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VILLAGE BACKDROP: FULHURST MOORS



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: FULHURST MOORS

In the dreary village of Fulhurst Moors, most residents spend their days cutting peat from the nearby bogs or tending flocks of rugged sheep on the moor. When night falls, they huddle in their homes or gather inside the solid stone walls of the Bell and Whistles, trading stories of the latest gruesome misfortunes to befall those foolish enough to venture out onto the moor after sunset or unfortunate enough to be caught by sudden fog or rain while working in the bogs.

The local priest has been driven close to madness by his inability to provide solace to his congregation, and the mayor and constable become increasingly concerned as a growing number of villagers drown their fears in moonshine whiskey. The fearful atmosphere is well deserved, for ancient beings of malice and cruelty haunt the mists beyond the village. And they have struck a terrible bargain with someone inside Fulhurst Moors.

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

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FULHURST MOORS AT A GLANCE

Ruler: Minerva Meriweather

Government: Autocracy

Population: 140 (127 humans, 6 dwarves, 2 half-elves, 3 half-orcs, 2 halflings)

Alignments: LN, LG, NG, N, CN, NE

Languages: Common

Resources & Industry Sheep farming, peat cutting

The windswept moorland around Fulhurst Moors was once a lush forest. Savage clans lived here and sacrificed captives and slaves in the bogs below the hills, where the waters of the Blackraven Creek cut through the acidic valley soil.

The sacrifices attracted strings of will-o'-wisps, who fed eagerly on their dying victims' fears. As the clansmen cut down trees for timber and firewood, the rain washed the nutrients out of the exposed soil. Desolate moor replaced the forest, the clans migrated elsewhere, and the wisps starved.

Centuries passed, and other humans settled beside Blackraven Creek. They built solid stone houses, raised flocks of rugged sheep on the moor and dug peat from the bog's brown waterlogged soil.

A few years ago, the wizard Kelurn Tinddar settled in Fulhurst Moors. Seeking ancient artefacts buried in the sacrificial sites, he struck a terrible pact with the will-o'-wisps yet haunting the bog: in return for the locations of ancient sacrificial sites, he began arranging deadly accidents and ambushes to both foster an atmosphere of fear in the village and provide the will-o'-wisps with fresh victims.

The effects of this terrible, secret compact are easily apparent to anyone visiting Fulhurst Moors. The anxiety is almost palpable, and only a handful of villagers are bold enough to move about as they please. The rest huddle behind their stone walls and speculate who will be the next to meet their doom upon the moor.

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Aisha Brackenridge (location 1; NG female half-elf **commoner**)

The feisty and independent proprietor of the village's general store, Aisha is irked by her neighbours' anxious prattling.

Bulgrim Graycairn (location 6; N male dwarf **commoner**) Solid as the walls of his inn, Bulgrim is the proud owner of the Bell and Whistles.

Devyn Matson (location 7; LN male human **veteran**) Stern, Devyn takes his duties as constable seriously.

Eliza Reede (location 2; N female human **priest**) Practical and pragmatic, Eliza brews potions, delivers babies and cures minor ailments.

Esmond Wynne (location 5; LG male human cleric 5) Chaplain Esmond tends to the spiritual needs of Fulhurst Moors, and is plagued by his inability to console his congregation.

Grefford Hinks (location 3; CN male old human **spy**) Never a fan of authority, old man Hinks is the resident manufacturer of moonshine whiskey.

Kelurn Tinddar (location 8; NE male human wizard [necromancer] 6) Beneath his chubby stature and well respected position in the village, Kelurn hides a dark secret.

Minerva Meriweather (location 4; LN female middle-aged human expert 2) A prosperous wool merchant, Minerva has been mayor of Fulhurst Moors for over a decade.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Brackenridge Mercantile:** Aisha Brackenridge and her wife Heather run this well-stocked general store.
2. **Eliza Reede's Hut:** From her modest hut, Eliza Reede offers a selection of potions and remedies.
3. **Grefford Hinks's House:** Thirsty villagers know to call on Grefford for a jug of moonshine.
4. **Mayor Meriweather's Home:** This large stone house is home to Mayor Minerva Meriweather and her husband Darinn.
5. **Temple:** The local temple is often half-empty at services these days, much to the chagrin of chaplain Esmond.
6. **The Bell and Whistles:** Despite the mayor having banned strong alcohol, the tavern is full almost every night.
7. **Village Hall:** The village hall functions as a meeting hall, courthouse and jail. The constable, Devyn Matson, lives here.
8. **Wizard's Tower:** Home of the wizard Kelurn.

MARKETPLACE

When the PCs arrive in Fulhurst Moors, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions resistance (lightning)** (500 gp)
- **Scrolls (Wizard)** *silent image* (50 gp), *ice storm* (1,200 gp)
- **Scroll (Cleric)** *death ward* (1,300 gp)
- **Wand magic missiles** (500 gp)

VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Fulhurst Moors. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: The land around Fulhurst Moors is useless for raising crops, but the locals graze flocks of sheep in the hills and cut peat from the bog.

DC 15: Something sinister lurks near the village. Both locals and travellers have disappeared or turned up dead.

DC 20: The bog where the villagers cut peat is rumoured to hold the remains of ancient sacrificial sites.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Mainly of short and stocky build, most villagers have thick auburn hair and grey eyes. The peat cutters usually emit a persistent waterlogged odour.

Dress The shepherds of Fulhurst Moors favour sheepskin vests and grey woollen cloaks, while the peat cutters wear long oilskin trousers, rugged shirts, wide brimmed hats and solid boots.

Nomenclature *male* Eruc, Garel, Huine, Kalet, Worick; *female* Ashina, Dedra, Kalen, Lyeisse, Therdra; *family* Beynet, Drackir, Kalsard, Thaelm, Wyerran.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

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

D6	RUMOUR
1	Old man Grefford hides a whiskey still somewhere on the moor.
2	A local youngster was found dead in the bog, covered with burns as if he had been struck by lightning.
3	The parents of the halfling twins Aisha and Heather Brackenridge adopted suffered a horrible fate while travelling to the village.
4*	The misfortunes plaguing the village are caused by the spirits of the ancient dead, who are angry the peat cutting has disturbed their burial sites.
5	If you know what to look for, you can see signs of long abandoned settlements on the moor.
6*	When Eliza Reede goes off to gather ingredients for her potions, she sometimes turns into a crow or fox.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: BRACKENRIDGE MERCANTILE

The bottom floor of this spacious stone two-storey building contains a well-stocked store. From here, the slender, red-haired Aisha Brackenridge (NG female half-elf **commoner**) and her wife, the plump, apple-cheeked Heather Brackenridge (NG female human **commoner**) keep the village supplied with tools, as well as foodstuffs and a varied assortment of sundries. The couple's adopted halfling twins, Kira and Merrick (NG young halfling **commoner**), usually help or run errands. The family lives above the store.

Not originally a native of Fulhurst Moors, the temperamental Aisha sometimes gets irritated by the insular, rumormongering and frightful disposition of the other villagers, but her good-natured wife usually has a calming effect on her. The pair adopted Kira and Merrick three years ago, after their parents were slain by one of Kellurn's traps.

2: ELIZA REEDE'S HUT

This modest hut of stone and turf is not much to look at, but the interior is surprisingly tidy and clean. Fragrant bundles of dried herbs and plants hang from the rafters, and a neatly organised work area is set up next to the central fireplace, while a small sleeping area is hidden in the back behind a woven curtain. Most villagers seek out Eliza (N female human **priest**) when they suffer minor ailments, and she aids women of the village with childbirth and other fertility matters.

It is well known Eliza frequently wanders the moor alone, both by day and by night. While this is merely to seek out ingredients for her many potions and remedies, it is enough to make her neighbours' imagination run rampant.

3: GREFFORD HINKS' HOUSE

In a simple stone house by the Blackraven Creek lives Old Man Grefford Hinks (CN male old human **spy**). Still remarkably spry for his advanced years, he can often be found working on his small skiff tethered to the wooden mooring behind his house or seated in the shade in front of his house, whittling a piece of wood.

Grefford has been distilling his own whiskey for decades, and has nothing but scorn for Mayor Meriweather's recent ban on hard liquor. Not a fan of authority at the best of times, Grefford feels it's a crime to deny a scared man a drink to calm his nerves. As such, he keeps selling his moonshine to the other villagers. Experienced at moving about unseen, he easily keeps the location of his still hidden from the constable, Devyn Matson.

4: MAYOR MERIWEATHER'S HOME

Inside this impressive two-storey manor house lives Minerva Meriweather (LN female middle-aged human **commoner**) and her husband Darinn (N male human **commoner**) along with a cook and a servant. The house also serves as office and storage facility for the Meriweather's wool business.

Minerva Meriweather is a tall and striking woman, her hair still jet black despite her being in her mid-fifties. She is both shrewd and practical, and her obvious organizational skills have made her the natural choice for mayor for over a decade. Darinn Meriweather, a notorious womanizer with a meticulously groomed beard, is a full partner in the business, but it is well known Minerva is mainly responsible for the Meriweather's prosperity.

She is sincerely troubled by the problems Fulhurst Moors faces, but has been unable to do anything about it except impose a prohibition designed to keep the frightened villagers from sinking into a drunken stupor.

5: TEMPLE

The interior of the circular main area of the village temple is decorated with colourful paintings depicting scenes of prosperous trade and strong warriors and priests protecting the weak. Coloured panes of glass in the domed ceiling filter the sunlight, bathing the room in a golden glow. An alcove in the north wall holds an altar dedicated to Conn (LN god of community, family and rulership), while the altar in the south alcove is dedicated to Darlen (LG god of law, order, justice and the sun). A small cemetery stands behind the temple, surrounded by a low stone wall.

The village chaplain Esmond Wynne (LG male human cleric 5) has a modest cell in the eastern section of the temple. Here he spends most of the time between the poorly-attended sermons praying for guidance. Esmond feels he has failed to protect and console the villagers, and is growing ever more desperate and depressed.

OLD MAN HINKS' MOONSHINE

This golden malt whiskey has a sharp and peaty flavour. It is most often stored in dark brown clay jugs. Every cup drunk beyond the first gives a -1 penalty to Wisdom-based skill checks and a +1 bonus to Wisdom saving throws made to resist *fear* and similar spells for 10 minutes. Anyone drinking more than four cups within the span of an hour must make a DC 12 Fortitude save for each additional cup drunk or be poisoned for an hour per consumed cup.

6 WILL-O'-WISPS WITH PERSONALITY

While most normal will-o'-wisps glow white or pale blue, six wisps of unusual colouring have gained particularly notoriety among the villagers of Fulhurst Moors. None know the wisps' true names; the villagers have taken to identifying them via their colouration.

1. The villagers call Yellow "The Pale Death." The wisp takes the form of a shrivelled man, gliding silently across the bog. As Yellow approaches, the victim loses all sense of hearing, then taste, then eventually sight and even touch. All that is left is a horrid stench of age and death: brittle skin, soft eyes and teeth. The villagers believe Yellow's touch means death. In reality, its victims die of fear before the wisp even gets close.
2. Green is surrounded by an immense cloud of luminescent, buzzing flies. Vines twist and reeds dance as the wisp moves, animated by its unquestionably malevolent presence. Green draws upon the hostility of nature, upon cold eyes and gleaming teeth in still water. The wisp's victims are driven to paranoia by the sounds of insects and beasts, and flee through the bogs until they die of exposure.
3. A disfigured face is visible within Blue's glow. Bloated and grey, the drowned head chatters with cold. Blue chases creatures into bogs and ponds, any place where mud grasps with eager hands. The wisp slowly approaches as its prey slowly drowns. A creature may become so disoriented with fear it cannot find air in waist deep water.
4. Purple revels in insanity. It infects the dreams of sleeping or drunk villagers, slowly driving them to terrified madness. Purple usually chooses one villager at a time, breaking his or her mind over the course of many months. This is a long-term strategy, far more nourishing than a quick death. When the victim inevitably takes her or her own life, the wisp is waiting to feed on the anguish.
5. Red leaves a splattering of blood wherever it goes. It revels in the fear and confusion of dripping blood without any apparent source. Sometimes Red generates blood within a villager's stomach or ears, feeding off the terrified frenzy that follows. Other times Red spreads confusion and sows distrust with a well-placed spot of blood on a kitchen knife.
6. Wreathed in ghostly flames, Orange generates intense cold. It lures lost villagers with illusory campfires, then watches silently as they freeze to death. Nothing is more delicious than the panic of a victim unable to get warm.

To depict these atypical will-o'-wisps, use the statistics for a normal individual, but modify them to account for each wisp's flavour text. For example, Orange inflicts cold damage, not lightning damage.

6: THE BELL AND WHISTLES

The cosy common room of the Bell and Whistles Tavern is the favourite gathering place for many of the villagers at day's end.

Bulgrim Graycain (N male dwarf **commoner**), a stocky dwarf with a thick black beard arranged in seven distinctive braids, runs the tavern with the aid of his wife Grellun and their four daughters (all N female dwarf **commoner**). While Grellun prepares her famous mutton and potato stew in the kitchen, Bulgrim serves tankards of dark draft ale from behind the bar.

Travellers usually have their pick of the comfortable rooms on the first floor.

Bulgrim is conflicted about the mayor's decision to ban strong alcohol. On the one hand, he is losing an increasing number of customers who prefer to sip moonshine whiskey elsewhere. On the other hand, the drinking brought a belligerent atmosphere to the tavern, and there are still plenty of folk who drop by to fill up on ale and gossip.

7: VILLAGE HALL

Built in dark grey stone, the village hall functions as the courthouse, jail and gathering place for village meetings.

Devyn Matson (LN male human **veteran**), the burly village constable, has a small apartment in one section of the hall, while another section holds three simple cells. Not overly bright, but dedicated and honest, Devyn frequently fills the cells with local drunkards and troublemakers in his futile attempt to keep the precarious situation in check.

8: WIZARD'S TOWER

The compact stone tower atop the hill on the eastern edge of Fulhurst Moors was originally a watchtower. It is now the home of the wizard Kelurn Tinddar (NE male human wizard [necromancer] 6) and his ambitious, unprincipled apprentice Rilad (NE male human wizard [necromancer] 2).

Kelurn, a stout and balding man, is a respected member of the community, and occasionally entertains guests in the dining hall located on the ground floor. The first floor contains the wizard's private library and Rilad's room, while Kelurn's own quarters and laboratory are located on the top floor.

In the cellar, a secret door leads down to a ritual chamber and several cells where Kelurn keeps some of his undead creations. From here, a hidden passage leads under the hill and out onto the moor, allowing Kelurn and Rilad to move unseen when they go to meet the will-o'-wisps or to set ambushes for the villagers and other unfortunate travellers.

Kelurn's bargain with the will-o'-wisps of the peat bog has allowed him and Rilad to uncover both dark knowledge and lost objects of power from the ritual sacrificial sites in the bog. The pair has no qualms about sacrificing innocent lives to further their gain.

LIFE IN FULHURST MOORS

While life in Fulhurst Moors has always been rough, the recent events have turned the mood dangerously sour. Most villagers have little to fill their evenings except drinking and retelling the latest horror stories. In response to several incidents of public drunkenness, Mayor Meriweather has outlawed the consumption of strong alcohol in the village.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Most villagers either raise sheep on the moors or cut peat in the bogs. While most of the peat is used locally for fuel, some is exported to other nearby settlements along with the wool that Mayor Meriweather buys from the sheep farmers.

LAW & ORDER

Devyn Matson has been very diligent about upholding the peace, ever since he was appointed as constable five years ago. He dutifully investigates any deaths or suspicious incidents, but when it comes to the trouble caused by Kelurn Tinddar and the will-o'-wisps, he is woefully out of his depth. Subsequently, he spends more time dealing with the symptoms of the fear gripping the village than getting to the root of the problem.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	One of the villagers is passed out drunk in the middle of the market square. After a couple of minutes, Constable Devyn Matson arrives to haul the drunkard away to sleep it off in a jail cell.
2	A violent thunderstorm rolls over the village, followed by severe rain. Blackraven Creek is in danger of overflowing, threatening to flood large parts of the village.
3	Some of the peat cutters swear they spotted a man shambling through the bogs, moving like a sleepwalker and not responding to their calls.
4	Several sheep are found slain, savaged in the night by an unknown predator.
5	Peat cutters return from the bog with a large rune-covered bronze disc. Mayor Meriweather insists they hand it over to Kelurn Tinddar for further examination.
6	Mayor Meriweather discreetly approaches the PCs, promising a substantial award if they can uncover the location of Grefford Hinks' moonshine still.



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