

THE LIDM HOARD — FREE STARTER SETTING

THE BRACKENFORD STARTER SETTING

A frontier village you can run tonight.

A system-agnostic home base · 5e / SRD 5.1-compatible · free to run at your table

THE BRACKENFORD STARTER SETTING

A home base with the lights on and the doors locked a little early.

Every campaign needs a place the party comes back to. Somewhere to spend the gold, hear the rumor, sleep off the wounds, and pick up the next job before they ride out again. Most DMs build that place on the fly, the first time the party asks “is there a town near here?”, and they end up with a tavern, an innkeeper named Bob, and nothing under the surface.

Brackenford is that place, built right. A small frontier village at a river crossing on the edge of wild country. A few hundred souls, an inn, a notice board, a ruined keep on the hill, and a circle of standing stones out on the moor. You can run it as a sleepy waystop the first night the party arrives. Then, the second night, you let them notice that nobody crosses the old bridge after dark, and the priest hasn’t opened the temple in a month, and the man who collects the ford toll answers to someone the party hasn’t met yet.

A REAL PERSON BUILT THIS

Thirty years running games, and the same lesson learned over and over: a town the players love is a town with problems they can choose to fix. Not a backdrop. A place that’s already living its own life when the party rides in, and keeps living it whether they help or not. Everything below is here to do one job: let you run Brackenford cold, tonight, and have something true to say the moment a player asks “what do I see?”

Drop it into the map you already have. The road comes from anywhere. The wild country past it goes anywhere you need. That’s the whole point.



THE VILLAGE AT A GLANCE

What you see riding in.

You come down out of the hills on an old trade road, and the first thing you see is the bridge — a stone span over the River Wend, half of it fallen into the water years ago, the gap never repaired. Beside it, where the river runs wide and shallow over flat stones, there’s a ford, and that’s where the road actually crosses now. A man sits at the near bank in a chair he carried out there himself, and he wants a copper from everyone who wets their boots.

Past the ford the village rises up the far slope: timber and daub houses with steep roofs, smoke from the cookfires, a square with a well and a notice board, and at the top of it all the inn — **The Broken Wheel** — with light in the windows and noise behind the door. Above the whole town, on the highest hill, sits the dark shape of **Caer Brack**, a ruined keep that nobody goes into and everybody can see.

It’s a friendly place. People wave. The ale’s good and the beds are clean. But ride in near dusk and you’ll catch the other thing: shutters closing a little early, a mother calling a child in by name, the way conversation drops half a tone when a stranger walks past. Brackenford is on edge, quietly, in the way of a town that’s learned to live next to wild country and has lately started learning to live next to something worse.

FOR THE DM — SCALING BY ROT, NOT BY MAP

Brackenford works at any party level. As a level 1–3 home base it’s a place of human-scale problems: tolls, grudges, a missing shepherd. Run it for higher-level parties and the same locations carry bigger weight: what’s under the keep gets hungrier, the stones on the moor matter more, and the people who run the village from behind the curtain get bolder. Scale by deciding how far the rot has spread, not by changing the map.

THE KEYED LOCATIONS

Eight places, keyed for the table.

The boxed text is what you read aloud. Everything after it is yours.

1. THE FORD & THE BROKEN BRIDGE

READ ALOUD

The river runs wide and shallow here, brown over flat grey stones, cold enough to numb your shins by the second step. Beside the crossing, the old bridge stands with half its span gone — the near arch still solid, the far arch a stub of broken masonry hanging over the water. A man sits in a wooden chair on the bank with a strongbox between his boots and a cudgel across his knees. “Copper a head to cross,” he says, not unkindly. “Two for the horse. The bridge is free, if you can fly.”

What’s here: **Doran Welk**, the ford-keeper (see the people, below). The toll is new, within the last year, and it’s the village’s biggest open argument. Doran says he collects it for repairs to the bridge. The bridge has not been touched.

The bridge itself collapsed a generation ago and was never rebuilt, which is strange for a village that depends on the crossing. Old folk will say the stone was needed elsewhere. Pressed, a few will admit the far arch was pulled down on purpose, the year the trouble started at the keep, by people who wanted the far bank harder to reach after dark.

Hooks: Who is Doran really paying? (Follow the money and it leads up the hill, then past it.) And why does the ford freeze over in a hard cold faster than running water should — and why won’t anyone cross it the night it does?

2. THE BROKEN WHEEL (THE INN)

READ ALOUD

The common room is low-beamed and warm, a fire going, a wheel with three spokes left nailed over the hearth as a joke nobody explains. A big woman works the taps with her sleeves shoved up, trading insults with the regulars by name. The board over the bar lists three ales and a stew, and the stew is good. A back stair goes up to the rooms. There’s one chair by the fire that nobody sits in, and a clean mug set in front of it.

What’s here: **Mara Tullamore**, the keeper (see the people). The inn is the social heart of Brackenford, the place every hook passes through, where the party hears everything and is heard by everyone. Rooms are a few coppers a night; the stew is mutton, and Mara will tell you not to ask about the lamb.

The empty chair by the fire is set for her husband, Tobin, a shepherd who walked out onto the moor last autumn and didn’t come back. She sets his mug every dusk. She is not grieving wrong, whatever the gossip says. She is waiting, because once, on a night the ford froze, she heard him at the door — and when she opened it, there was nothing but his crook, stuck upright in the frost.

Hooks: Mara knows everyone's business and trades it for a song or a kind word. She's the party's best information broker. And if they're the kind to go looking on the moor for a missing man — she'll pay them in free beds for a year, and beg them not to bring back what they find if it isn't really him.

3. THE NOTICE BOARD

READ ALOUD

A slab of weathered oak stands in the square by the well, layered with notices old and new — some printed, most scrawled, a few just charcoal on bark. A lottery winner from three seasons back. A reward for a lost dog, the ink run with rain. And, pinned over all of it with a black-headed nail, a fresh sheet in a careful hand that wasn't there yesterday.

What's here: the village's job board and gossip wall, the on-ramp for adventures (the full table is below). Anyone can post. Most notices are mundane. A few are the start of something.

The black-nailed notices are the ones that matter. They appear overnight, written in the same careful hand, and they never name who posted them. The villagers have learned to take them seriously. Doran the ford-keeper takes them down by morning if he can — he doesn't like them up where strangers can read them.

Hook: roll on the notice board table for what's posted when the party arrives, and again any time they pass through. The strange ones (marked) reward a party that asks who wrote them.

4. CAER BRACK (THE RUINED KEEP)

READ ALOUD

The road up the hill is grown over but still walkable, and at the top the keep waits — a square stone shell, roof long gone, walls standing two and three storeys where they haven't fallen. The gateway gapes open; the gate itself rotted off its hinges. Inside the bailey, grass and gorse grow waist-high, and in one corner a stone stair leads down into the dark, the steps swept clean. Somebody keeps that stair clear of leaves.

What's here: the bones of the keep that Brackenford grew up beneath. The upper levels are a ruin, safe enough to explore, good for a low-level skirmish with whatever's dened up there (wild dogs, a desperate squatter, a nest of the **fen-shrikes** described below). Treat the exterior and the ground floor as a runnable site: collapsed halls, a dry cistern, an old armory long since looted, a chapel with the altar smashed.

The swept stair is the thing. It goes down past the cellars into older stone, and it is always clear of debris, no matter how long since anyone admits to going down. Cold air comes up it that smells of wet rock and, faintly, of tallow. Someone burns candles down there. The villagers will not discuss what's below. The bravest of them will only say: "It used to sleep more."

FOR THE DM — LEAVE THIS OPEN

Do not detail the lower levels here. Whatever is under Caer Brack is the seed of a bigger story; a companion adventure will go down those stairs. For now, the keep's depths are the question the whole village is built around and nobody answers. Let the party feel the cold come up the stair. Let them find a fresh candle-stub. Then let them decide they're not ready — yet.

5. THE STONE CIRCLE (OUT ON THE MOOR)

READ ALOUD

An hour's walk out onto the moor, where the heather gives way to bare turf and standing water, a ring of grey stones breaks the skyline — nine of them, taller than a man, leaning at angles that feel wrong the longer you look. The ground inside the ring is bare. Nothing grows there, though the moor crowds right up to the edge. In the center, flat in the grass, lies a tenth stone, fallen, with a worn channel cut around its rim.

What's here: the **Wend Stones**, a circle older than Brackenford, older than the keep, that the villagers treat with a careful, practical respect. Shepherds leave a coin or a crust on the fallen center stone when they pass; they say it keeps the moor “quiet.” Nobody remembers who set the stones or why. The channel around the center stone has, on close inspection, been kept clean of moss. Someone still tends it.

The thing about the stones: count them twice and you may not get nine both times. On the nights the ford freezes, the bare ground inside the ring is the only place on the moor where frost doesn't form. People who've spent a night inside the circle by accident come back fine, but they come back a day later than they should, swearing only one night passed.

Hooks: the stones and the keep are connected — the same cold, the same nights. A party that maps the connection has the spine of a campaign. And the offerings on the center stone have lately started disappearing faster than the weather can explain.

6. THE SHRINE OF THE QUIET HAND (TEMPLE)

READ ALOUD

A small stone chapel at the edge of the square, older than the houses around it, with a carved hand above the door — palm out, fingers together, the universal sign for stop, wait, be still. The door is shut. A month of dead leaves has piled against it. Through a gap in the shutters you can see candlelight inside, and hear, faintly, someone moving.

What's here: the shrine of a small local faith, the **Quiet Hand**: a creed of patience, vigil, and holding the line against what comes in the dark. (System-agnostic; reskin to any deity of watchfulness or protection your setting uses.) Until a month ago, the keeper, **Brother Anselm**, opened the doors each dawn, took the village's worries, and rang the bell at dusk. Then the doors stopped opening. The bell still rings, every dusk, on time.

What's wrong: Anselm is still inside. He hasn't left in a month, and he hasn't let anyone in. He still takes the offerings left on the step; they vanish overnight. The villagers are frightened of what his silence means, and too respectful, or too scared, to break the door down. The truth (yours): Anselm saw something come up the swept stair at the keep, and he believes the only thing keeping it penned is the dusk bell and his unbroken vigil. He may be right. He may be losing his mind. He may be both.

Hooks: a party can talk their way in, break in, or wait him out. What they find is a man who hasn't slept in thirty days, ringing a bell on time, and a very good question: what happens to Brackenford if he stops?

7. GREEL'S YARD (MARKET & TRADE)

READ ALOUD

A muddy yard behind the square, fenced with cart-wheels and hung with everything a frontier village trades — pelts, iron tools, dried fish, rope, a wall of mismatched boots. A wiry man with a tally-stick haggles three conversations at once, never writing anything down, never wrong about a price. A boy runs goods between him and the river. A goat eats a hat.

What's here: Pell Greel, the trader (see the people), and the village's de facto market — there's no proper shop, just Greel's yard, where everything bought and sold in Brackenford passes through. He fronts as a cheerful junk-dealer. He is the man who actually knows what moves through this village, who's selling family silver quietly, who came through with goods they shouldn't have had, what's been carried up the hill road and not carried back down.

The catch: Greel buys information as readily as goods, and sells it to whoever pays. He is not the villain. He's the weathervane. Whatever's really happening in Brackenford, Greel can be paid to point at it. He'll also, for the right price, sell the party out to whoever asks about *them*.

Hooks: the party's best fence, supplier, and rumor-tap, all in one greedy package, as long as they remember he's selling them, too.

8. THE DROWNED LANE (THE FAR BANK)

READ ALOUD

Across the ford, on the wild side of the river, a single row of houses stands half-sunk in the boggy ground — doors swollen shut, roofs caved, a lane that was a street once and is mud now. Reeds grow through the floors. This was a part of Brackenford, once, before the far arch came down. Nobody lives here now. Nobody crosses to it after dark.

What's here: the abandoned far-bank quarter, the part of the village that was cut off when the bridge's far arch was pulled down "the year the trouble started." A dozen empty houses, slowly sinking, picked over long ago but never quite emptied. Good for a quiet, creeping exploration scene: the place feels like the rest of Brackenford turned off and left to rot.

What's wrong: the far bank is closer to both the keep and the moor, and it's where the cold gets in first on a freezing night. The villagers abandoned it not because it flooded (it always flooded) but because, after the trouble started, things began using the empty houses to get closer to the ford. Lights are sometimes seen in the windows. The party may be the first people to walk the Drowned Lane in years, and they will not be alone if they do it at the wrong hour.

Hooks: what's nesting in the far-bank houses (the **fen-shrikes**, below, or worse). And the reason one house, at the lane's dead end, has a door that's been recently, carefully, nailed shut from the *outside*.

THE PEOPLE

Eight named villagers — allies, problems, and people the party won't be sure about.

Each one wants something, has a reason they think they're right, carries one habit you'll remember them by, and hides one thing.

DORAN WELK, THE FORD-KEEPER

A broad, tired man who collects the toll from a chair he won't leave. **Wants:** to keep his family fed and out of the cold — both meanings. **Why he's right (to himself):** somebody has to pay the price the keep demands, and better coin than blood; he's the wall between the village and a worse bill. **Mannerism:** tests every coin against his teeth, even

coppers, even when he knows them. **Secret:** the toll money doesn't fund the bridge and never will. It's tribute, carried up the hill road on the nights the ford freezes, and Doran is the one who carries it. He hates it. He does it because the year he refused, his eldest didn't come home.

MARA TULLAMORE, THE INNKEEPER

Loud, kind, sharp as a tack, runs The Broken Wheel like a ship. **Wants:** her husband Tobin back, or proof he's gone, so she can stop setting the mug. **Why she's right:** she heard him at the door; a wife knows. **Mannerism:** sets a clean mug at the empty chair every dusk, without breaking conversation, like breathing. **Secret:** she knows more about the swept stair and the freezing nights than anyone living, because Tobin told her things before he walked out, and she's been quietly feeding the party rumors, hoping someone brave and stupid enough will finish what he started.

BROTHER ANSELM, KEEPER OF THE QUIET HAND

A gaunt man nobody's seen in a month, ringing the dusk bell from behind a locked door. **Wants:** to hold the line until help comes, or until he dies on his feet. **Why he's right:** he believes his vigil is the lock on the door, and he may not be wrong. **Mannerism:** speaks in the cadence of liturgy even when begging; every sentence sounds like a prayer he's halfway through. **Secret:** he hasn't slept in thirty days, he's not sure anymore which of the things he's seen were real, and he is terrified that the moment he believes his own vigil is pointless is the moment it stops working.

PELL GREEL, THE TRADER

Wiry, cheerful, never writes anything down. **Wants:** to come out ahead on every exchange, including the ones nobody knew were exchanges. **Why he's right:** information is just another good, and he never lies about a price; he simply sells to both sides. **Mannerism:** answers a question with a question about your business, mapping your worth before he'll deal. **Secret:** he's been quietly buying up the deeds to the far-bank houses for coppers, betting that one day Brackenford will reclaim the Drowned Lane. He knows exactly what's nesting there, which is why he's getting them cheap.

OLD SEFA, THE HEDGE-WITCH

A bent woman who lives at the edge of the moor and tends the stone circle's offerings. **Wants:** the moor to stay quiet, the old bargains kept, the stones tended. **Why she's right:** the village laughs at her crusts and coins until the night they don't, and she's the only one who remembers how the old keeping was done. **Mannerism:** counts under her breath constantly (steps, stones, stitches, breaths) and goes silent only when the count comes out wrong. **Secret:** she knows the stones and the keep are halves of one thing, knows the offerings are buying time and not safety, and she has been lying to the village about how much time is left because the truth would empty Brackenford by spring.

HETT VANCE, THE MILITIA CAPTAIN WITH NO MILITIA

A square-jawed man who still wears the tabard, drills an empty yard, and keeps the watch alone. **Wants:** to be the protector the village needs, badly enough to ignore that he can't be. **Why he's right:** someone has to stand the watch, and standing it alone is better than nobody standing it. **Mannerism:** announces the hour aloud as he walks his rounds, to an empty street, the way he did when there were six men to hear it. **Secret:** the militia didn't desert. He sent them away, on a made-up errand to a far town, because he'd worked out that the freezing nights take the able-bodied first, and he'd rather they live as cowards somewhere else than die brave here. The village thinks they ran. He lets them think it.

BRYN, THE BOY WHO RUNS GREEL'S GOODS

Quick, watchful, twelve or so, sees everything in the village and says little. **Wants:** to matter, to be let in on the grown-ups' secrets, to be brave. **Why he's right:** he's the only one who goes everywhere and is invisible doing it. **Mannerism:** repeats back the last thing an adult says, quietly, like he's filing it. **Secret:** he's been up the hill road and down the swept stair, on a dare, farther than any adult would dare, and he came back. He's seen what's down there. He hasn't told anyone, because the one time he tried, the words wouldn't come out, and now he's not sure they ever will.

GOODWIFE ALDER, WHO RUNS THE VILLAGE FROM HER KITCHEN

A plump, gracious woman who hosts the women of Brackenford for tea and somehow every decision in the village gets made over her table. **Wants:** the village to hold together, by her hand, on her terms. **Why she's right:** somebody competent has to steer, and the men with titles are all useless or absent, so she does it where it actually works — the kitchen, not the council. **Mannerism:** offers food as a tactic — you cannot refuse her bread, and you cannot stay angry while eating it, and she knows both. **Secret:** she made the call, a year ago, to start paying the toll-tribute rather than fight it. She is the one who told Doran to carry the coin up the hill, and she carries the weight of every soul it's cost since, alone, smiling, pouring tea.



THE NOTICE BOARD

What's pinned to the board when the party comes through the square. Roll, or pick.

The ones marked ♦ are the black-nailed notices — strange, unsigned, and worth chasing.

THE NOTICE BOARD (D10)

D10	POSTED ON THE BOARD...
1	"Lost: a good ram, grey-faced, answers to nothing. Reward." — <i>The ram came home three days ago. The shepherd took the notice down, then put it back up. He won't say why, but the ram that came home isn't quite the ram that left.</i>
2	"Wanted: strong backs to clear the old well on the green. Fair pay, hot food." — <i>The well's been dry for years. What Goodwife Alder actually wants cleared is what someone dropped down it last winter.</i>
3	"Hands needed at Greel's yard, river to square, a copper a load." — <i>Honest work, and a fast way to get Bryn talking. The loads going up the hill road are the ones to ask about.</i>
4 ♦	"The bell rings at dusk. Do not be on the far bank when it stops." — <i>No signature. Anselm didn't write it. Sefa did. She's warning whoever can read.</i>
5	"Hett Vance seeks able men and women for the village watch. Tabard provided." — <i>The captain's standing offer. Take it and he'll be pathetically grateful, then try to send you away the first freezing night.</i>
6	"Marrying! Tam and Lisbet, at the green, full moon. All welcome, bring drink." — <i>A real wedding, a rare good night — and the full moon is the next freezing night. Sefa knows. She's trying to get it moved.</i>
7 ♦	"Stones counted wrong again. Nine going out. Ten coming back. — S." — <i>Sefa, leaving herself a record on the public board because she no longer trusts her own memory. The party can read the count getting worse over weeks.</i>
8	"Reward for the safe return of Tobin Tullamore, shepherd, gone since autumn. — M.T." — <i>Mara's standing plea. The reward is generous. The condition, in small letters at the bottom: "alive, and himself."</i>
9	"No crossing the ford the night it ices. Toll suspended. By order." — <i>Posted by Doran, no authority named. The "order" comes from up the hill. He'd rather lose the coppers than have strangers wet their boots on the wrong night.</i>
10 ♦	"Whoever keeps clearing the keep stair: I see you. Stop. — A." — <i>Brother Anselm, in his careful hand, from behind his locked door. The party now knows two things: someone tends that stair, and the priest is still alive in there.</i>



WHAT'S SIMMERING

Four tensions running under Brackenford — each a thread a DM can pull for a session or a season.
The visible problem is what the party meets first. What's underneath is yours. How it blows is where the campaign goes.

1. THE TOLL, AND WHO REALLY COLLECTS IT

Visible: Doran charges a copper to cross a ford that used to be free, and tells everyone it's for a bridge he never repairs. Half the village resents him for it.

Underneath: the toll is tribute. The coin goes up the hill road on freezing nights, carried by Doran, ordered by Goodwife Alder, paid to whatever sleeps under Caer Brack to keep it sleeping. It's protection money, and the protection is real.

How it blows: the party "frees" the village from the unjust toll (stops Doran, exposes the scam, plays the hero) and the next freezing night, with no tribute carried up the hill, the thing under the keep wakes hungry. The good deed is the disaster. Now they have to fix what they broke.

2. THE MISSING FOLK ON THE MOOR

Visible: people walk out onto the moor and don't come back, a few each season, always more after a freezing night. Tobin the shepherd is only the most-mourned. Mara still sets his mug.

Underneath: the moor and the keep are one system, joined by the stone circle. The freezing nights are when the cold "reaches" across the ford, through the far bank, out to the stones, and on those nights it takes the able-bodied who are caught outside the ring. Some it kills. Some it changes and sends back, a day late, not quite themselves.

How it blows: one of the missing comes back. Tobin walks out of the moor on a freezing night, looking like himself, talking like himself, asking Mara to open the door. She will. The question the party has to answer fast: is it him, and what comes in with him if it isn't.

3. THE SILENT PRIEST AND THE DUSK BELL

Visible: Brother Anselm hasn't opened the shrine in a month, but rings the bell every dusk, on time, from behind a locked door. The village is unnerved and won't act.

Underneath: Anselm believes the dusk bell and his unbroken vigil are the lock on the thing under the keep, that as long as he keeps faith, it stays penned. He's exhausted, half-mad, and possibly correct. Sefa's offerings buy time; Anselm's vigil holds the line; the toll feeds the thing. Three different people, three different methods, none of them coordinating, all of them keeping Brackenford alive by accident.

How it blows: the bell doesn't ring one dusk. Maybe Anselm finally slept. Maybe he died on his feet. Maybe the party, investigating, made him stop to talk. Whatever the cause — the village hears the silence where the bell should be, and so does what's under the hill.

4. WHO ACTUALLY RUNS BRACKENFORD

Visible: there's no lord, no mayor anyone respects, no real council. The village seems to run itself, badly, by committee.

Underneath: Goodwife Alder runs it, from her kitchen table, and has for years. She made the call to pay the tribute. She tells the captain, the ford-keeper, and half the village what to do, and they do it, because she's the only one with a plan. She's competent, kind, and carrying the cost of every choice alone behind a teapot.

How it blows: the party works out who's really in charge, and has to decide what to do about a woman who's been quietly trading lives for the village's survival the whole time. Is she the villain who's been feeding a monster, or the only adult in the room who did the math nobody else would? Let them sit with that one. There's no clean answer, which is the point.



A CREATURE FOR THE MARCHES: THE FEN-SHRIKE

An original threat for the moor and the far-bank houses, system-agnostic.

Stat it to your party's level using your system's "pack predator" template.

A fen-shrike is a long-legged moor bird the size of a wolfhound, grey as standing water, with a beak it uses the way other birds use a hawk's talons. It hunts the wet country in silent pairs and impales what it kills on the broken reeds and fence-stakes of the Drowned Lane, leaving a larder of small, neatly-spitted corpses that the party will find before they find the bird. It's drawn to the cold that comes off the keep: where the fen-shrikes nest, the freezing nights have been. They're a real danger to a low-level party and a tell for everyone else. A fresh shrike-larder means the cold's been here recently, and may be coming back.

SIGNATURE TACTIC — SILENT UNTIL IT STRIKES

A fen-shrike makes no call, which is how it lives in a place where everything listens. The first warning is the rush of wide wings, and by then it's already inside your reach. Run them in pairs; one drives the prey, one waits where the prey will run.



THE LOCAL MAP

A text sketch so it can be illustrated later. North is up.

The River Wend runs roughly east–west across the bottom of the village.

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      ~ ~ ~ THE HOLLOW MARCHES ~ ~ ~
    moor . fen . old forest . standing water

      . o o      (the Wend Stones) .
    o   o   o . a ring of nine + a fallen tenth
      . o o o   Sefa's hut nearby \
              o
    [ CAER BRACK ] <- ruined keep on the hill
              /||\ (swept stair goes DOWN)
              hill road
              ||
===== B R A C K E N F O R D =====
      (north / far bank)      ||
    ~ THE DROWNED LANE ~      || Shrine of the
    half-sunk houses,        [TEMPLE] the Quiet Hand
      one nailed shut      ||
-----||----- old trade road
      \      || [SQUARE] -- well -- notice board
      broken \ FORD      || |
bridge -> X=====||=[ THE BROKEN WHEEL ] (inn, top of square)
      (far arch Doran's || |
      down) chair [GREEL'S YARD] market, river->square
----- R I V E R W E N D -----
      (south bank -- the road continues to anywhere you need)

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SPATIAL LOGIC FOR THE DM

The road comes in from the south, crosses the Wend at the ford (the broken bridge a useless landmark beside it), and climbs the far slope through the square to the inn at the top. The temple sits on the square's edge; Greel's yard runs between square and river. The hill road leaves the back of the village and climbs to Caer Brack. Past the keep, the Hollow Marches open out: moor and fen, the stone circle an hour's walk northeast, Sefa's hut on the moor's edge. The Drowned Lane is the old far-bank quarter, northwest across the ford, closer to both keep and moor, which is why the cold reaches it first.



DROP IT INTO YOUR GAME

Brackenford needs no setting of its own.

It's a river crossing on a trade road at the edge of wild country, which exists on every fantasy map ever drawn. To plug it in:

- **Pick the road.** The trade road comes from your nearest established town and goes toward your next adventure. Brackenford is the waystop in between.
- **Pick the wild.** The Hollow Marches are whatever frontier your campaign already has — borderlands, the edge of a kingdom, the buffer before the monster country. Rename them to match. The moor, fen, and old forest reskin to swamp, badlands, or deep woods without changing a single hook.
- **Pick the pressure.** Decide how far the rot from Caer Brack has spread. Early campaign: it's a local mystery, the village just on edge. Later: it's a regional threat, and Brackenford is the front line.
- **Use it as a hub.** Let the party bank here, drink here, hear rumors here, and come back between adventures. Every time they return, roll the notice board and advance one simmering thread. The town that changes while they're away is the town they'll fight for.

RUNNING IT IN OTHER SYSTEMS

Nothing here is bolted to one rule set. The locations, people, hooks, and tensions are pure narrative. Drop them into any d20 fantasy game, or into Draw Steel, Daggerheart, a Cosmere game, an OSR retroclone, or your own homebrew,

and stat the fen-shrike and any keep-dwellers with that system's own monster math. The only numbers in this document are "a copper to cross" and "nine stones, sometimes ten," and both of those travel fine.



IF BRACKENFORD EARNS A SPOT ON YOUR TABLE

This village is yours, free, to run forever.

Name it, rename it, burn it down, build it up. A home base is only worth anything if your players come to love it, and the way they come to love it is by choosing, session after session, to protect a place that has real problems and real people in it.

THE WEEKLY ONE-SHOT

If running Brackenford makes you want a full adventure to drop the party into — the kind where the villain has a reason, the players have a real choice, and the boxed text is already written — that's what we make every week. **The Weekly One-Shot** lands in your inbox ready to run: open it Thursday, run it Friday. And one of these weeks, the party's going to be ready to go down that swept stair under Caer Brack. We'll have written what's waiting.

No pressure. The village runs either way. See you at the table.



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