

Branmouth – A port city stretched across the mouth of the Brandywine river

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Location overview

A once prestigious port fortress of man, west of Eryn vorn, across the mouth of the Brandywine river. The old bridge barely stands, a raft of wood and thatch used in its shadow, its presence still a pride of the city.

Upon the bridge sits a bell tower, with the bridge sinking into the Brandywine the tower is too fragile to enter, only the bell tenders are allowed within. They keep the bell ringing out to signal the opening of the markets, or so the people say.

Trade continues across the Brandywine, carts and horses hobble over the raft bridge, boats regularly fill the ports running along the river cliffs, the state of the central bridge in contrast to the city's success. Repairing it would be a disservice to its history, its scars reminders of how the city survived war after war, still standing strong, say the locals.

Those who live in the city respect its traditions, all visitors are busy in the markets or soaking in the rich history of the port, near nobody bats an eye to the bell keepers and their presence.

There are some that do, an eager historian, a rebellious merchant's apprentice, these characters find themselves at the mouth of the belltower, and soon, at the mouth of its resident. Never to be seen again.

For the bell tower holds a secret, a mighty hoard of coin, and dangling from the supports above a dragon. The bell tower sinks into the Brandywine due to the weight of this creature and its hoard; money made by the port. All trade is partaken under the watchful eye of the bell keepers, pawns of the dragon in the tower. The rich history of their position grants them immense power and influence within the city, the perfect hosts for the parasite.

The dragon keeps the port rich, opening the markets by trashing its tail against the bell, deciding on bizarre taxations to maintain a stream of coin to its hoard. Regular markets keep the people within the city, the merchants, traders and artisans happy, the taxes may be questionable but the money continues to accumulate throughout the market hall.

Key figures

The tower dragon and the bell keepers.

The tower dragon is a malformed beast, the confines of the tower restricting its movement and growth, its muscles atrophied, it cannot be moved from the tower, and its soft underbelly is pressed firmly against the wall of the tower so it cannot be pierced. The only threat the dragon poses are with its jaws and mind, bending will and crushing bone, anyone caught within the belltower without the robe of a bell keeper will be swiftly welcomed by the dragon's jaws.

When the bridge still stood proud hundreds of years ago, a dragonet found its way inside the tower, flown far from its kin in Rhovanion to the west. Found by a bell keeper, once a solitary profession, they couldn't help but fall fond of the unfamiliar creature.

As they grew the dragon formed like a parasite, fed by the bell keeper, manipulating them to maintain its survival, a bell keeper is a profession with many benefits, to lose it over the stealing of food, the harboring of a

dangerous creature, in such an important place, would mean losing your place in society, outcasting you and your family.

So the bell keeper kept quiet. And so the dragon grew.

Generation after generation of bell keeper kept the secret, and the dragon filled the tower, manipulating every keeper that stepped foot into her domain, seeking to use them to grow what she craved; a hoard.

Convincing the keepers to grow their numbers, they led friends, family, confidants to the tower, and all had their wills bent and molded by the dragon. Slowly they seeped into the social structures of the city, manipulating rules, diverting funds, all under the guise of tradition.

Now the bell keepers act as an arm of the dragon's will, pests that may disrupt the flow of coin discreetly delt with, new taxations swiftly enforced, upholding the infected corpse of this port's most treasured traditions.

The bell keepers aren't completely mindless however, their warnings of the dangers of the tower are meant sincerely, and they will keep innocents away from the tower the best they can, unnecessary disappearances raise unhelpful questions.

From a role steeped in tradition to an army hidden in plain sight, the bell keepers evolved alongside the dragon to keep the port's relationship with this parasite symbiotic; the bell keepers are allowed to live, maintaining their tradition and keeping people moving through the port, and the dragon is kept fed and provided an ever-growing hoard of taxed income.

The snoop.

Stories set within this port and following its secret will focus on a snoop; be that the rebellious merchant's apprentice, suspicious of the bell keepers, or a fanatic historian, sent by a great academic institution to document the history of this port, and unwilling to leave any stone unturned.

The snoop will always come from outside the city and will be unfazed by the distractions of the market and the bell keepers. It is important they come from outside, as they would be unaffected by years of propaganda laced tradition from growing up surrounded by the bell keepers.

Some, like the fanatic historian, will make their way to the tower arrogant to all warnings, their work must be thorough! And that means documenting the inside of the tower and the market bell.

Others find themselves at the tower by accident, a frustrated artisan's apprentice finding a solitary spot to sulk at night, the desolate bridge the perfect spot to vent to the world.

The sound from within the tower draws even the least curious at its doorstep, and unless they can be stopped by a bell keeper or a resident passing by, then the snoop's story will always end at the meeting of the dragon.

Judged as a thief attempting to steal from the hoard, no amount of bargaining or explanation will change the dragon's mind, their punishment a swift death.

Found soon afterwards by the bell keepers, it is then their job to cover up the disappearance of the snoop with as swift a response as possible, to keep the port running smoothly.

Landmarks

With the port set on the mouth of the Brandywine river, it and its lake cliffs surrounding the port are of major importance to the residents. The cliffs are notable as geographical defenses, these natural walls prevent attack from land, and old batteries of harpoons and ballista line it's edge, deterring any attempt to attack the port by sea.

The old bridge that connects the two halves of the port across the branywine remains of significant cultural value. Those born within the port find their pride in it, any coinage struck within the city bears its silhouette, the city's identity rests on its sinking foundation.

This bridge has been practically replaced by several long lines of rafts connecting the two halves of the port, carts and donkeys hobble across the Brandywine to keep the trade flowing, some rafts utilise makeshift pulleys, acting as ferries across the river for larger carts that don't dare to risk sinking the raft-bridges.

The market hall is another significant landmark for the port, a stone pavilion sheltering an open-air bazaar littered with stalls of all kinds, huddled within a perimeter of stone arches, the bustling hub of commerce, only open when the bell rings out from the tower.

Political and cultural dynamics

The port has always remained politically neutral, enemies and allies alike are welcome to meet in its borders, and all are welcome to trade. While the port is an inviting take for warlords, a logistical hub of the west of middle-earth, its scars of past battles won and natural defenses tend to make most think twice.

Besides, why waste the man-power when the port is open to all?

Some warring factions utilise the neutrality of the port to meet for talks, and under the watchful eye of the bell tenders these discussions remain civil. Assassinations have been planned to be committed on neutral ground, but the bell tenders see to it that no such disruptions are ever carried out within the port's walls.

Many in middle-earth recognise and respect the craftsmanship of the port artisans, members of other towns and cities of man will make significant treks to trade with those at the port, not just for typical goods but for tourism and leisure purposes too.

Many enjoy looking upon the old tower bridge, and exploring the bustling market hall, the unique stamped coinage of the city its own souvenir.

Supporting work

