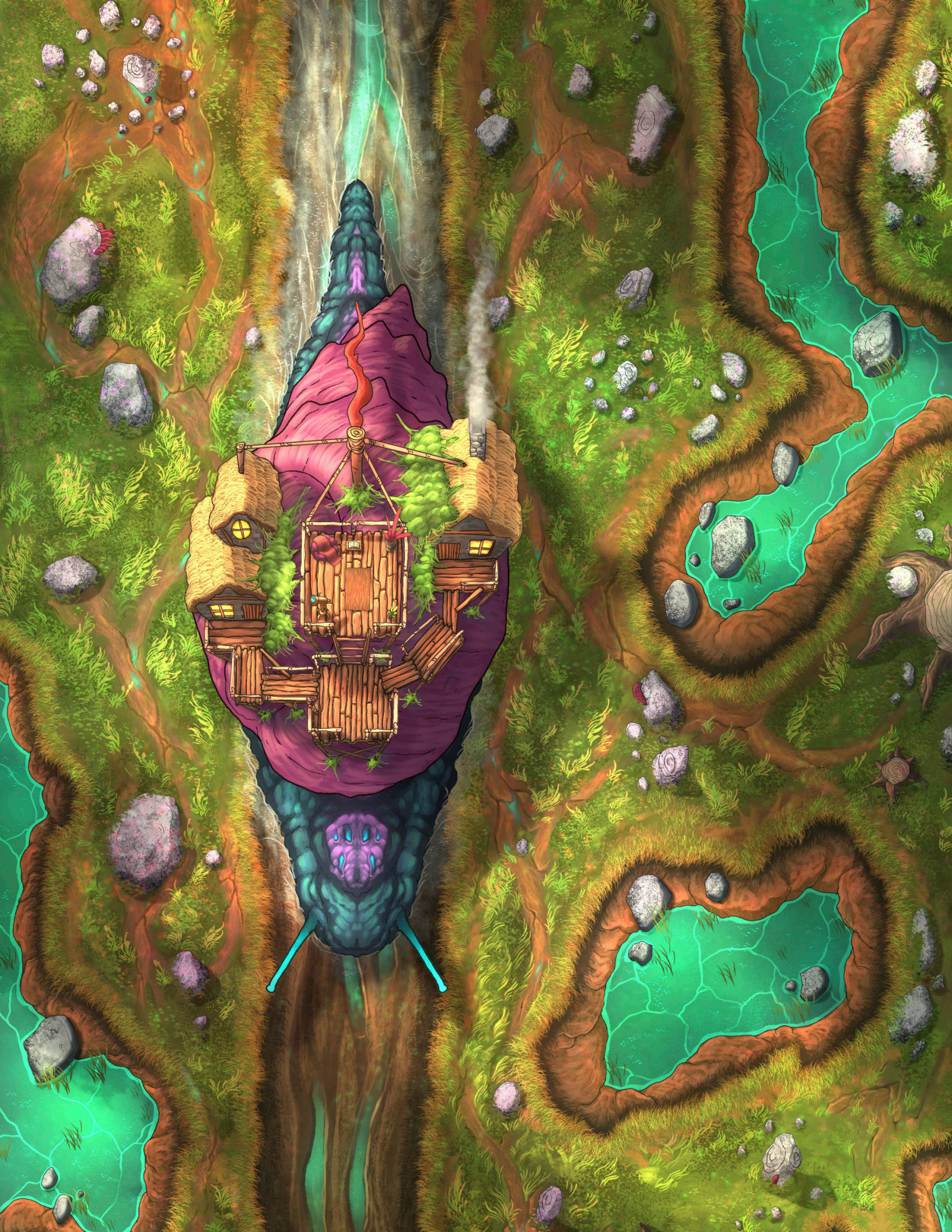
The fen has long protected Anise. Many of her sisters have fallen to urban threats; those who do not hide from cityfolk may find themselves atop a burning pyre. Out in the fen, Anise is far less concerned about close-minded bigots storming her home. That said, the endless marsh does more than just deter witch hunts. Anise's true power comes from the nutrient-filled peat itself. Her nomadic snail Gumperham gradually crawls through the fen, munches the biome's unique biomass, and then excretes the dense, arcane pellets known as fenbulbs. These murky orbs form the base of Anise's witchy brews, imbuing additional ingredients with the spark needed to catalyze magical reactions.

For decades, Anise had few true woes. She wandered the fen with plentiful access to her arcane fuel. She had all the time in the world to engage in her true passion: birdwatching.

Unlike the other members of her coven, Anise uses 90% of her spells just to aid her hobby. She creates illusory blinds, deploys infallible tracking spells, and amplifies perfectly replicated bird calls. When she spies a particularly elusive warbler, she'll crystalize the memory in a "vision print," a sort of sorcerous photograph. After Thestwick Watch was erected nearly a century ago, Anise also began carefully monitoring the nutrients and acidity of the fen to make sure her new neighbors weren't tampering with the ecosystem. For years, the fluctuations were negligible. Now that's all starting to change.

As the fen is drained, the peat withers and the birds begin looking for new homes. The Lowland Reclamation Corps is destroying everything Anise loves. While the rumors of Anise's wickedness are fabricated, the reclusive bog witch may now need to exert her territorial authority. She will not let the duke and duchess get away with destroying the fen.







## GUMPERHAM

Few are so lucky as Anise to have a familiar, a home, and a best friend all in one. Gumperham (he/him) is more than just a colossal snail. He has been with Anise since they were both children. Now, Gumperham is somewhere between 100 and 1,000 years old, he's 40 feet tall, and he's seen every corner of his lovely fen. Gumperham doesn't speak, not even telepathically as so many witch's familiars might. However, Gumperham is *extremely* expressive with his non-verbal gestures. With a solemn head bow, a curious twitch of his eyestalks, or a timid retraction into his shell, this colossal snail can convey a surprising breadth of emotions.

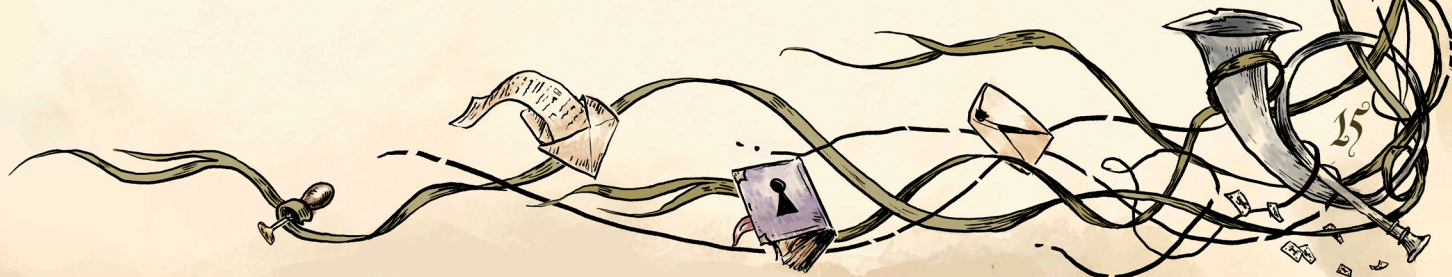
Gumperham has simple needs. He enjoys bird-watching just as much as Anise. After all, it's a hobby that a creature with independently moving eyestalks is predisposed to enjoy. Beyond that, he enjoys exploring the variety of different fen microbiomes, feeling the thurleigh reeds tickle his foot, and most all: devouring endlessly delicious peat. Gumperham munches the decaying biomass as though it were the nectar of the gods.


Gradually, Anise has built up her home atop Gumperham's shell. For years, she'd schlep a tent around while the two moseyed through the fen in peace. Once Gumperham became big enough, Anise simply plopped the tent atop his shell and fastened the corner with gluey bog adhesive. Next, she added a second tent so she could work in a different space from where she slept. Then she figured she might as well make the home more permanent. Now, Gumperham's entire shell is akin to a crawling witch's dreamhouse. Everywhere the duo goes, Anise has access to an alchemy chamber, a store of birdseed, bedchambers, a lookout, and some peat reserves for when they approach a stretch of dried-out fen. Anise would *certainly* never look down on her sisters who live in tiny shacks in forgotten forests... but she is quite proud of the home that she and Gumperham have built. A proper home for a proper witch.

## PLOT HOOK: CONFRONT ANISE

Lord Nathaniel Fandry invited the party of adventurers for one reason: he wants his chosen problem solvers to ensure none of the accursed ne'er-do-wells interrupt his reclamation. He doesn't care how they do it. The party can attempt to kill each of the marks, force them to relocate, or trick them into fighting each other. If the party feels particularly patient, they can simply keep watch indefinitely, acting as a permanent sentry outside the windpump and along the embankments. All Lord Fandry demands is the successful completion of his grand scheme, and then some assurance that the fen will *stay* drained.

Though each of the four creatures that haunts Thestwick is of great concern to the anxious duke, Anise Bloodbirch is his top priority. She's undoubtedly the smartest villain of the lot, and the duke is greatly concerned about the effect Gumperham is having on the residents. The giant snail is *imposing*, and his mere presence has led to an accelerating decline in morale. Worst of all, Lord Fandry rightly fears that Anise may be the linchpin in a collaborative effort against his operation. If Anise is able to coordinate an assault with the other creatures of the fen, Lord Fandry is almost certain that he and his crew will have to retreat back to Lotthingham.





**GM NOTE:** While you should trust your players to approach their task however they see fit, there are *broadly* three paths they can take during their time in Thestwick. They can side with Lord Fandry and help the Lowland Reclamation Corps drain the fen, they can ally with Anise to create a coalition to rout out the humans, or they can help the locals to take back their town from the duke. The plot hooks of each borough guide for Thestwick will present relevant information for these three approaches, but it is worth keeping in mind that there are countless variations on how your players might decide to proceed.

### ANISE'S AIMS

Anise and Gumperham have relocated to Thestwick-on-Alderham, but they haven't yet begun to disrupt the activities of the Lowland Reclamation Corps. Currently, their highest priority is likely the same as that of the party: reconnaissance and fact-finding. Anise is an expert scout, and she's employing her birdwatching prowess to keep tabs on the town. Before attempting anything drastic, Anise is spending her days spying on Lord Fandry and Louisa Terrowin, analyzing the fen waters, and sneaking into the village in various illusory disguises. She wants to make sure she understands exactly what's going on before making her move.

Though Anise could theoretically burn the wind-pump to the ground in the middle of the night, that would only be a short-term solution. It would also be needlessly dangerous, and she might end up killed in the retaliation. Instead, Anise wants to find a way to rid Thestwick of *all* of its human residents altogether... even the locals who have been there for decades. That could mean turning all the villagers into frogs, or it could just mean convincing them all to leave. Anise isn't picky, but she does recognize that time is running short.

Regardless of what she decides, Anise believes her best shot at ridding her home of its destroyers would be to ally with the other oft-maligned creatures of the fen: Black Alfie the ghost dog, Bulgreck the cave troll, and Sin Ranulf the bloodthirsty revenant. Despite the bountiful folk tales of each of these beings and their relative proximity, Anise has never met any of them. After all, she and Gumperham tend to keep to themselves. Given the desperate situation, however, Anise feels it may be

worth quickly making introductions and subsequently joining forces.

### APPROACH ANISE

Whether the adventurers wish to work with Anise or dispose of her, the party will first have to actually find her. To do so, they can either infiltrate her home—a feat made difficult by the wary and watchful Gumperham—or else find her while she's clandestinely navigating the village.

### INFILTRATE THE SNAIL HOME

The first impediment adventurers will face while conducting a home invasion is Gumperham himself. He may not be able to talk, but he is intelligent and perceptive. Given his sensitive foot and antennae, he may be able to notice the adventurers trudging through the lowlands even if he can't directly see them. If the party is able to give Gumperham the slip, they will then have to figure out a means to get up into Anise's home. The witch herself has numerous rope ladders she can use to climb up into the structure without bothering Gumperham, but she can also cause these to deploy or retract with a simple incantation. The players likely won't be so lucky. They will have to either boulder up Gumperham's shell—invariably grabbing his attention in the process—or else bring their own ladder, pole, or magic spell.

Once inside, Anise's home is only minimally booby-trapped. Most of her defenses are magic alarms, or even cruder techniques. Her most successful trap—in terms of total intrusions foiled—is a bucket of bog water balanced atop a door frame. Anise knows she's playing with fire simply by parking Gumperham so close to town. She *is* prepared, but she also isn't about to blow some intruder to smithereens simply for trying to sneak around her home.

The biggest challenges for adventurers who attempt to break and enter into Anise's home will be navigation and quelling their own curiosity. The witch's complex is large, and while the party attempts to get their bearings, Anise will no doubt be planning countermeasures. Plus, the adventurers may want to inspect any number of magical doodads, or the highly reactive fenbulbs themselves. All but the most experienced spellcasters may inadvertently trigger an arcane mishap through their own ignorance and clumsiness.



## SPOT ANISE IN THESTWICK

As soon as Anise and Gumperham made their way to the village, Anise began sneaking about. Often donning the visage of a villager, she discreetly skulks about while trying to learn the ins and outs of the operation. Depending on how long the party waits before trying to confront her, she may have learned any of the following:

1. Lord and Lady Fandry have crippling marriage problems.
2. The reclamation can be undone by destroying the embankments.
3. The windpump is a functional but flawed construction.
4. Louisa Terrowin hates Lord Fandry but wants to see the project through anyway.
5. Many individual members of the Lowland Reclamation Corps secretly mock Lord Fandry.
6. The locals are hatching their own scheme to sabotage the operation.
7. The windpump will need to operate in perpetuity to keep the fen dry.
8. Lord Fandry has plans to march the Alderham knights into Talmouth.

If the party would rather not invade her mysterious and intimidating snail home, they can attempt to intercept her while she is making her way through town. Crucially, the party will first have to come to the conclusion that Anise has in fact been walking amongst the villagers. No one else has yet realized. This may be accomplished through day-and-night surveillance, although the mists of the fen tend to play tricks on those unused to such thick morning fog. Anise will always make her entrances and exits under the cover of night or during periods of all-obscuring mist.

Seeing through Anise's disguise will require either excellent perception or deduction. Her "masks" (as she calls them) aren't foolproof, and if the adventurers take stock of *everyone* in town, they may be able to spot the duplicate. Short of seeing through the illusions, the adventurers may have to infer from evidence who Anise might be: the knight who keeps walking past the door to the windpump, the old lady who can't keep her eyes off the moorwings, or the gentleman with mysteriously wet trousers.

## DEAL WITH ANISE

Once the players are able to track down Anise, they will have to decide what to do with her. Lord Fandry would be most pleased if they could simply fell the wicked witch, but he will also happily accept any solution that rids her from Thestwick altogether. Of course, the adventurers may see eye-to-eye with Anise, and if they're particularly persuasive, the witch of Alderham Fen could be convinced to collaborate.

### KILL ANISE

Anise is old, but she is not immortal. Through potent elixirs and the aid of her coven, Anise has been able to indefinitely extend her lifespan, but she will not survive a sword through the heart. Nevertheless, landing that killing blow will not be easy. Anise is a master of disguises, illusions, and—if need be—transformation. While she may hate to interfere with the local ecosystem, she will not hesitate to turn an assailant into a frog.

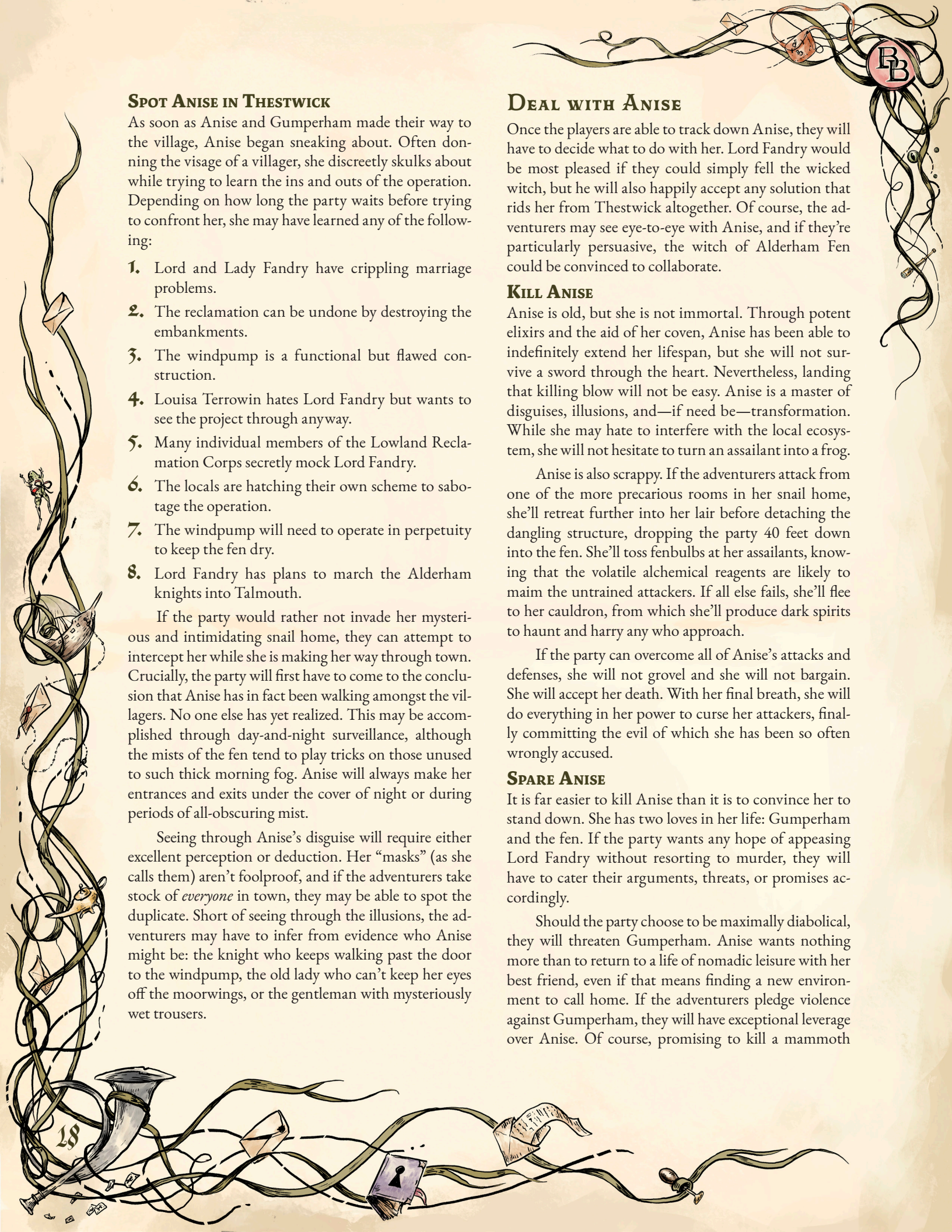
Anise is also scrappy. If the adventurers attack from one of the more precarious rooms in her snail home, she'll retreat further into her lair before detaching the dangling structure, dropping the party 40 feet down into the fen. She'll toss fenbulbs at her assailants, knowing that the volatile alchemical reagents are likely to maim the untrained attackers. If all else fails, she'll flee to her cauldron, from which she'll produce dark spirits to haunt and harry any who approach.

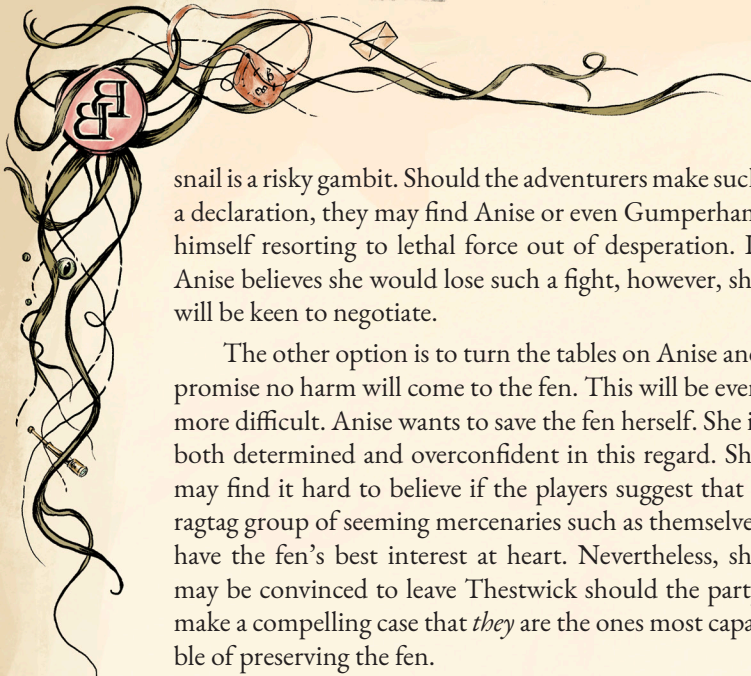
If the party can overcome all of Anise's attacks and defenses, she will not grovel and she will not bargain. She will accept her death. With her final breath, she will do everything in her power to curse her attackers, finally committing the evil of which she has been so often wrongly accused.

### SPARE ANISE

It is far easier to kill Anise than it is to convince her to stand down. She has two loves in her life: Gumperham and the fen. If the party wants any hope of appeasing Lord Fandry without resorting to murder, they will have to cater their arguments, threats, or promises accordingly.

Should the party choose to be maximally diabolical, they will threaten Gumperham. Anise wants nothing more than to return to a life of nomadic leisure with her best friend, even if that means finding a new environment to call home. If the adventurers pledge violence against Gumperham, they will have exceptional leverage over Anise. Of course, promising to kill a mammoth





snail is a risky gambit. Should the adventurers make such a declaration, they may find Anise or even Gumperham himself resorting to lethal force out of desperation. If Anise believes she would lose such a fight, however, she will be keen to negotiate.

The other option is to turn the tables on Anise and promise no harm will come to the fen. This will be even more difficult. Anise wants to save the fen herself. She is both determined and overconfident in this regard. She may find it hard to believe if the players suggest that a ragtag group of seeming mercenaries such as themselves have the fen's best interest at heart. Nevertheless, she may be convinced to leave Thestwick should the party make a compelling case that *they* are the ones most capable of preserving the fen.

### SIDE WITH ANISE

If Lord Fandry has his way, the fen will change drastically in ways that he cannot foresee. Yes, many wealthy subjects will gain land to farm, but countless fenfolk will be forced to abandon their centuries-old way of life. A rich ecosystem of birds, reeds, eels, and shellfish will be devastated. There will be countless unpredictable ripple effects as the dried fen reveals secrets that are better left preserved in the peat. Perhaps the adventurers feel as though the acres and acres of newly arable farmland are worth these sacrifices. Alternatively, they may agree with Anise Bloodbirch: something has to be done.

Anise has not cooperated or colluded with anyone but her coven and her snail for centuries. As such, the adventurers will have to painstakingly gain the witch's trust. She may ask them to willingly accept a minor hex, or she may give them a gruesome task to complete to prove their commitment. In either case, Anise won't simply bring them into the fold because of their honeyed words.

If the party is able to successfully convince Anise that their aims are compatible, they will still have the challenge of colluding with the witch without drawing the ire of the townsfolk. The party will have to work with incredible secrecy to make sure they don't arouse suspicion.

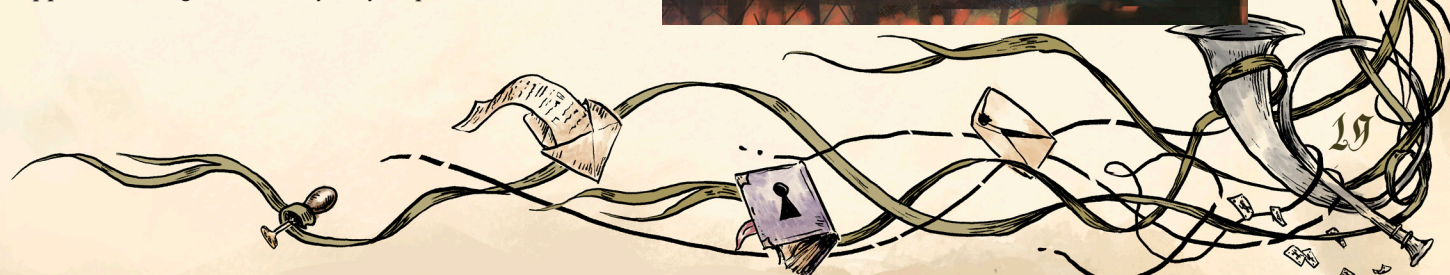
Anise's major task for the party will be to do what she has thus far been putting off: forging an alliance between the non-human entities in Thestwick. Anise will tell the party what little she knows of Black Alfie, Bulgreck, and Sir Ranulf, and she will give them any supplies and magical aids they may require, but she can

do little else. In the meantime, Anise will scheme about how best to ensure that a potential victory over the duke and his gang of bullies is not short-lived.

### WHAT DO THE LOCALS WANT?

The moorwing eelers and thatching artisans who call Thestwick-on-Alderham home have their own plans for the village. They have been meeting in secret, attempting to form a last-ditch plan to rid their town of the Lowland Reclamation Corps for good. If the party wants to help the locals in their goal, it may be advantageous to encourage an alliance between Anise and the Thestwick residents. This will be a tough sell for the locals, however, as they fear the bog witch more than any. As far as the "haunted fen" goes, the locals feel surprisingly similarly to Lord Fandry. They want the monsters gone just as much as the duke and duchess. Their end goal is to take the village back for themselves, not to affiliate with dark magicians and undead soldiers.

Regardless, the full nature of the locals' plan will be explored in a future chapter.





# The Old Ways

## OF KNIGHTS AND FENFOLK

The local population of Thestwick—that is, those who lived in the village before Lord and Lady Fandry arrived—are born of two worlds. The village was originally founded by former knights who opted to stay in the fen after the peaceful resolution of the border conflict. It wasn't long before some of the native fenfolk began traveling to the village. Never before had the people of Alderham Fen established such a centralized and permanent community in the lowlands. The few who already lived solitary lives in the backwaters were happy to trade with the new residents and share strategies for living in the unforgiving terrain. A few generations later, most newborns in Thestwick share blood of the knights who first populated Thestwick Watch as well as the indigenous fenfolk who had always called the wetlands their home.

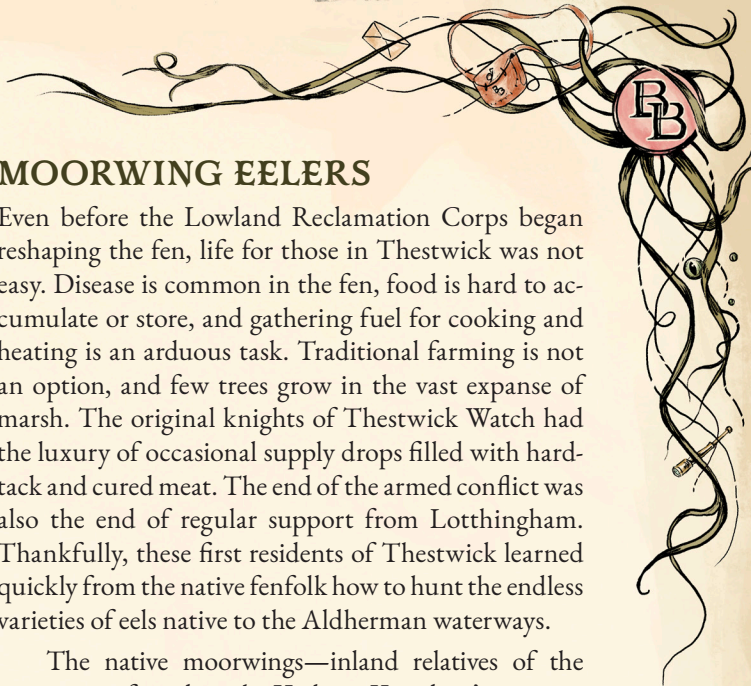
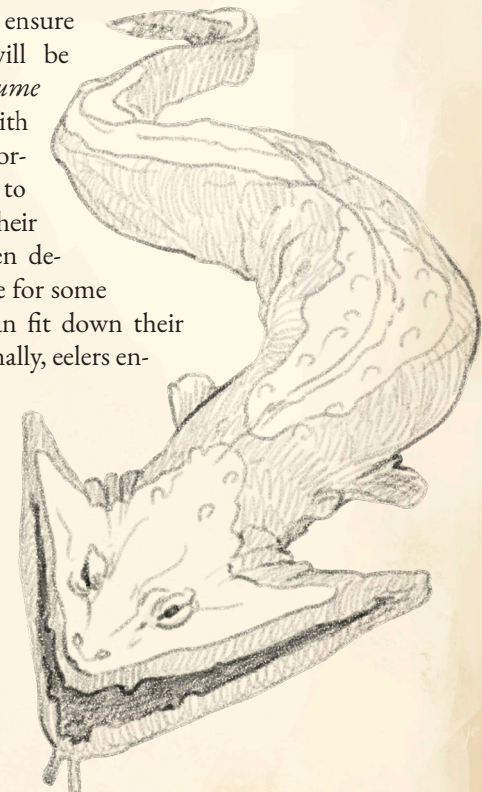
These days, few care terribly about distant family trees. The residents of Thestwick are their own people. Most consider themselves true “fenfolk,” if only for semantic convenience: that is, they are *folk* who live in the *fen*. Culturally, however, they are distinct from those who live out in the wilds, free from the minor amenities that Thestwick-on-Alderham provides. Though all residents of Thestwick must technically swear fealty to the duke and duchess, they are almost entirely autonomous, relying little on trade with distant Lotthingham.

## MOORWING EELERS

Even before the Lowland Reclamation Corps began reshaping the fen, life for those in Thestwick was not easy. Disease is common in the fen, food is hard to accumulate or store, and gathering fuel for cooking and heating is an arduous task. Traditional farming is not an option, and few trees grow in the vast expanse of marsh. The original knights of Thestwick Watch had the luxury of occasional supply drops filled with hard-tack and cured meat. The end of the armed conflict was also the end of regular support from Lotthingham. Thankfully, these first residents of Thestwick learned quickly from the native fenfolk how to hunt the endless varieties of eels native to the Aldherman waterways.

The native moorwings—inland relatives of the cormorants found on the Veglenic Kingdom’s coasts—are excellent hunters. These broad-winged water birds evolved specifically to spot and catch the eels that call the fen their home. The knights of Thestwick Watch first tried to catch eels with poles and bait, but the clever fish are far trickier than their counterparts in the lakes, streams, and ponds adjacent to Lotthingham. The fenfolk showed the first residents of Thestwick that the only way to reliably land the slithery creatures was to deploy the local fauna against them.

Moorwings can easily catch eels, but they rely on their elastic necks to swallow the creatures. By tying a loose snare around the moorwing’s neck, eelers can ensure that the moorwing will be unable to actually *consume* the eels they catch. With enough training, a moorwing can be taught to grab an eel, return to their owner’s canoe, and then deposit the eel in exchange for some smaller shellfish that can fit down their ensnared neck. Additionally, eelers enforce a strict code of reciprocity: for each 5 eels the moorwing catches, they can eat one themselves.



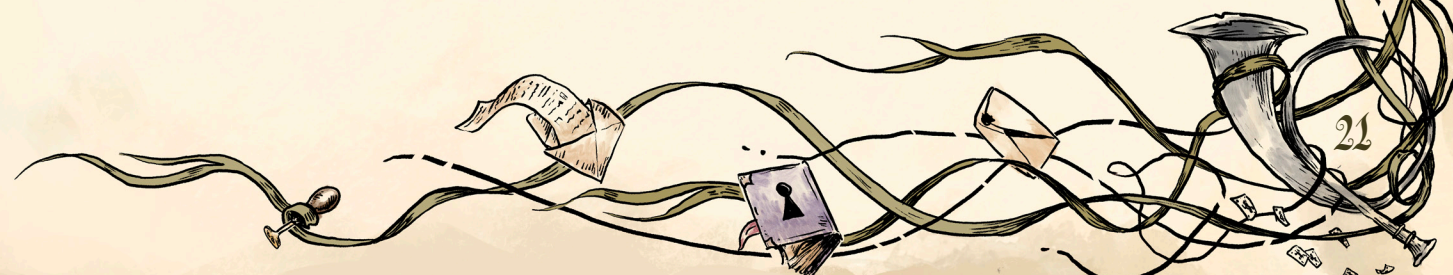


### THE ETHICS OF EELING

When the duke, duchess, and Lowland Reclamation Corps arrived, they decried moorwing eeling as barbaric, but the eelers see it differently. The moorwing still gets food, and the eelers are able to feed the people of their village. What's more, the residents of Thestwick don't need to spend hours reeling in and tossing back the numerous species of inedible fish that make up most of the aquatic life in the waters. And most importantly: they can live out in the backwaters without transforming the entire ecosystem into acres of monoculture farmland. A snare on a neck seems at the very least comparable to the yoke on an ox or the blinders on a carriage horse. Would the duke and duchess object to the use of all draft animals?

These arguments are still insufficient for many Lotthingham nobles. Those unfamiliar with the realities of farming struggle with the mental gymnastics required to justify the practice. The people of Thestwick pride themselves on living in harmony with their environment, and yet they shackle the fen's creatures for their own gain. Is that hypocrisy? An act of wanton cruelty? Or merely a necessary compromise?

Thestwick's eelers tend to gain a strong kinship with their moorwings. While most young eelers affix long leashes to their moorwings, a seasoned fisherman will abandon the leash altogether after gaining the trust of their birds. The moorwing knows that food awaits them back on their keeper's canoe, including delicious fen snails that they cannot eat without the aid of humans to shell the creatures. Once an eeler has developed a particularly close relationship with a moorwing, it's rare to see them go anywhere separately. An eeler will walk about town with their bird atop their shoulder, and a particularly affectionate eeler might even help their moorwing build a nest atop or adjacent to their home.







## D6 TYPES OF EELS DESCRIPTION

- |   |                      |  |
|---|----------------------|--|
| 1 | Common Veglenic Eel  | The most abundant eel in the Alderham Fen, growing up to 2 feet long. A nocturnal predator that eats spiders and small frogs. Typically jellied and then eaten cold.   |
| 2 | Twin-Headed Snap Jaw | A curious two-headed eel. Comparatively inefficient hunters, each head spends much of its time biting the other. Though tough and flavorless, it is fenfolk tradition for newly married couples to split a snap jaw on their wedding night.  |
| 3 | Freshwater Sparkler  | The freshwater sparkler is the only species of electric eel found in the Alderham Fen. Fenfolk have repeatedly attempted to domesticate freshwater sparklers to hunt other eels, but none have yet succeeded. Anyone foolish enough to trudge through the fen in metal armor should be wary of these otherwise innocuous predators.  |
| 4 | Chasling Honkbogey   | There is nothing actually dangerous about a honkbogey, but they're reviled anyway. While hunting in packs, they will occasionally turn completely rigid, surface, and loudly croak for up to ten minutes. This makes them easy to catch, even without a moorwing, but it's particularly obnoxious.   |
| 5 | Mudshells            | A chemical on the scales of a mudshell causes the fen sediment to adhere and harden around the eel. The result is a sort of carapace that protects the creature from predators. Mudshells are delicious when fried, but notoriously difficult to catch.  |
| 6 | Darkdiver            | The largest eel in the Alderham Fen is also the most unusual. The darkdiver is predatory, up to 8 feet long, and capable of mimicking the traits of creatures it bites. When a darkdiver nicks an adventurer with its arrow-like jaw, it magically adopts one or more of its prey's adaptations: the superior sight of a ranger, divine blood of a paladin, or arcane defenses of a witch. |

## THE EELER WAY OF LIFE

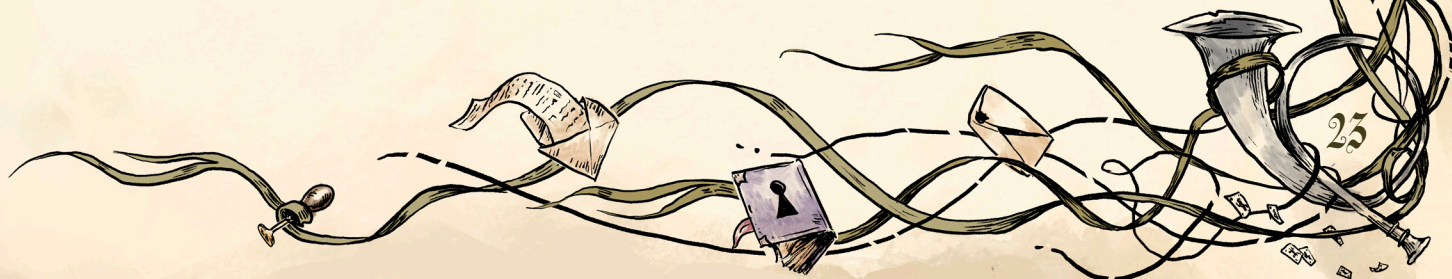
A young eeler is expected to build their own canoe and paddle from what little wood they can find in the fen. In fact, canoes and paddles are some of the only acceptable uses for the few trees that grow in the fen. Wood is so scarce that residents of Thestwick are strictly forbidden from using wood for fires or roofs. The construction of the Fandry Windpump was thus a huge point of contention for the locals. The Lowland Reclamation Corps chopped down dozens of trees that the young eelers were hoping to use for their own canoes when they came of age.

Eelers are almost always men. Thestwick residents consider themselves morally superior to their kin in distant cities, but they've retained many of the patriarchal cultural touchstones of their urban ancestors. There have been a handful of female eelers, but they are never fully accepted or respected by the men that rule the waters.

There is little in the way of hierarchy for eelers. There is no leadership structure. Once an eeler has built their canoe, they are welcomed into the moorwing aviary to find a suitable fishing partner. There are accepted codes of conduct, but nothing resembling the strictly codified bylaws of the various guilds in Lotthingham. Instead, becoming an eeler is a matter of undergoing a series of rites: build a canoe, choose a moorwing, abandon the leash, catch a mudshell, etc. Traditions are passed down orally and evolve gradually over time.

Of course, the entire eeler way of life is now in jeopardy. As the water level of the fen continues to fall, the only reliable fishing waters are those of Alderham Creek. Gone are the days when eelers could travel in any direction with some canoeing prowess and careful navigation. Eel habitats are drying up, and consequently moorwings populations are falling precipitously. The people of Alderham Fen will—supposedly!—thrive with their acres and acres of new farmland, but it seems no one in Lotthingham is concerned that the centuries-old practice of moorwing eeling will fade into distant memory.

**LLOYD MADDOX:** Given the mixed heritages of virtually all of Thestwick's residents, it is surprising that some locals still cling to ancient prejudices. Lloyd (he/him) prides himself on having no fenfolk blood in his ancestry. He carries the noble blood of the Alderham knights through and through. And yet, Lloyd lives out in the fen. He's an eeler, practicing a fishing tradition



that the fenfolk have honed over the centuries. His neighbors, his eeler kin, and everyone he knows is either part fenfolk or thriving thanks to the fenfolk ingenuity. The residents of Thestwick have no patience for Lloyd's intolerance. Prior to the construction of the windpump, the locals were planning to exile Lloyd, but now that the town itself is at risk, the residents have more pressing concerns. For now, Lloyd is doing everything he can to cozy up with the Lowland Reclamation Corps while fulfilling his eeling duties.

## THE MOORWING AVIARY

Young eelers are expected to build their own canoes before heading out on the water, but they aren't expected to catch a moorwing by themselves. Thestwick's aviculturists maintain a steady gulp of at least twenty yet unclaimed moorwings at any given time. Keeping these birds happy and healthy is a challenge in and of itself. For fear of overfishing the waters, the captive moorwings are forbidden from seeking out their own food. Instead, their keepers feed them an exceedingly labor-intensive diet of shelled snails. Whenever on the water, eelers will keep their eyes peeled for these delectable snails, which tend to travel in large groups.

The Lowland Reclamation Corps have had free reign over the city throughout the duration of their stay. The locals have been insistent, however, that no outsiders step foot in the aviary. This bird reserve is Thestwick's equivalent of a central bank. It ensures the long-term stability of the town. If a few eelers pass away suddenly, a new generation can rapidly train with healthy moorwings to keep the town fed. If anything were to happen to the aviary, Thestwick's future would be in jeopardy. Of course, that very future is already in question if the duke and duchess have their way.

**BRONWEN TAPHIS:** While many of Thestwick's essential facilities are led by senior members of the community, the head aviculturist at the moorwing aviary is 15-year-old Bronwen Taphis (she/her). Caring for the moorwings is an intricate task. While everyone in Thestwick wishes the village could stockpile more snails to feed the fledgelings, the harsh reality is that there are always limited stores of the precious bird food. Bronwen has a gift for rationing, for reading the birds' needs, and for keeping precise records. No bird goes hungry in her aviary, and each is cared for with admirable love and affection. Bronwen is given total autonomy, and many who assist her in the aviary are at least twice her



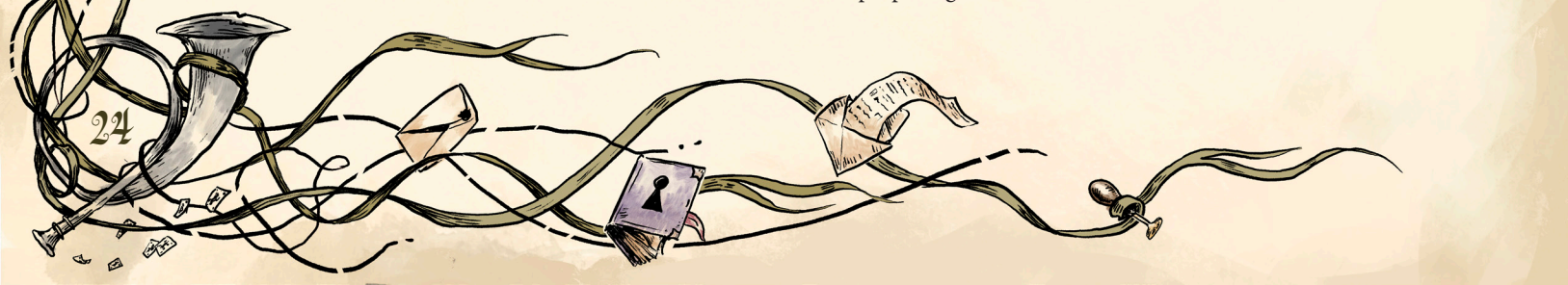
age. Some resent the young "bird expert," but most are happy that the village's most precious resources are given the care and attention they deserve.

## RHETT NESLING AND THE THESTWICK RESISTANCE

For years, Rhett (he/him) was one of the quiet ones. He enjoyed life in Thestwick because it asked little more of him than caring for his birds, fishing all day, and helping his wife Carys with childcare and cooking. Bright and early, he'd head out on the water, read the clouds for shifting weather, and trust in his moorwings to help him find food for his family. Even when the other eelers would get drunk and rowdy after a successful day on the water, Rhett would typically just head home.

That all changed once the fen began to drain.

Rhett now leads the internal resistance. The eelers of Thestwick-on-Alderham want to take their fen back, and they know they must act soon. Though Rhett had barely known many of the other eelers prior to the construction of the windpump, he now leads secret meetings with the fervor of a raving prophet. Rhett wants his home back. He wants his sons to grow up to be happy eelers. He desperately wants the clueless knights who plan to farm this drained basin to stay where they belong back in Lotthingham. Rhett is done being quiet, and he is preparing at last to act.





## ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE RECLAMATION

A more permanent solution for Thestwick residents hoping to maintain their way of life will involve forcing the duke and duchess to stop meddling with the fen for good. To do this, Rhett and his eeler brethren will have to convince the duke and duchess—and ideally, their inevitable successors—that their plan is either counterproductive or too risky. Unfortunately, the lords of Alderham Fen aren't as persuaded by “the majesty of the wetlands” or “the sanctity of peaceful fen life” as the eelers are. Rhett and co. will need to learn to speak the language of money and power.

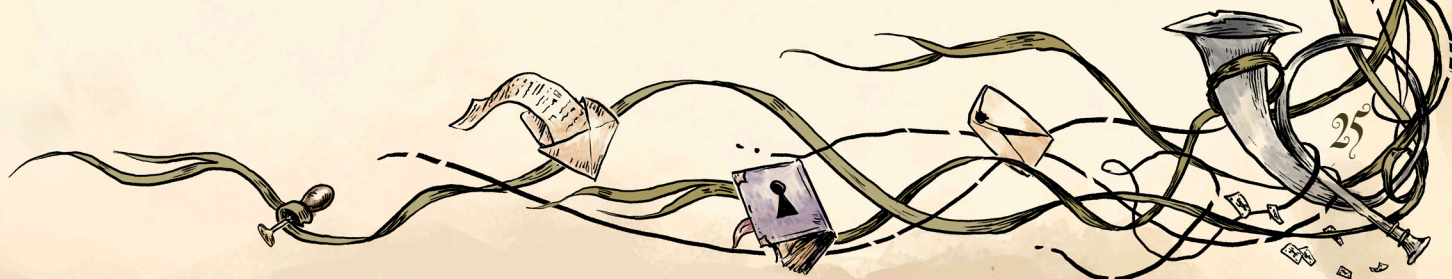
One potential line of reasoning they can wield is that the land beneath the marshes may be unfit for farming. This is *probably* not true, but even Lord Fandry himself would admit that the whole production has been an awful lot of work given the degree of uncertainty in his plans. It's possible that the whole fen will have to lie fallow for years or decades before it will yield a plentiful harvest. Again: there is no evidence that this is the case, but if Lord Fandry could be *convinced* that it's the truth, one more mechanical setback may be all it takes for him to abandon the project altogether.


Another potential argument is that the fen serves a purpose that is more valuable than any potential farmland. The fen has always acted as a massive buffer against marching armies. So long as invading troops are forced to trudge through miles upon miles of dangerous boggy terrain, it is unlikely Lotthingham will ever be attacked from the south. Of course, that is one of the reasons why the prior border skirmish ended in a stalemate: the Duke of Talmouth realized there was no hope of annexing even an acre of land if it meant fighting Alderham troops across fetid wetlands.

First, Rhett and his allies (roughly a dozen other eelers, or one-third of the total eeler population) must decide their plan of action. Anything they do to keep their fen free from meddling will have to address both the water level and the far-reaching ambitions of the duke and duchess. Yes they *could* simply sabotage one or more embankments, but that is at best a temporary solution. The windpump is surprisingly efficient. As soon as the water starts flooding back in, the Lowland Reclamation Corps will patch up the dike, and the fen will be re-drained quickly. If the rebellious Thestwick natives repeatedly attempt to sabotage the polder infrastructure, they will likely be hanged.

### LORD FANDRY'S AMBITIONS

Though it sounds like a good argument, Lord Nathaniel Fandry is unlikely to be swayed by the tactical value of his duchy's wetlands for one simple reason: they are a hindrance to his *actual* plans. Yes, Lord Fandry *does* want to turn his territory into workable farmland, but he also plans to turn the tables on Talmouth, march his knights south across the newly traversable terrain, and sweep across the neighboring duchy in a surprise onslaught.





If Rhett and any allied adventurers attempt to persuade Lord Fandry of the importance of an environmental buffer against invading forces, the duke will nod coyly, but he will change his mind, and he will do his best to keep his cards close to the chest. The residents of Thestwick are already unhappy with Lord Fandry, and if he reveals that his full force of knights will soon be marching through their town en route to war, the locals may become dangerously incensed.

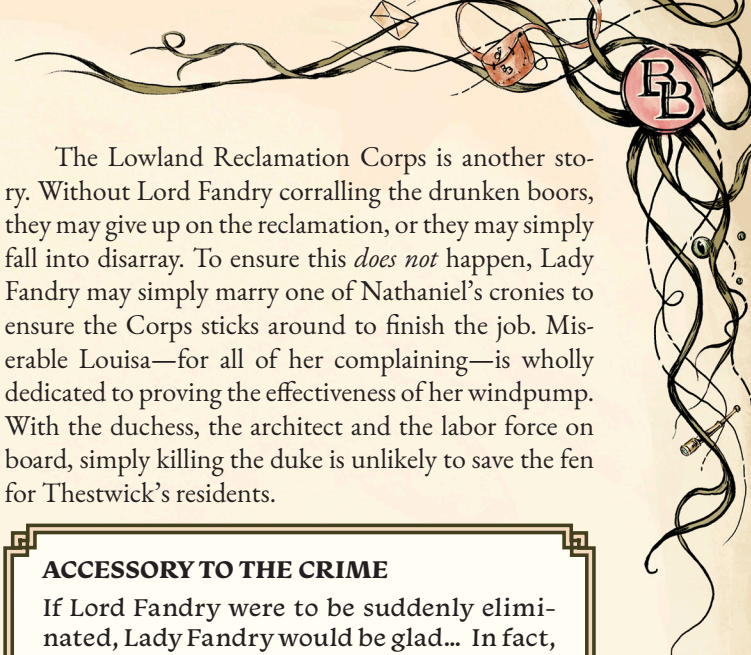
Perhaps the best argument in favor of leaving the fen alone is one of pragmatism. Defending the full-length of the embankment against vandals will be expensive and risky, and a single point of failure could cause dangerous flooding for anyone farming the reclaimed land. Even without ne'er-do-wells interfering with the infrastructure, calamitous weather could result in storm surges overtaking the dikes. More land *could* act as a useful economic incentive for the dukedom's knights, but it also seems likely that a torrent of prospectors would move into the territory before the lords have the chance to adequately divvy up the parcels. The knights will be stretched thin just guarding the embankment, and with miles and miles of newly habitable land to protect, the already perilous guard force would teeter on a knife's edge.

The reclamation is ambitious, and if all goes according to plan, the Alderham Fen will dramatically expand their arable farmland. However, expanding so quickly brings with it considerable risks: military invasion, secession, and the unavoidable risk of flood surges.

## KILLING THE DUKE

Rhett and his companions are not stupid. They know that Lord Fandry is the linchpin in this operation. If he were to be removed from the calculation, would that be the end of the Lowland Reclamation Corps?

The answer is complicated. Lord Fandry and his strategic marriage helped make architect Louisa Terrowin's blueprints a reality, and the duke's cronies are ultimately the primary labor force behind the project. Yet, the wheels are already in motion. If Lord Fandry were assassinated tomorrow, it's not clear that enthusiasm for the reclamation would suddenly dry up. Lady Fandry knows the potential value of this farmland, and she seems committed to seeing this project through.



The Lowland Reclamation Corps is another story. Without Lord Fandry corraling the drunken boors, they may give up on the reclamation, or they may simply fall into disarray. To ensure this *does not* happen, Lady Fandry may simply marry one of Nathaniel's cronies to ensure the Corps sticks around to finish the job. Miserable Louisa—for all of her complaining—is wholly dedicated to proving the effectiveness of her windpump. With the duchess, the architect and the labor force on board, simply killing the duke is unlikely to save the fen for Thestwick's residents.

## ACCESSORY TO THE CRIME

If Lord Fandry were to be suddenly eliminated, Lady Fandry would be glad... In fact, it is *possible* that she could be convinced to help facilitate a clandestine assassination. If Lady Fandry received assurances that she would be held blameless, she might lean into her alleged "curse" and bring some more misery to the most important man in her life. Lady Fandry *does not like* her husband, and a mysterious death out in the fen would be easily hidden from her vassals back in Lotthingham. The body could be disposed of, and that would be that. Lady Mabel Fandry could revitalize her duchy and get rid of her detestable husband in one fell swoop.

## THE THESTIWCK BONE MILL

When the reclamation is finally complete, the duke and duchess hope to get the farmland in working condition as soon as possible. While they suspect that the moist fen soil will be ideal for farming, they also plan to provide ample fertilizer to anyone in need. To facilitate this process, the Lowland Reclamation Corps was ordered to build a bone mill on a minor offshoot of Alderham Creek. Ever since construction began, the residents of Thestwick have been required to keep their leftover eel bones, dry them, and provide sackfuls to the Lord and Lady. These are subsequently pulverized by the mill's bone crusher to produce gritty fertilizer.

The Corps erected the bone mill quickly and easily. They were, of course, aided with blueprints by the one and only Louisa Terrowin. Early experiments proved quite successful. The eel bones were easily smashed, and basic tests in flower pots indicate that the fertilizer should serve its purpose.



Unfortunately, the Thestwick Bone Mill was suddenly abandoned after the first few ventures. Two members of the Corps were instructed to take a shift at the Bone Mill one afternoon, and after neither returned, Lord Fandry himself went to check on the operation. He found both bodies mangled beyond recognition, torn to bits by some horrible beast. After reporting back to the people of Thestwick, everyone knew exactly what had happened: Black Alfie had found the poor souls.



## BLACK ALFIE

The first residents to develop Thestwick were the Alderham knights who chose to stay in the fen after the end of their border dispute. These knights had some experience living in the fen; they had at least spent a year or so in Thestwick Watch. Nevertheless, life inside a sentry tower is decidedly different from life in the open fen. Many of these knights tried to treat the town as though it were any other small hamlet a few miles outside of Lotthingham.

As charming and peaceful as Thestwick may be, it is not a place where one can simply live passively. The marsh holds dangers, and carelessness can be fatal. One young squire learned this the hard way. Thomas Nickelby was walking with his dog along the early scaffolding for the town to be when he fell into the waters below. Normally, this would be startling but of no real concern. Thomas, however, was staggeringly drunk. He struggled in vain while his pet dog Alfie barked in horror. Thomas drowned in the fen.

The fenfolk have very simple burial traditions. Corpses are placed on floating wooden platforms, and left to drift wherever the marsh waters take them. In most instances, the bodies are picked clean by moorwings before the next dawn. When someone *drowns* however, the body is to be left in place. Superstition holds that spirits haunt the waters, and tampering with a drowned body can release those spirits. As such, Thomas's body was left to sit in the thick peat in which it came to rest.

Alfie, Thomas's loyal companion, returned to his meager dog house on a small hill rising up over the marsh. He waited faithfully day after day, then week after week, for his master to return. Locals brought Alfie food, hoping to coax the dog back into town, but Alfie never ate. The townsfolk suspected that Alfie died, but they never found his body.

Some claim to see the spectral image of Alfie on moonlit nights. If the legends are to be believed, Alfie—or "Black Alfie" (he/him) as the locals call the ghostly shade—protects his master's eternal sleep.



## PLOT HOOK: CONFRONT BLACK ALFIE

Lord Fandry is terrified of the prospect of some sort of century-old haunted dog ghost interfering with his schemes. Whether it's true, some trick of bog witch Anise's making, or pure superstition, anything that gets in the way of his reclamation needs to be smoothed over as soon as possible. Lord Fandry will ask the party to investigate tales of this mysterious mutt, and, if needed, dispatch him.

### BLACK ALFIE'S AIMS

Alfie's spirit is restless. He watched his master Thomas drunkenly struggle in the unforgiving fen waters, the worst sight a happy dog can witness. What's worse, Thomas was *barely* a Thestwick resident. While the locals honored the burial traditions of the fenfolk by allowing Thomas's body to rot and fester in the murky waters, Thomas's family mourned that they could not give him the Veglenic funeral pyre he would have wanted. Alfie, of course, could not fully process the nuance of this torment, but he sensed great pain from his master's family.

Now that the fen is drying up, it's only a matter of time before Thomas's remains resurface. A peculiar side effect of the fen's peat is that bodies that eventually sink are *perfectly* preserved. As such, a century's worth of decay will have had almost no effect on Thomas's body, frozen in time the day he died.

Black Alfie wants nothing more than for Thomas's body to be given the true funeral pyre it deserves. Instead, it seems increasingly likely that the body will soon resurface as the beat dries out, and that it will be left to rot in the Alderham sun. At some basic level, Alfie understands this, and he hates it.

### APPROACH BLACK ALFIE

As Alfie died, he spent his last remaining energy digging out a truly massive burrow deep into the earth beneath his dog house. There is no rational justification for the size of the dugout Alfie was able to carve in his final days. Perhaps supercharged by the agony of loss, the mourning dog was able to perform unfathomable feats of strength and endurance, creating a subterranean monument to his woes.

Black Alfie's spectral form now wanders this dark cave, eternally wailing out for Thomas. Adventurers seeking the canine spirit will have to crawl through the

hole beneath his dog house and into the dark lair.

Alternatively, it just so happens that the Thestwick Bone Mill sits *directly on top of* this haunted warren. It seems likely that Black Alfie killed the two members of the Lowland Reclamation Corps specifically because they intruded on his den. Adventurers who seek out the bone mill first may be able to find a path down into the cave from above.

### DEAL WITH BLACK ALFIE

Handling an allegedly wicked witch is one thing. Confronting a restless spirit is quite another. As with Anise, Lord Fandry does not care how the party dispatches Black Alfie. So long as the adventurers can ensure the spirit won't interfere with the reclamation, Lord Fandry will consider it a job well done. Of course, the adventurers may have different aims altogether. If they previously decided to side with Anise or the Thestwick locals, they may instead choose to weaponize Black Alfie against the duke, duchess, and Lowland Reclamation Corps.

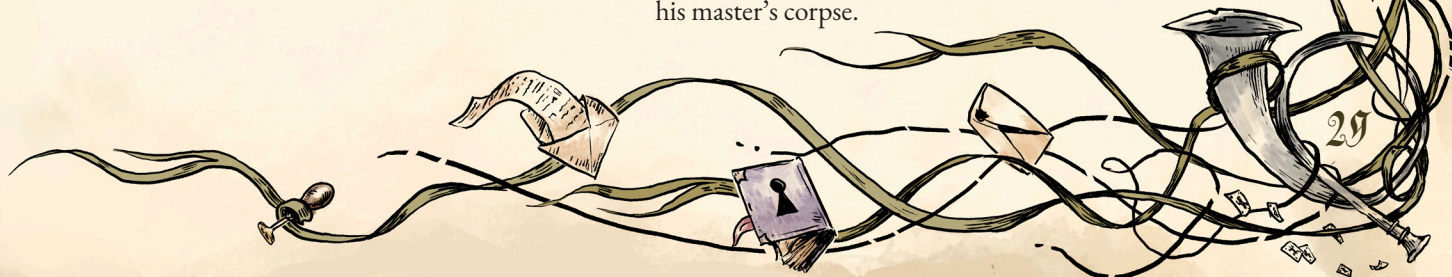
### BRING PEACE TO BLACK ALFIE

The selfless approach is to put Black Alfie's soul to rest. The poor dog just wants his master to receive traditional Veglenic funeral rites. Accomplishing this task, however, will be anything but straightforward. The party will have to first uncover the legend of Black Alfie, then ascertain Black Alfie's wishes, then find Thomas's body somewhere in the peat, and then *finally* find somewhere to burn the preserved corpse.

Learning the legend will be relatively easy, but it requires the party to actually do some common sense fact-finding before going off in search of the ghost. Most residents know the story, but they won't just offer the information up unprompted.

Learning what Black Alfie wants will be trickier. A *séance* is a good place to start, and Anise Bloodbitch might be convinced to help. However, Anise does *not* want Black Alfie's soul at rest, at least not yet. If the bog witch suspects that the party will try to eliminate her trump card, she will cease aiding them in their task.

Finding Thomas's body will be particularly challenging. As the fen dries up, the party will end up finding quite a few bodies in the all-preserving peat. The party can either attempt to divine Thomas's location, consult decades old records, or confer with Black Alfie himself. If the party can gain the spirit's trust, he may join them in one final trek across the marsh in search of his master's corpse.



**GM Note:** This quest will be much easier to GM if Black Alfie can at least understand some basic language. If you really want to up the roleplaying, you can have the dog actually speak, but this seems a bit at odds with the natures of a *dog* ghost. Instead, have Black Alfie respond to simple commands.

### WEAPONIZE BLACK ALFIE

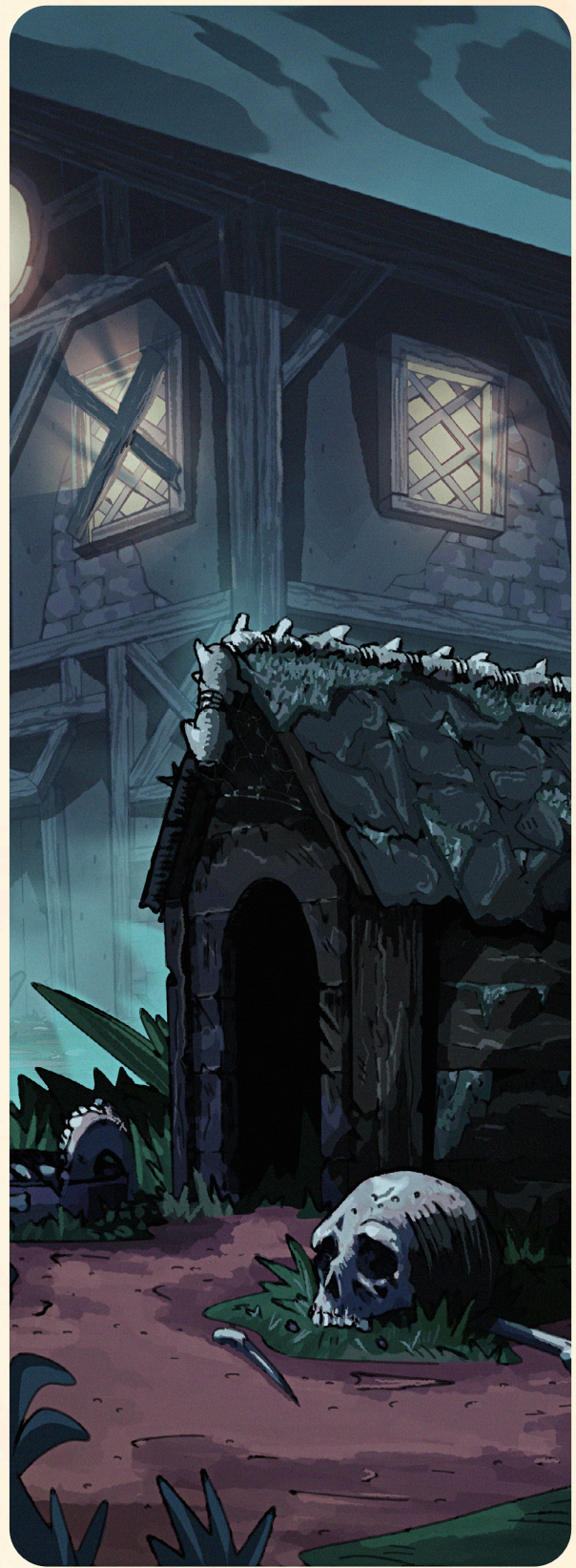
Anise Bloodbirch will suggest that the party try to get Black Alfie on her side. Practically speaking, that just means giving the spirit the motivation he needs to terrorize the village. If Black Alfie were to somehow *understand* that it's the Lowland Reclamation Corps who are responsible for gradually exhuming Thomas's corpse, he will be incensed enough to target the town.

Once Black Alfie gains the necessary bloodlust, the only thing keeping him from terrorizing the people of Thestwick is his fear of Alderham Creek. He watched his master drown in these dangerous waters, and so being within sight of the creek strikes fear into the dog. This may offer some clues as to why Black Alfie carved out an underground lair for himself instead of stalking the fens like the other strange beasts of Thestwick. If Black Alfie were able to overcome his fear, or if the water were drained *completely*, he would be free to wreak havoc.

### DISPATCH BLACK ALFIE

If the party cannot determine how to either release Black Alfie from eternal torment or instead turn the dark spirit against the town, their third option is to somehow "defeat" the spirit. Again, the trick here is the creek itself. Black Alfie is terrified of the fen's waters. Flooding his cavernous home will cause the spirit to flee. If the party really wants to torture the poor spirit, bathing in the fen's water before confronting him may trick Black Alfie into believing his master has returned for the sake of torment.

No matter what, Black Alfie is a restless spirit. Short of completing the task that haunts him, the spirit won't simply move on. So long as Thomas's body rests in the bog, Black Alfie is here to stay. The next best thing Lord Fandry can hope for is that the spirit is sent far, far away from his operation.





# Reeds And Peat

## THURLEIGH REEDS

Trees are scarce in the fen. The marshy landscape is unkind to all known varieties of timber throughout the Veglenic Kingdom. Instead, the fen is a seemingly endless expanse of winding waterways, haunting gray skies, and the endemic thurleigh reeds. These hardy marsh grasses are considered a nuisance by the largely male cohort of moorwing eelers. As they paddle their canoes through the winding creeks, they often scratch their hands and forearms on the abrasive reeds.

It is the women of Thestwick who have become the masters of the reeds. Thurleigh reeds are crucial to life on the fen. With proper processing, they can be used for everything from roofing, to clothing, parchment, and even music instruments. With so few natural resources to rely on in the fen, Thestwick's craftswomen have learned how to take advantage of everything they can.

The primary use of thurleigh reeds is in thatching. The thatched roof homes of Thestwick are surprisingly durable, and they make for great insulators during the harsh Alderham winters. To the surprise of many city-folk, a properly installed thatched roof can last 20 or 30 years before it needs to be replaced.

Much of the clothing worn by Thestwick's residents is also made from reeds. The process of making

anything remotely comfortable is quite labor-intensive. The reeds need to be painstakingly "massaged" with thick gloves to remove the scratchy burs. Clothiers can either make thick coats with these newly relaxed reeds, or else extract the softer fibers by retting the reeds in the marsh. Some Thestwick residents will trade for wool with the few fenfolk able to raise sheep, but most wear itchy reed clothing with at most one or two softer shirts.

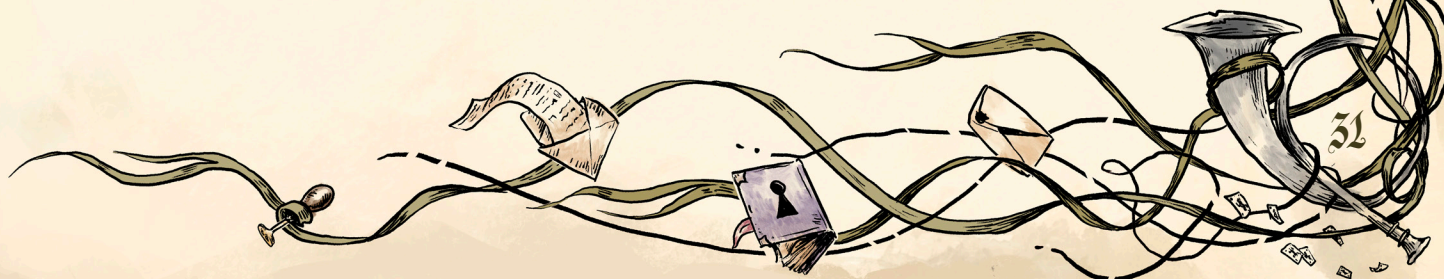
The craftswomen have found additional creative uses for the reeds, though they still use the vast majority of harvested marsh grasses for roofing and clothing. Dedicated artisans are able to make baskets, pens, and parchment, and a select few luthiers make idiosyncratic instruments. The "sywod shawm" is made from hollowed out eel bone with a double-reed mouthpiece. These grating woodwinds are exceptionally difficult to tune, and performances are typically unaccompanied.

## CATRYN AND HATTIE HOWELL

Thestwick mothers take great pride in teaching their daughters the trades of the fen. There's always a celebration when a young Thestwick girl first learns to make her own skirts and tunics from the native reeds. 70-year-old Catryn Howell (she/her) had the chance to teach her own daughter Meredith to work with reeds, and now, after Meredith's sudden death, Catryn gets the opportunity to teach her granddaughter Hattie (she/her) as well.

Catryn is among the oldest Thestwick residents. Her grandfather had been one of the original knights overseeing Thestwick Watch. Now, she trembles as she imagines the inevitable bleak future that her town and her grandchildren face. In the meantime, there is little Catryn can do except pass down her expertise to the younger generation. Though much of her work seems simple, there is a complex art to working with reeds: the exact twisting motion that most efficiently removes burs, the patterns for optimal thatching, and easily missed signals that retting is complete.

Young Hattie is happy to work with her grandmother, though times have been tough since her parents passed away. The older eelers have helped Hattie and Catryn by providing the family with enough food to live on, but there is an expectation that Hattie's younger brother Martyn should soon be supporting his family. That prospect is looking increasingly grim as even the experienced eelers struggle to fish the receding waters.







While Catryn frets over what she can do to help future generations, young Hattie is taking matters into her own hands. At night, she sneaks out of her home, slinks over to Gumperham the giant snail, and spies on bog witch Anise Bloodbirch. Rhett Nesling and his ill-fated resistance aren't going to save the town. Only magic can. Hattie suspects that Anise knows she's being watched; the witch has even begun to explicitly narrate her alchemy, perhaps in an effort to surreptitiously teach the snooping youngster. Should Hattie master some of the witch's dark secrets, she will bravely exercise her newfound abilities in an attempt to defeat the true villains of the fen: Lord and Lady Fandry, and that sycophant Louisa Terrowin.

Unbeknownst to the youngster, grandmother Catryn knows exactly what Hattie is doing. It may as well be a family tradition at this point. Catryn learned much from the witch of the Alderham Fen in her own youth. She hasn't dabbled in these dark arts for many years, but perhaps it is time Catryn guided her granddaughter in the careful practice of witchcraft.

**GM NOTE:** Catryn and Hattie are good NPCs to plop into whatever workshop your players feel like exploring. Catryn knows plenty about the city's past—about Thestwick Watch, Sir Ranulf, and the legend of Black Alfie—and Hattie will likely be unable to keep the secrets she's gleaned from Anise Bloodbirch. If anyone is going to spill some gossip or share some magical gifts, it will be this unusual duo.

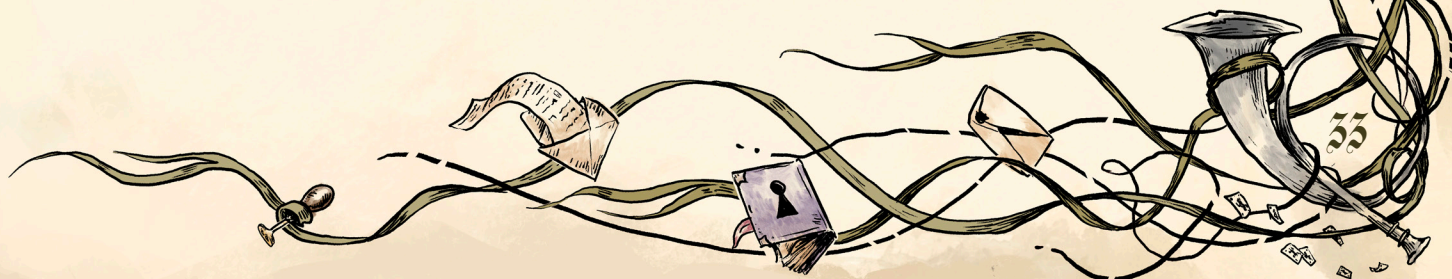
If the players can suss out that *both* Catryn and Hattie have done their own fair share of spying, it will be advantageous to encourage a bit of magical cooperation. With the aid of Catryn and Hattie's second-hand black magic, the adventurers may just get a leg up on the duke and duchess. Put another way: Catryn and Hattie are probably non-factors in the struggle for Thestwick *unless* the party can convince them to take advantage of the secrets they've gleaned. Alternatively, players cooperating with Lord Fandry can bolster their reputation by ratting out the potential dissident witches.


## ALDERHAM PEAT

The Alderham Fen is the perfect environment for the accumulation of peat. This layer of dense, moist, partially decayed biomass might at first seem like little more than unfarmable mud, but it holds a great many uses, and even more secrets.

For Thestwick residents, the primary purpose of harvesting peat is for fuel. Burning wood is strictly forbidden, given the scarcity of trees. As such, all heating and cooking uses dried peat instead. Women dry the peat in large open-air piles, a process that takes days. Residents will use peat bricks in specially built stoves to keep their homes warm during the winter or to cook eels and shellfish.

Once dried, the peat is highly flammable, which is both a blessing and a curse. Accidental fires are unfortunately common, and a peat blaze is difficult to extinguish. The residents are constantly worried that the Lowland Reclamation Corps with their new-fangled "cigars" will accidentally start a blaze that they cannot put out.





Of course, the peat has one additional property that none of Thestwick's residents have been able to harness. There is a latent magic in the Alderham Fen, and when the moist peat is processed just so—say, for example, in the intestines of a giant magical snail—its true arcane potential can be fully unleashed. Exploiting the peat for its alchemical properties is currently beyond the expertise of the Veglenic Kingdom's greatest minds, let alone the untrained fenfolk. If someone were to reveal the true power of the peat, however, it could drastically change the economic calculus of draining *and therefore withering* the biomass throughout the fen.

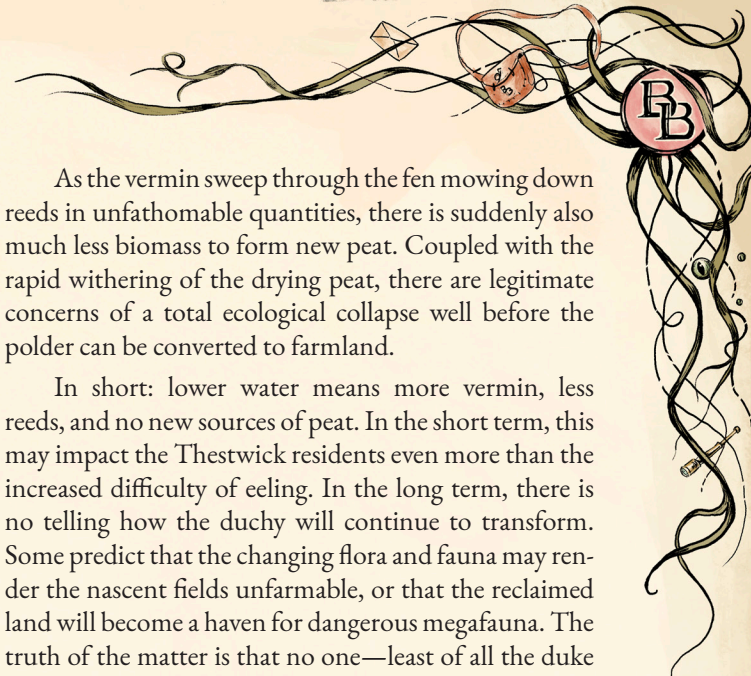
## GENDER DISPARITY

Thestwick's workforce is almost entirely segregated on the basis of gender. Men head out on the waters to eel, harvest shellfish, and gather reeds. Women make crafts, and tend to the children. Much as they try, there is no justification for this division beyond "well, that's how we do things here." Many of Thestwick's women forge far stronger bonds with the moorwings than the men of the fen, and these women could easily swap places with a man who would rather not spend his days wandering the waterways.

Lotthingham is little better. The Lowland Reclamation Corps and the Alderham knights aiding the expedition consist solely of men. When the duke and duchess traveled to Thestwick, the only women who relocated were Louisa Terrowin and Lady Mabel Fandry herself. Perhaps the only industry with a more equitable gender balance is that of farming. Though eelers and craftswomen would lose their traditional ways of life if the fen were fully drained, a new generation of farmers would bring about unprecedented gender equality in the fen. Of course, the overwhelming majority of these farmers would be serfs working under the watchful eyes of the Alderham knights. Still... that's progress, right?

## THE COMING SWARM

Alderham Fen's thurleigh reeds prosper even as the fenfolk harvest large quantities each month. With even the slightest change to the ecosystem, however, this is likely to change. One of the most unexpected transformations the fen has faced throughout the reclamation is the sudden explosion of vermin that have begun invading the polder. Previously, the water level was high enough to keep most shrews, voles, and rats from inhabiting the fen. That balance has rapidly shifted, and with it, the reeds suddenly face overabundant predators.



As the vermin sweep through the fen mowing down reeds in unfathomable quantities, there is suddenly also much less biomass to form new peat. Coupled with the rapid withering of the drying peat, there are legitimate concerns of a total ecological collapse well before the polder can be converted to farmland.

In short: lower water means more vermin, less reeds, and no new sources of peat. In the short term, this may impact the Thestwick residents even more than the increased difficulty of eeling. In the long term, there is no telling how the duchy will continue to transform. Some predict that the changing flora and fauna may render the nascent fields unfarmable, or that the reclaimed land will become a haven for dangerous megafauna. The truth of the matter is that no one—least of all the duke and duchess—knows what will happen as they continue to heedlessly drain a perilously balanced ecosystem.

## THE BUNKHOUSE

The village could not have been less prepared to house the dozens of lackeys the duke and duchess towed to Thestwick. For the first time in recent memory, the locals had to make legitimate sacrifices for their duchy. After the windpump was complete, they gathered as much wood as they possibly could—from what few trees remained, from decommissioned canoes, and even from their stockpile of funeral rafts—and built the ramshackle bunkhouse in which every single member of the Lowland Reclamation Corps now sleeps.

The bunkhouse would be condemned in any other city in the Veglenic Kingdom. The gang that calls it home has somehow found a way to make their squalid barracks smell worse than the surrounding marsh. Appalling odors emanate from this barely standing shanty.

What's worse, the bunkhouse sits immediately adjacent to the peat drying racks. Some residents have standing bets to see what will happen first: the peat goes up in flames, or the bunkhouse simply collapses.

Inside the bunkhouse, the members of the Corps drink until they can't distinguish the floor from the ceiling. They gamble their meager wages and plot money-making schemes for their eventual return to civilization. They wrestle, play darts, and tend to their clumsily self-inflicted wounds. To the Thestwick locals, the casual debauchery and immaturity of the bunkhouse is the surest sign that the fenfolk are superior in every way to the backwards cityfolk who are trying to take their wetlands from them.



**Jackson Havlin:** Back before Nathaniel Fandry's sudden ascension to duke, Jackson (he/him) had been the leader of the Lotthingham Rotters, the gang that was to become the Lowland Reclamation Corps. It was *he* who initially welcomed Nathaniel into the brotherhood, *he* who planned the robbery of Louisa Terrowin's coach, and *he* who begrudgingly agreed to let Nathaniel lead the team down to Thestwick. As expected, Jackson has largely stepped back from his leadership position within the crew. Lord Fandry calls the shots now, and Jackson, while bitter, accepts this strange twist of fate.

Many of his brothers question why Jackson allowed Nathaniel to commandeer the gang for largely personal benefit. Jackson claims that he knows a good opportunity when he sees one. This is *true*, but not for the reason most of his co-Corps members suspect. In truth, Jackson cut a deal with Nathaniel. Jackson took a backseat to Lord Fandry on the condition that Jackson ends up with a healthy plot of land once the reclamation is complete. He's had enough of life as a brigand. At this point, Jackson is content to commit to a year or two of labor in exchange for a graceful exit from crime as a minor lord in the new countryside.

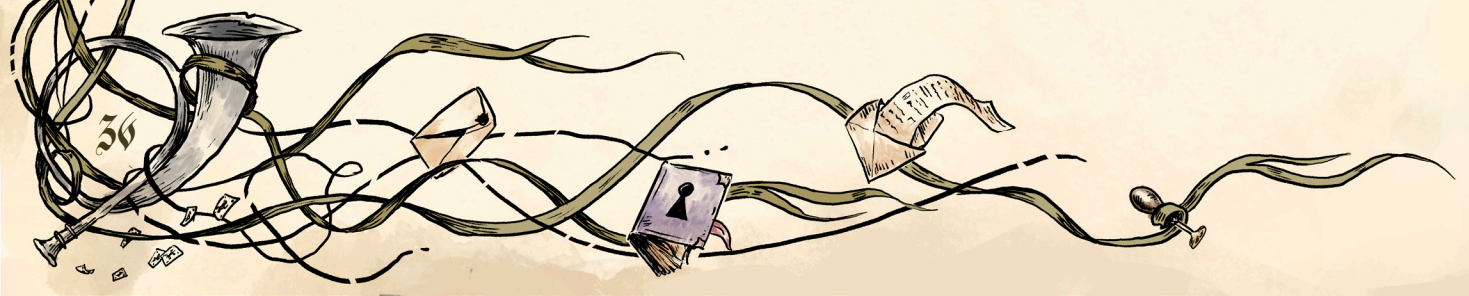
**Slimmy the Hagfish:** Slimmy (he/him) was among the most mean-spirited of the Lotthingham Rotters. While the rest of the crew was content to threaten violence and nab purses, Slimmy was obsessed with instilling genuine fear in his marks. One of his favorite techniques was to draw his own blood while holding up a carriage just to prove the depths of his depravity. Even his brothers in the gang feared Slimmy's commitment to allegedly strategic masochism. When Nathaniel assembled the Corps to join him on his venture to Thestwick, there were moments when the duke debated whether bringing Slimmy was even worth the risk.

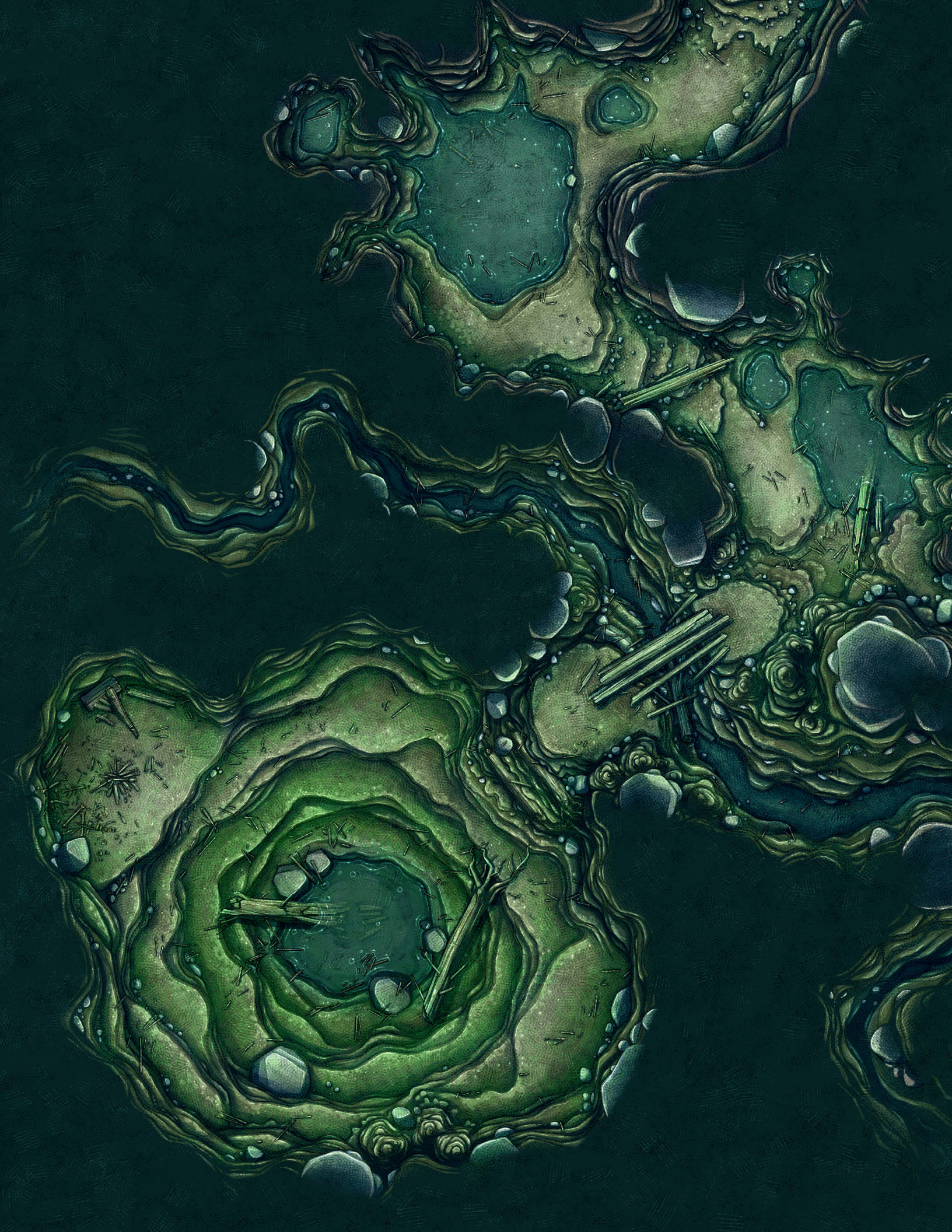
Now that Slimmy's had a good few months to enjoy life in the fen, he's questioning everything he once thought. Slimmy *loves* the fen. He loves the crisp air, the chewy overcooked eels, and the perfect balance of gloom and wonder. He's curbed his drinking, and he is slowly working up the courage to admit the truth to his friends and allies: he isn't going back to Lotthingham when this is all done. Slimmy's going to stay in Thestwick and hopefully help these people find their way in the newly reclaimed fen.



**Lonnie Poyner:** As soon as the Corps arrived in town, Thestwick's women began discouraging their younger unmarried friends from cavorting with the disreputable city-folk. There was a sort of irony to it. After all, Thestwick as a village is the result of relationships between Alderham knights and the local fenfolk. Sometimes, there's no accounting for who you fall in love with.

Lonnie Poyner (she/her), a local weaver, has fallen for a member of the Corps. Or rather, she fell one member of the Corps, and then another, and then another. There's just something about the hypermasculinity of these metropolitan oafs that Lonnie finds utterly irresistible. She is trying to keep her expectations tempered, but Lonnie prays every night that one or two of the handsome bachelors will stick around and that they can become a happy farming couple. Maybe it's not so hopeless as she suspects...





## BULGRECK

To say that the people of Thestwick have lived in “harmony” with cave troll Bulgreck (he/him) may be overselling the agency of the fenfolk. In truth, Thestwick residents give Bulgreck a wide berth. The troll would wade through the fen, snatching whichever eels seemed tastiest before returning to the grotto he calls home. When an eeler spied Bulgreck, they’d simply turn around. The hulking figure is easy to see from a distance, especially in the vast expanses of the wetlands where only a few trees could possibly obscure the troll’s frame.

Make no mistake: Bulgreck is *imposing*, and the people of Thestwick *fear him*. And yet, until the duke and duchess arrived, there wasn’t a single example of Bulgreck hurting anyone. Unlike other predators, there’s no evidence that Bulgreck is as afraid of the humans as they are of him, but he has also never shown any particular interest in mingling with the villagers. Instead, Bulgreck keeps to himself, hunting the fen, scratching his back on the scant few willow trees, and basking in the rare days of sunshine that grace the wetlands.

Of course, the fen is changing, and with it Bulgreck’s daily routine. As the waters continue to fall, Bulgreck is forced to fish closer and closer to the village. The deepest basins in the Alderham Fen are all in the immediate vicinity of Thestwick, and if he wanted to get to Alderham Creek, he’d have to pass the village anyway. It has become increasingly difficult for the people of Thestwick to avoid Bulgreck, leading to the first violent spat with the troll.

Bulgreck is not bright, but he is also not mindless. He is capable of rudimentary speech, learned from observing the eelers over the decades. He is aware that the humans are making the water levels drop, but he doesn’t quite understand how or why. Bulgreck is *not* scared of the humans—he knows he could easily pummel the frail creatures—but he *is* scared for his future. If he can’t hunt eels, will he be forced to befriend the birds like the tiny humans do? Or will he have to resort to more extreme measures... eels and humans alike are both mostly made of meat.



## BULGRECK’S CAVE

Once a short paddle from Thestwick, the mouth of Bulgreck’s cave is now a miserable muddy hike southwest of the village. Deep in the lowest bowels of this cave, Bulgreck used to be able to sit in relative peace, submerging 90% of his body in the curative fen waters that keep him young and healthy. He would take seeds and berries, mash them up, and paint little murals on his walls, whiling away the time in moist serenity.

While the Thestwick locals refer to Bulgreck as a “cave troll,” a more accurate taxonomy would classify him as a form of “freshwater bog troll.” The “cave” aspect of Bulgreck’s identity is more or less incidental to his physiology. He sits in his cave to avoid disturbing the humans, and to avoid the constantly pestering moorwings. The real key to his survival is the water itself. Bulgreck must remain submerged in water at least twelve to sixteen hours per day. So long as the water has touched the nearby peat, there will always be enough ambient magical vigor to provide Bulgreck with the energy he needs.

The shape of Bulgreck’s cave also ensured that there would always be plenty of deep water in which Bulgreck could lounge and keep a few eels for late night meals. However, the reclamation has affected even his cave. To stay hydrated, Bulgreck must lie prostrate in the shallow puddle of water that remains at the nadir of his den. His reserve eels are dying, and the snails that would normally hang around on the walls of his cave have begun to seek out new homes. The reclamation is impacting everyone, even poor Bulgreck.



## PLOT HOOK: CONFRONT BULGRECK

Now that Bulgreck is forced to hunt closer and closer to Thestwick, the threat of continued violence—accidental or otherwise—grows by the day. There are still conflicting accounts of how Lowland Reclamation Corps member Clarence Carter ended up smashed by the troll. Fellow Corps brother Jackson Havlin says Bulgreck was the instigator, whereas eeler Rhett Nesling claims to have seen Clarence drunkenly attempt to sneak up on the lumbering troll. In either case, Clarence was summarily thrashed about, folded in on himself, and impaled into the peat.

Needless to say, Lord Fandry will not be having any of that. He needs the ragtag adventurers he's recruited to sort out this Bulgreck mess once and for all. As with each of the creatures haunting the fen, Lord Fandry does not care how the party tackles this particularly beefy obstacle, though he suspects this ought to be the most straightforward of his marks. After all, Bulgreck's got no magic and he isn't a ghost. He's just a big, killable bully who needs to be dealt with, presumably with extreme violence.

### BULGRECK'S AIMS

Unlike Anise Bloodbirch, Bulgreck doesn't have a clear understanding of what is going on in Thestwick. He knows he needs the fen's waters to survive, and he knows that those waters are receding. He knows it's becoming harder and harder to find eels, and that he runs the risk of starting more fights as he veers toward the village. All of this frustrates Bulgreck endlessly, but he hasn't quite arrived at any meaningful conclusions.

All Bulgreck wants is for everything to return to the way it was. He enjoyed his simple life of painting on his cave walls, trudging through the fen, and eating tasty eels. He has no interest in smashing the village of humans, but he *will* do whatever it takes to stay alive.

Crucially, Bulgreck requires *fen* water. He cannot simply relocate to some other pond, river, or reservoir. Only peat-infused water can sustain the ancient beast. Even if he has trouble vocalizing this fact, he is aware that he cannot leave the fen.

## APPROACH BULGRECK

Bulgreck spends most of his time in his cave. Unlike other great beast lairs, there are no traps or lesser foes on the way inside. It is simply a damp and winding cave filled with crude drawings and eel bones. Adventurers should be wary of slipping on the smooth rock and bonking their heads, but other than that, it is a simple enough task to march to the mouth of the cave and then descend below.

Alternatively, Bulgreck has an increasing need to hunt for eels instead of relying on the stockpiles he once kept in the waist-deep waters of his den. Bulgreck is *exceedingly* easy to track. Now that the water level has fallen so low, his large tracks will be visible wherever he has stomped. Additionally, for whatever reason, moorwings love to harass the cave troll. It's unclear whether this is some sort of misunderstood commensalism or a form of deep-rooted hatred embedded into the moorwing psyche. In either case, moorwings will home in on Bulgreck if they can catch his scent. From there, it's simply a matter of following the birds to the troll himself.

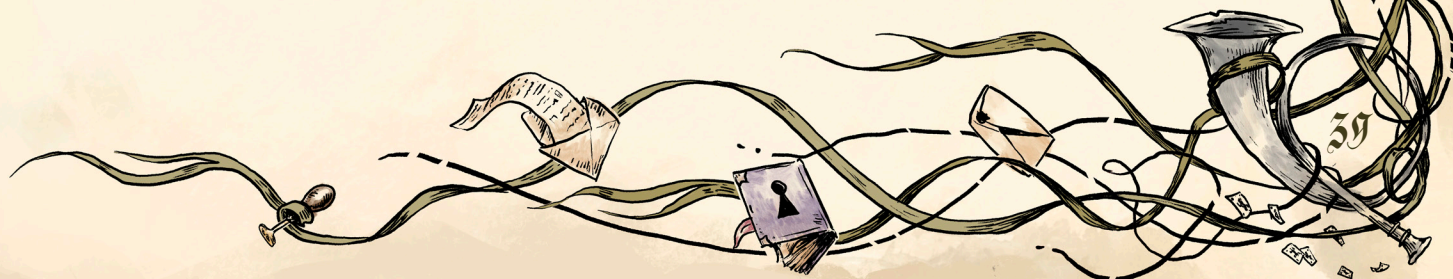
## DEAL WITH BULGRECK

Though Lord Fandry has left this job open-ended, he'll make it clear that he believes the wisest solution is to kill the brute. He'll scoff at the notion of engaging diplomacy, though he won't rule it out entirely. It is not out of cruelty that Lord Fandry suggests a violent approach but prudence. Of course, the adventurers may have different notions, especially if they've already spoken with rebellious Rhett Nesling or Anise Bloodbirch.

### KILL BULGRECK

In a fair fight, Bulgreck will easily vanquish all but the hardest opponents. He's large, strong, and hard to take down. The easiest way to kill him is to outsmart him. Bulgreck likely won't be expecting anyone to even attempt to fight him. After all, no one's given him much trouble in the decades that he's lived in the fen.

Bulgreck's downfall will likely be his predictability. Each day he will exit his cave, and each evening he will return. Bulgreck can be easily ambushed either time. Even if the party is able to camouflage themselves in advance of an attack, however, they should be particularly wary of Bulgreck's fine-tuned senses. The cave troll has honed his senses of smell and hearing with years of tracking eels.



**GM NOTE:** If the players immediately opt to kill Bulgreck, a straightforward fight can turn out to be pretty anticlimactic. Ultimately, a brutish cave troll is likely to be little more than a damage sponge, and a well-executed ambush may be both narratively and mechanically unfulfilling.

For more advanced players, consider twisting the narrative. Maybe Anise has already gotten to Bulgreck, bestowed him with magical weapons, and warned him of the dastardly adventures. Or maybe Bulgreck has taken the time to enlist fen creatures: he'll be harder to take down with swarms of eels, wolves, and predatory birds joining the fight. Finally, consider ramping up the threats of his lair. Has Bulgreck been secretly gathering food for a yet-unseen troll wife? Or is Bulgreck actually *two nearly identical trolls* that have never ventured out into the fen at the same time? Your players should never assume that they know the whole story going into a monster hunt.

**GAIN BULGRECK'S TRUST**

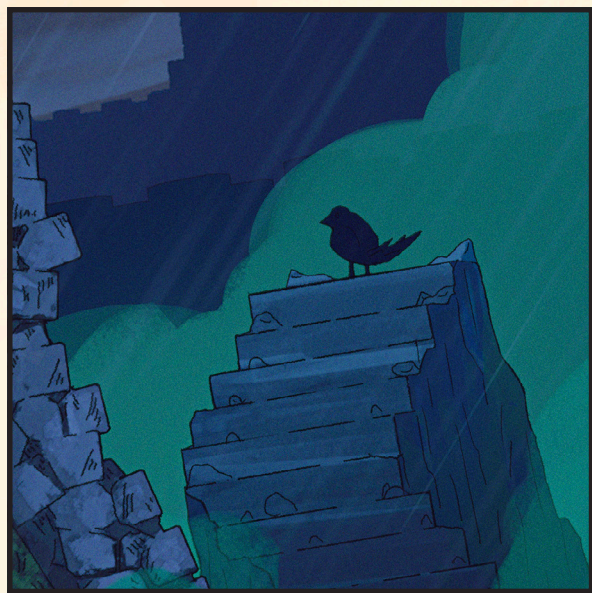
Both Anise and the Thestwick Resistance would be happy to gain the aid of Bulgreck. After all, he's never demonstrated open hostility to either the bog witch or the village locals. Unfortunately, there's quite a wide gap between "non-hostile" and "friendly" when it comes to trolls. Bulgreck is difficult to approach, and even if the adventurers attempt to make inroads peacefully, Bulgreck is extremely territorial.

As with all introverts, the easiest way to gain Bulgreck's trust is to appeal to his interests. Bulgreck wants eels to eat, berries and seeds for paint, and some easier way to moisturize in solitude. Of course, the adventurers are unlikely to actually know any of these details. As such, some careful reconnaissance will likely be necessary.

Curiously, most Thestwick residents don't seem to be aware that Bulgreck is capable of speech. After all, the eelers never attempt to approach him, so the troll has never had a reason to yell "get back." Rhett and Jackson—both of whom witnessed Bulgreck kill Clarence—*have* heard Bulgreck speak. Rhett says the troll kept saying "I don't want to hurt you," whereas Jackson

claims he was hurling obscenities. Regardless, either will tell the adventurers that Bulgreck *can* in fact understand the local tongue. If the party slowly approaches Bulgreck while assuring the troll they won't hurt him and offering something he actually wants—say, a delicious mudshell—Bulgreck may engage them in conversation.





# Irredeemable

## LADY MABEL'S COTTAGE

The duchess followed her husband to Thestwick begrudgingly. She knew she'd have a limited mandate to rule in the duke's stead, and she also knew that poor Nathaniel would be *truly inconsolable* without his beloved for the untold months he'd be away from their estate. Thus, Lady Mabel agreed to accompany Nathaniel and the Lowland Reclamation Corps on one condition: she was to be given a proper cottage from which to perform her governmental duties.

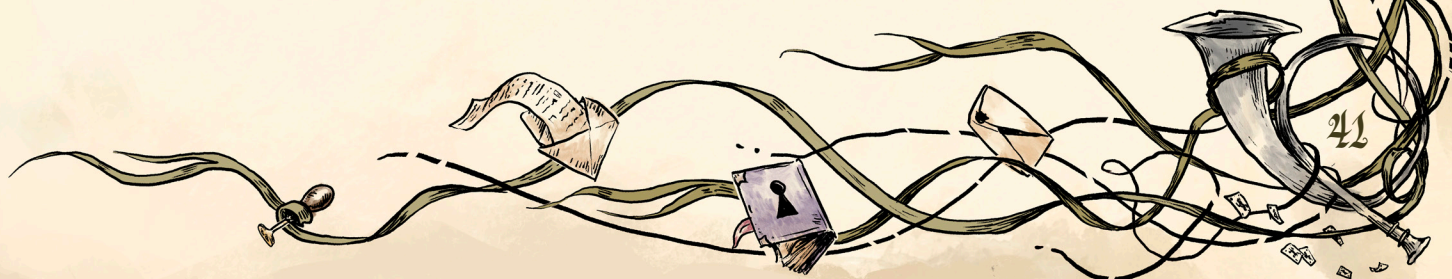
The Corps did their best to appease their duchess. The cottage is pleasant, or at least quite a bit more pleasant than the surrounding homes, stores, and workshops. Were Lady Mabel a busier noble, this would be a perfectly acceptable office. As it stands, the duchess has close to zero responsibilities other than to keep an eye on her husband and his cronies. The cottage is thus little more than a cute home in an otherwise wet and backwoods town. It still serves an incredibly crucial purpose for the Lady: the cottage provides a convenient escape from her husband. The doting duke is an unbelievable nuisance, and Lady Mabel needs as much time away from him as possible. The residents of Thestwick gossip tirelessly about the duke and duchess's separate homes, unsurprisingly, but that is a small price to pay for a piece of solace.

Each morning, Lady Mabel forces herself out of the cottage to begin her daily rounds. In her continuous efforts to become a humbler ruler, she offers her aid to any in need. Of course, there is little in Thestwick Lady Mabel is actually fit to do; she has no aptitude toward carpentry, fishing, animal care, or reed crafts. Instead, Lady Mabel has fashioned herself something of a minor courier, fetching this and that for anyone in need. She still botches the majority of her deliveries, but curse be damned, the Corps and the fenfolk alike appreciate her efforts.

As Lady Mabel's reputation inches upward in Thestwick, it continues to fall precipitously elsewhere in the duchy. Everyone but the knights—who stand to gain some free farmland if the reclamation is successful—vilify their absentee ruler. While some in distant Lotthingham hold out hope that the operation in the fen will have ripple effects that aid business in the capital, most consider the endeavor a costly experiment at best or a worthless vanity project at worst. Political cartoons depict Mabel, Nathaniel, and architect Louisa Terrowin as a cursed ice queen, a lovesick buffoon, and a beguiling witch respectively. Even now, every minor noble throughout the fen debates whether it's worth attempting a power grab with the duke and duchess away in Thestwick, or whether taking the duchy for themselves would even be worth the effort.

For now, Lady Mabel's cottage is a perfect embodiment of the pointlessness of the duchess's rule. The small pocket of cutesy architecture does little to beautify the surrounding village. Likewise, the duchess's efforts to improve the lives of Thestwick's residents are a drop in the bucket compared to the overwhelming harm she and her husband are inflicting on the surrounding fen.

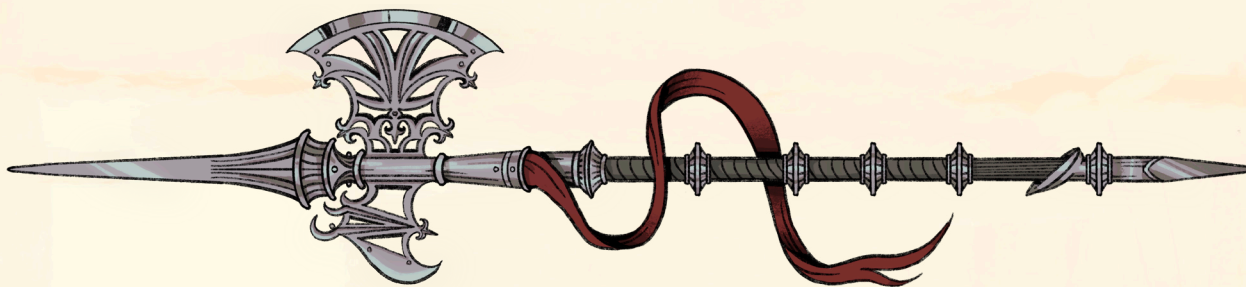
If the adventurers decide to give themselves a "self-guided tour" of the cottage, however, they will find much of value. Like many nobles, Lady Mabel cannot help herself from hauling miniature luxuries and precious baubles wherever she goes.





**D6 COTTAGE LOOT DESCRIPTION**

1	Silverware set	The most obvious treasure in the cottage. Unfortunately, Lady Mabel herself was duped into buying fake silver. A reputable fence will only pay a pittance for these primarily nickel-made spoons and knives.
2	Sir Ranulf's unclaimed halberd	Before Sir Ranulf departed for Thestwick Watch, he had a glorious halberd commissioned from the premier blacksmith in Lotthingham. When the knight never returned, the blacksmith instead gifted the masterwork to the duchy.
3	Copy of Louisa's blueprints	Were Louisa Terrowin to abscond from the village, the entire reclamation would be in jeopardy. As such, Lady Mabel secretly instructed the squires to make copies of the blueprints for her windpump. The diagrams are imperfect, but necessary repairs should be easy enough to work out, and the duchy could always make some money by selling access to the design.
4	Lady Mabel's wedding ring	Lady Mabel doesn't wear her wedding ring. That should come as no surprise. Of note, however, is that Lord Fandry pilfered the ring during his days with the Lotthingham Rotters. If the minor noble Nathaniel robbed were to notice the idiosyncratic ring on Lady Mabel's finger, there would certainly be some drama in the duchy.
5	The Eye of Talmouth	One hundred years ago, hostilities with the neighboring duchy of Talmouth ended through diplomacy instead of war. The duchesses of both regions gave gifts to symbolize the truce. Talmouth's gift to the Alderham Fen was a brilliant emerald. Supposedly taken from the crown of some distant Queen Selenniaste, the emerald resonates with a faint magical aura. Could this be the source of Lady Mabel's curse?
6	Locket of the Lady's beloved	Lady Mabel never recovered from the death of her first betrothed. To this day, she keeps a locket containing a few strands of his hair in a secret compartment under bed. Lord Nathaniel would be <i>devastated</i> if he knew Lady Mabel still felt so strongly.

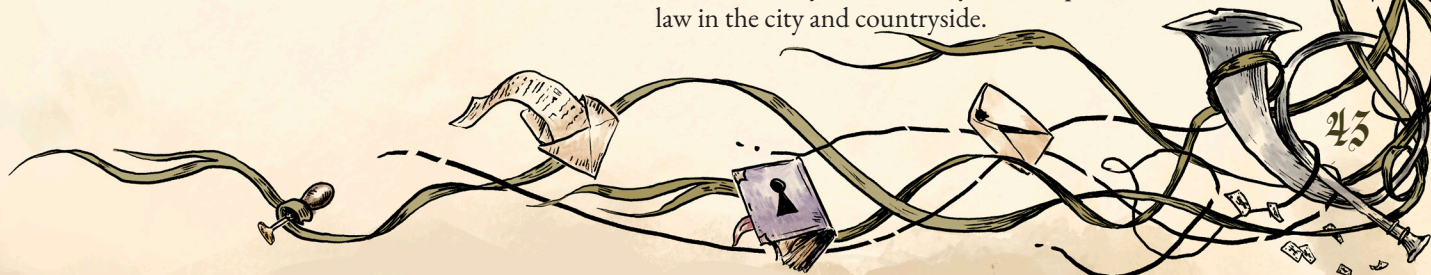



### THE ALDERHAM KNIGHTS

While Lady Mabel is generally distrustful of her knights—that is, those who have sworn allegiance to Alderham Fen and not simply Lord Fandry—even she has to acknowledge that it would have been riskier to venture into Thestwick without them. As such, she opted to bring three of her most trustworthy knights and their squires. While hardly a meaningful fighting force, she figured they would at least be able to protect her. Potential assassins are an incredible risk out in these furthest reaches of her duchy. Presumably, few would have the political motivation to attempt such a strategic killing, but Lady Mabel needs to be prepared nonetheless.

Alderham knights are quite different from those in most neighboring kingdoms. Most *own* horses, plate armor, and claymores, but these are primarily formalities. Out in the fen, thick leather armor, a sturdy longbow, and lengthy pikes are far more practical. Riding horseback is nigh impossible in the fen... or at least it was prior to the reclamation. Even now, it's still difficult to trudge through endless quagmire.

As aspirations of conquest have been far outside the realm of acceptable political discourse in Lady Mabel's duchy for over a century, most knights are sentries, peacekeepers, and wealthy landowners. They protect the kingdom against minor border incursions, oversee the limited farmland in the vicinity of Lotthingham, and *occasionally* do what they can to uphold the rule of law in the city and countryside.





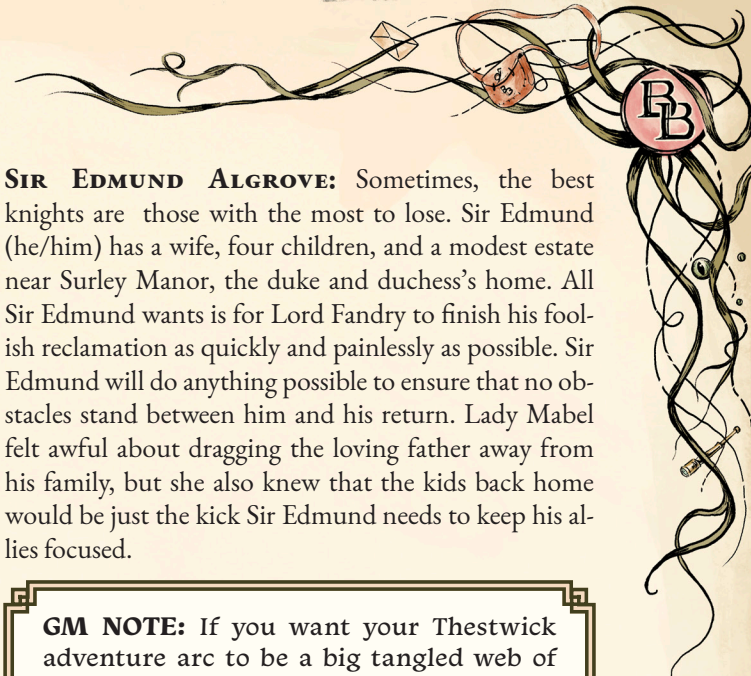
In Thestwick, Lady Mabel's chosen knights do almost nothing. Theoretically, they have a perfectly timed rotation: eight hours accompanying Lady Mabel, eight hours guarding the cottage, and eight hours of rest. In practice, this is rarely the case. The cottage is virtually never properly guarded, as the knights sic that responsibility on their squires. Likewise, Lady Mabel has increasingly requested *not* to be accompanied while running trivial errands. Her stated reasoning for this is that she's trying to be more independent; in truth, she just wants there to be fewer people around when she fumbles the simplest of tasks.

Most of the time, the knights enjoy downtime. They have slowly befriended certain members of the Lowland Reclamation Corps, namely those who will pander to them. The knights know what these sycophants are doing, of course. The Corps figures that if they butter up the knights, the knights will agree to gamble, and inevitably lose. The knights don't mind. They've got more coin than they know what to do with, and they appreciate the company.

**SIR CALLEN PEMBROKE:** None challenge the honor Sir Callen (he/him). There's no point in challenging Sir Callen's. He's got none, and he'll be upfront about it. What Sir Callen lacks in honor, he makes up for with dependability. So long as he is well paid, Sir Callen will do just about anything, including live in the fen and protect the duchess. Lady Mabel knows that Sir Callen is a rotten bastard, but she also knows that as long as she has the coin to compensate him, he'll be steadfast.

If the adventurers come into a sizeable enough fortune of their own, they may be able to purchase Sir Callen's loyalty.

**SIR BANFORD DAVIES:** Like many in Lotthingham, Sir Banford clings to what few specks of noble history he can. Alderham Fen has never been grand or powerful, but the duchy's knights were once the most feared in the Veglenic Kingdom. Now Sir Banford (he/him) honors that tradition by doing everything in his power to terrify any would-be opponents. This dirty, sulking brute might appear meek and inconsequential when he's in the corner, but when he rises to almost 7 feet tall in his sabatons, most will cower in fear before they'd ever face him in a duel.



**SIR EDMUND ALGROVE:** Sometimes, the best knights are those with the most to lose. Sir Edmund (he/him) has a wife, four children, and a modest estate near Surley Manor, the duke and duchess's home. All Sir Edmund wants is for Lord Fandry to finish his foolish reclamation as quickly and painlessly as possible. Sir Edmund will do anything possible to ensure that no obstacles stand between him and his return. Lady Mabel felt awful about dragging the loving father away from his family, but she also knew that the kids back home would be just the kick Sir Edmund needs to keep his allies focused.

**GM NOTE:** If you want your Thestwick adventure arc to be a big tangled web of overlapping faction allegiances and motivations, then feel free to play up any minor disputes between the knights, the Corps, and the locals. They are distinct groups with nuanced views of what's best for the fen. You could absolutely design a mini-arc centered on the conflict between the largely lower-class members of the Corps and the landed knights.

If, however, Thestwick is just a "homebase" for some good old-fashioned monster hunting, then it may be advisable to present all Thestwick-based factions as a unified whole: that is, a bunch of humans who want the fen rid of monsters. Not every fantasy city needs to be some allegory about capitalism, colonialism, and environmentalism. You can absolutely just take a bunch of cool eelers, knights, and gang members and have them root for the party as they beat up a quartet of monsters. *That's totally fun.* Read your table and give your friends the adventure they want!

## THE SQUIRES

Regardless of how well trained any given knight may be, they are each nearly useless without their squires. Sirs Callen, Banford, and Edmund's boys—Horace, Orvis, and "Bozo"—tackle most of the actual responsibilities assigned to the knights. They keep watch, accompany Lady Mabel, and "investigate" minor crimes. Of course, the Lowland Reclamation Corps is responsible for the overwhelming majority of misdemeanors in the town, and they are invariably pardoned for any wrongdoing.



Just like everyone else that the duke and duchess dragged to Thestwick, Horace, Orvis, and Bozo are insolent troublemakers. Take three 13-year-old kids, tell them to keep watch of a cute cottage all day, and they are bound to get up to no good. They spent more time down below the city playing in the mud than they do attending to all of their assigned tasks combined. That said, no harm has yet come to Lady Mabel, and the trio have fulfilled the basic requirements expected of squires: maintaining armor and weapons, dressing the knights, and lending a modicum of legitimacy to the whole affair.

Against all odds, the trio of squires have become incredibly popular among the locals. While none would describe these youngsters as “polite,” they each demonstrate a sort of boyish kindness that is at odds with the condescension and rudeness of the knights and the Corps. When old Catryn Howell needs someone to pick up a reed she’s dropped, one of the squires will happily make sure the matriarch doesn’t have to put her weathered back at risk. When the eelers need a hand hauling in their boats after a day on the creek, the squires will offer their assistance. This baseline level of helpfulness puts the actual knights to shame, and it has endeared the fenfolk to the cheeky hooligans.

While the squires of Thestwick seem charming but innocuous, they will draw their side-swords if they or Lady Mabel are threatened. Although still early in their training, the squires are competent duelists and will defend themselves with honor. And if the party brings chaos to the swamp, the squires will not defect. They

will remain loyal to the duchy until the very end, even if that means striking down the Thestwick residents that they’ve slowly befriended.

## THE TEMPORARY GARRISON

In perfect contrast to the Lowland Reclamation Corps’ bunkhouse, the Alderham knights’ temporary garrison is well built and well maintained. Though the Corps’ few dozen members vastly outnumber the three knights and three squires, the two sets of lodging are roughly equal in size. This is yet another constant reminder that the power hierarchies of distant Lotthingham still carry a great deal of weight out in the fen.

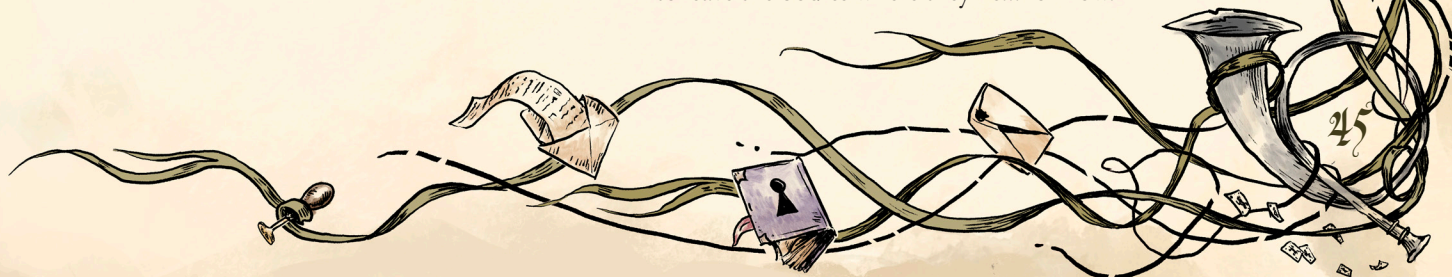
In a sense, the temporary garrison is Thestwick coming full circle. After all, the town was first inhabited by knights with lodging far bigger than it needed to be. In fact, the very stones used to build the garrison were salvaged from the crumbled tower of Thestwick Watch.

There has been no shortage of jokes about the sorry state of the Alderham knights and the reclamation in general. Some say that the temporary garrison will someday come to be known as “Thestwick Watch the Second,” a jab implying that a) this meager outpost is the best the Alderham knights will be able to establish, and b) that the never-ending reclamation will require a permanent knight force within the village. It’s not exactly a *funny* joke, but it underscores both the pessimism of the fenfolk and the disdain with which they look down on the cityfolk.

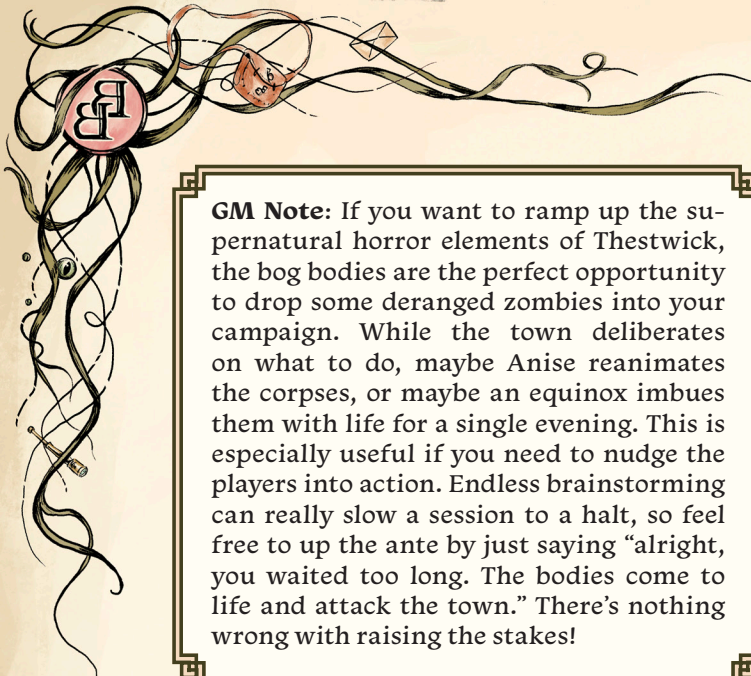
## BOG BODIES

Fenfolk tradition holds that anyone who drowns in the fen is to be left undisturbed. Removing a corpse from the boggy waters can perturb the spirits of the fen. As such, a dozen or so bodies remain perfectly preserved and scattered throughout the area surrounding Thestwick. As the reclamation slowly drains the fen, these bodies are finally starting to resurface.

Thestwick locals are divided over what to do with these mummified cadavers. Now that there’s so little water in the fen, is it *really* breaking with tradition to move them? Or should they still be left in place? Is it safe to touch the bodies? While moorwings typically peck at bodies left out in the sun, they seem entirely averse to even approaching these bodies. Lord Fandry’s first instinct was to simply haul the bodies into the creek and let them wash away, but in an uncharacteristic show of defiance, the Thestwick locals persuaded Lord Fandry to leave the bodies where they lie... for now.







**GM Note:** If you want to ramp up the supernatural horror elements of Thestwick, the bog bodies are the perfect opportunity to drop some deranged zombies into your campaign. While the town deliberates on what to do, maybe Anise reanimates the corpses, or maybe an equinox imbues them with life for a single evening. This is especially useful if you need to nudge the players into action. Endless brainstorming can really slow a session to a halt, so feel free to up the ante by just saying “alright, you waited too long. The bodies come to life and attack the town.” There’s nothing wrong with raising the stakes!

## THE BOG NIX

Throughout the past century, a surprisingly high number of Thestwick residents have drowned in the fen below the city. Many of these are easily explained: a reed harvester gets trapped in the muck, a child falls from the stone walkways, or an eeler gets his comeuppance from a thrashing darkdiver. Even so, the fenfolk spend their whole lives in the fen. Is it realistic that so many of them would fall prey to the waters they call home?

Some of the more superstitious residents claim that there is a fifth supernatural villain haunting the town: the so-called “bog nix.” Ancient folktales speak of a misguided otherworldly creature who lures fenfolk into the water, grips them with her claws, and then pries their mouth open to force the murky fen water into their lungs. Mystics like Catryn Howell claim that the bog nix acts mercifully, granting her victims eternal life through the all-preserving peat moss. After all, a body in the bog *does* stop aging.

For now, Lord Fandry considers rumors of the bog nix doubtful. He is much more concerned with the dangers he knows than those he doesn’t.

## SIR RANULF

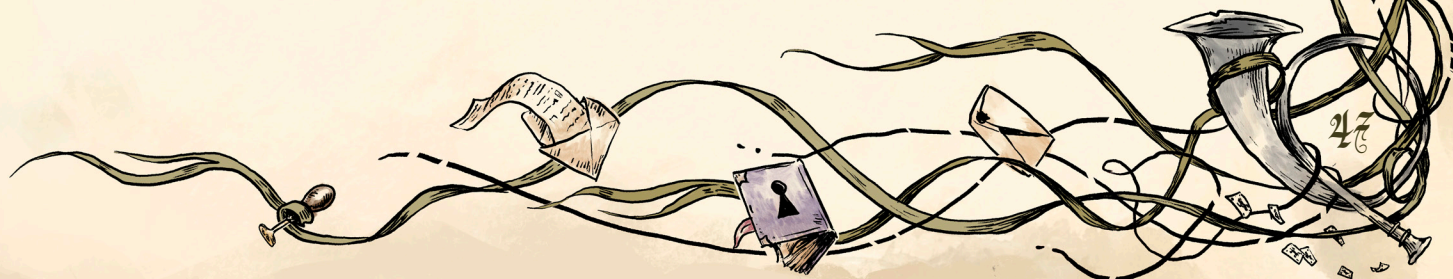
The original soldiers stationed at Thestwick Watch were led by Sir Ranulf Nanbury, a decorated knight who served as the duke’s trusted advisor and protector. While many of the Alderham knights sent to the garrison were dismayed at the prospect of spending months or years in a fetid swamp, Sir Ranulf was instead honored to be defending the duchy to which he

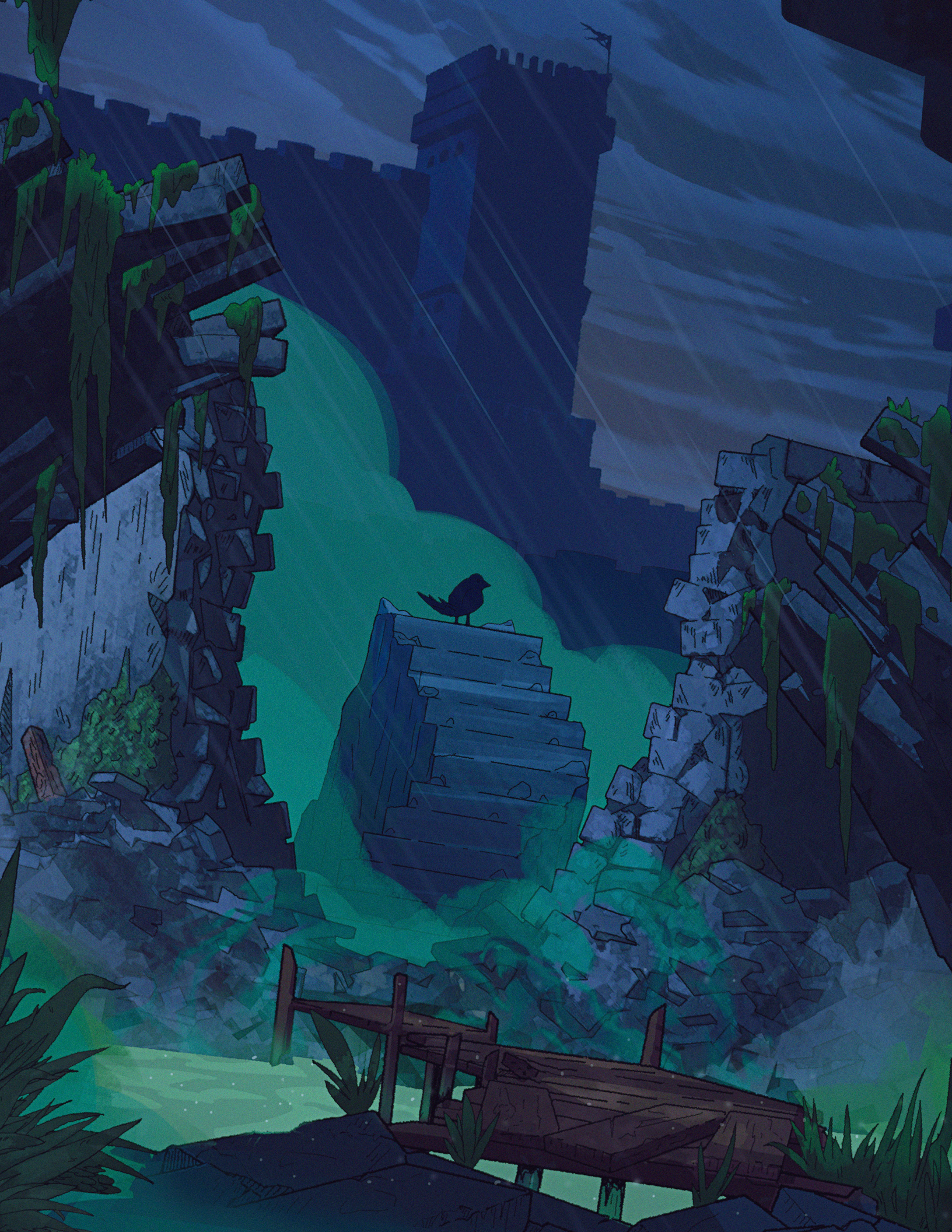


had pledged his life. The conflict with neighboring Talmouth remained a stalemate, but Sir Ranulf dutifully trained his troops, prepared for all varieties of attack, and remained ever-vigilant.

Of course, the supposedly “inevitable” conflict never resulted in bloodshed. Both sides backed off as diplomacy won the day. Sir Ranulf was torn. On one hand, he was relieved that the duke and duchess could claim a political victory. On the other, he *yearned* for battle. He had spent so long preparing to fight. Was there really no glory to be claimed? Would Sir Ranulf return to Lotthingham and act as a mere bodyguard for the rest of his days?

After the peace treaty was signed, the duke sent word to Thestwick Watch that the Alderham knights were relieved of duty. They could return to Lotthingham for new assignments, or else claim land and title in the fen or the scant few unclaimed fields near the capital. Many, evidently, chose to stay in Thestwick. In an unorthodox move, Sir Ranulf sent a letter to the duke claiming that he had secret intel revealing that Talmouth may not have conducted a full retreat of their troops. Sir







Ranulf pledged himself to remain in Thestwick Watch until he could *guarantee* there would be no clandestine incursion. The duke was confused, but granted Sir Ranulf's request.

Sir Ranulf and his squire Kenric claimed Thestwick Watch for themselves. They roamed the now empty halls and scouted the endless expanse of fen beyond, keeping watch for invaders. In the back of his mind, Sir Ranulf *knew* there was no threat, but he was also certain that a return to the capital would be the death of his spirit. He needed to be out here on the frontlines, ready for combat, ready to defend Alderham Fen's borders.

As the burgeoning town outside the keep's walls gradually developed, Sir Ranulf's mental health quickly began to deteriorate. He grew increasingly paranoid and obsessed with fighting the rotten bastards to the south. He would trek out into the open fen in search of enemy combatants, only to return to Thestwick Watch each night to fester in his deranged hatred. Kenric the squire followed suit, and the two finally succumbed to their madness. Certain that an attack was imminent, they locked the doors behind them and vowed to hold the border until the end of time.

After the pair barricaded themselves inside the keep, the residents of Thestwick figured that the crazed Sir Ranulf would starve, and that would be that. Years and years passed, however, and residents continued to spy candles flickering and silhouettes passing by the arrowslits in the towers. It was clear that someone or something was still living—in some capacity—within the abandoned keep.

## THESTWICK WATCH

The great fortress in the fen has been out of use for almost one hundred years. In that time, many of its outer walls have been picked clean, with the original stones of the construction repurposed for use in the town.

Thestwick Watch was built on unsound foundations. The soggy fen soil can handle smaller buildings, but construction on the scale of Thestwick Watch was always destined to crack and sink. Crumbling parapets have become such an omnipresent hazard that residents are encouraged to never approach the keep for fear of falling masonry. The deterioration of the keep began to accelerate at an alarming pace once the reclamation began in earnest. As the earth beneath the structure started to dry and compress, large fissures opened up in the walls. Eventually, the primary watchtower itself broke off from the keep and came crashing to the ground, smashing into the southeast corner of the village.

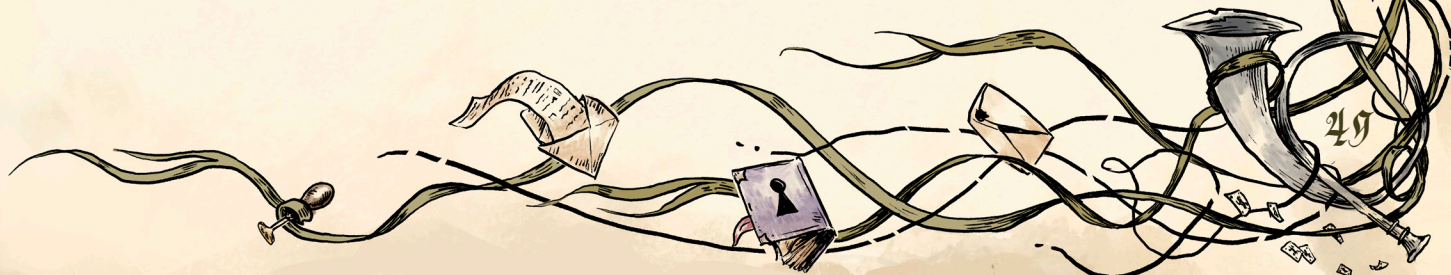
The total collapse of the fortress now seems inevitable, but no one can be sure how long it has left. It could be a matter of days, or it could be years. In the meantime, the fragmenting keep is an omnipresent hazard.


Lord Fandry decided that the only safe way to deal with a slowly deteriorating fortress would be to execute a planned demolition of the structure. He didn't know how exactly he would go about that, but he figured a few scouts could take some notes on the architecture of the building and then report back to Louisa. Presumably Thestwick's great engineer could work something out. However, each time he sent members of the Corps to investigate, someone would start opening fire from *within* the keep. If the Lowland Reclamation Corps is going to demolish Thestwick Watch, they'll first have to take out whoever is defending it.

## PLOT HOOK: CONFRONT SIR RANULF

Every morning, Lord Nathaniel Fandry looks up at the crumbling Thestwick Watch and frets. If the rest of the building were to suddenly collapse, the resultant shockwave could take out Thestwick altogether. The sooner he can get the entire building dismantled—even if he has to do it stone by stone—the better. He needs the party to eliminate whoever keeps trying to kill each of his men before they are able to investigate the structure.

Lord Fandry figures that Sir Ranulf is *somehow* behind this, but the details are unclear. After all, if Sir





Ranulf were still alive, he would have to be close to 130-years-old by now. Maybe he had a secret family in the keep? Or maybe this is just Anise up to more tricks? In either case, Lord Fandry is light on intel and will be quick to send the party off to do their own detective work. As always, he is incredibly flexible. He wants the party to ensure his men will be safe as they scout out the building, but he doesn't care how they proceed.

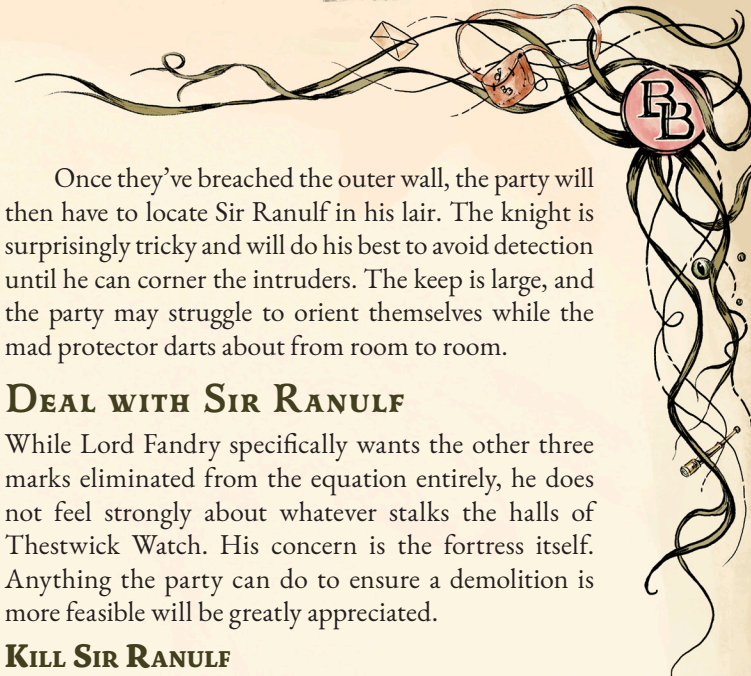
### SIR RANULF'S AIMS

The lord of Thestwick Watch is animated by violence. What was once a desire to protect his homeland and bring glory to his duke has been twisted into a wicked bloodlust. There was no single moment when Sir Ranulf became the monster that he is now; it was instead a gradual transition from knightly life to spiteful undeath. The closest word for what Sir Ranulf has become might be "revenant," but this fallen soldier is likely unique in his magical perseverance. Perhaps it is the all-preserving peat that keeps Sir Ranulf's body functional, or maybe it's just the undying fire of his lust for battle. Regardless, Sir Ranulf lives on in some unholy manner.

Sir Ranulf's deepest wish, the desire that galvanizes his rotting mind and body, is his yearning for battle. He was denied the fight he so desperately wanted when the war with Talmouth ended, and he feels he is still owed the glorious combat he was promised. Beyond that, Sir Ranulf has made an oath to protect his keep. Anyone who threatens either Thestwick Watch or his duchy's ironclad borders will become the target of Sir Ranulf's hatred.

### APPROACH SIR RANULF

Sir Ranulf never leaves his keep. Whether the party intends to reason with him or finally destroy him outright, they will have to charge the keep he so dutifully defends. Even approaching Thestwick Watch will be a challenge, as Sir Ranulf—in classic Alderham knight fashion—will attempt to fell his opponent with bow and arrow before they even get close. If the party does manage to survive the opening salvo, they will have to ram through the barricaded door. Sir Ranulf has repeatedly reinforced the portcullis. He will activate defenses as necessary as the party approaches: the adventurers would be wise to keep their eyes up in case Sir Ranulf decides to engage the murder holes.



Once they've breached the outer wall, the party will then have to locate Sir Ranulf in his lair. The knight is surprisingly tricky and will do his best to avoid detection until he can corner the intruders. The keep is large, and the party may struggle to orient themselves while the mad protector darts about from room to room.

### DEAL WITH SIR RANULF

While Lord Fandry specifically wants the other three marks eliminated from the equation entirely, he does not feel strongly about whatever stalks the halls of Thestwick Watch. His concern is the fortress itself. Anything the party can do to ensure a demolition is more feasible will be greatly appreciated.

### KILL SIR RANULF

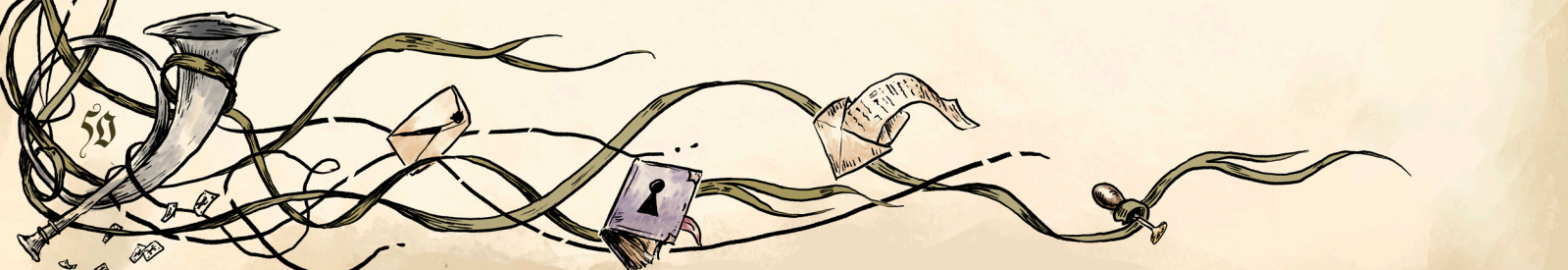
The untiring knight is incredibly dangerous while roaming the halls of Thestwick Watch. He has established defenses throughout the keep, and he is prepared to retreat through hidden passageways if he thinks his assailants have gained the upper hand. While Sir Ranulf's mind is profoundly decayed, his battle senses remain perfectly honed. The eldritch warrior will use everything in his power to overcome the adventures as they approach. At a distance, Sir Ranulf prefers to fire his arrows down the narrow corridors, though he'll quickly switch to his favored polearms as the party approaches. Sir Ranulf has stashed weapons throughout the keep, so he'll have no problem swapping for a claymore, pike, or side-sword if disarmed. Of course, the party can also help themselves to these various arms.

While he once sought glory, Sir Ranulf now only seeks death and victory. If he can split up the party and stealthily kill them one by one, he will. He will *only* engage in a fair and honest duel if it is his last resort.

Despite his curious affliction, Sir Ranulf *can* be defeated. He is not truly immortal. Though he is hardier than any other Alderham knight, he will succumb to a final death should he suffer a grievous enough wound.

### THE SECOND THREAT

Slinking in the shadows of Thestwick Watch, a viler beast threatens those who dare intrude. Kenric, Sir Ranulf's squire, became tainted in a more profound way than the revenant himself. The darkness that plagues Sir Ranulf's soul twisted Kenric's body into that of a feral monster. Part beast, part man, Kenric wields a greatsword in one hand and swipes at foes with his bestial claws.







### ALLY WITH SIR RANULF

Sir Ranulf can be reasoned with, but he is not what anyone would call “reasonable.” More so than any of the creatures haunting the Alderham Fen, Sir Ranulf is single-minded and unsympathetic. He wants to kill, he craves victory, and he will not settle for anything less. He cannot be threatened and he cannot be bribed. The only way for the party to ally with Sir Ranulf is to offer him what he seeks. If the players can promise Sir Ranulf the opportunity to finally inflict the violence for which he has been preparing, he may join them.

Anise and the Thestwick Resistance will both hesitantly accept the help of Sir Ranulf if he pledges himself to their cause. After all, his combat prowess will serve invaluable against the true enemy. However, if Lord Fandry learns of the revenant’s true motivations, he will do everything in his power to gain the assistance of the untiring knight. Ultimately, Lord Fandry and Sir Ranulf share the same goal: attacking Talmouth head-on. If the duke can weaponize Sir Ranulf for his own military aims, he will do so gladly, undead curse be damned.

### DEMOLISH THESTWICK WATCH

*Technically speaking*, Lord Fandry doesn’t need Sir Ranulf to be dealt with directly. His primary goal is to ensure Thestwick Watch won’t suddenly collapse and put his reclamation, and—to a lesser extent—the town in jeopardy. If the party can safely demolish the keep themselves, that will solve the problem altogether. Lord Fandry is unlikely to give the party the go ahead on this dangerous engineering problem, but should the party attempt it themselves without permission, they may just solve two problems at once.

Of course, the challenge is to destroy the fortress without hurting themselves or anyone else. This will not be easy. The impact of a sudden collapse could plunge the town into the fen below. One errant stone could take out a home, or—God forbid—the Fandry Windpump

The greatest minds of the Alderham Fen have yet to develop gunpowder, but there are rumors of other duchies in the Veglenic Kingdom who may have concocted powerful explosives. If the party can procure such volatile munitions, they may be able to conduct a strategic demolition. Short of that, they may seek Bulgreck’s help to smash through the walls, or some of Anise’s caustic fenbulbs. No matter what, the risk of collateral damage will be high, so the party should exercise extreme caution.

Barely aware of his surroundings, Kenric stewes in hatred. There is *possibly* still a rational man behind his bloodthirsty eyes, but the soul of the once noble squire has been corrupted by the lust for violence. If Kenric spies the party, he will attack on sight. In the clamor of battle, the adventurers may just barely hear the monster whisper “I’m so sorry. I cannot stop.” Perhaps putting the mad beast out of his misery would be a mercy.

**GM NOTE:** Kenric is a totally optional boss monster you can throw at your party. While they’re preoccupied with finding and subduing Sir Ranulf, this corrupted wildcard comes lashing out. This is the big fake out, designed to surprise your players who *think* they know what they’ll be up against.

Kenric also provides a convenient means to add a bit more combat to the dungeon. Even if the party chooses to talk down Sir Ranulf, they’ll still be able to enjoy a challenging battle with the irredeemable squire beast. Just make sure the party feels *justified* in killing him. It will make the combat more satisfying amidst the otherwise morally gray dealings throughout Thestwick.