Peg Powler's Cream

Upper Teesdale, County Durham — a spring night in 1882, with the river in spate.

TEESDALE, COUNTY DURHAM, ENGLAND · 3-5 PLAYERS · ABOUT 4 HOURS · LATE VICTORIAN (1882)

BUILT ON THE LEGEND OF: PEG POWLER OF THE RIVER TEES (RECORDED BY 19TH-CENTURY FOLKLORISTS)

Spoiler-safe: everything in this pack may be read by players.

System-neutral. Difficulty is given in plain words (easy / hard / very hard) for you to map to the rules you play. The legend is real and cited; the adventure built on it is original fiction.

Why you are here

You are lodging at the Heather Bell in Scarthgill, a lead-mining village below High Force. You might be surveyors, a travelling photographer's party, or just walkers caught by the spate. Tom Raine, a young miner, went down to the river on Tuesday night and hasn't come back. Tonight his sweetheart Annie swears she heard him calling her from the water, and she means to go to him.

What everyone in town knows

The River Tees, they say in the dale, has a keeper of its own. Her name is Peg Powler: a water hag with long green hair who lives in the deep places of the river and drags down anyone who comes too near the edge.

Parents in Teesdale used her to keep children away from the water. Stay back from the bank, they warned, or Peg Powler will have you. The Victorian folklorist William Henderson wrote that she had 'an insatiable desire for human life'.

Where the river slows and froths, the foam that gathers in cream-coloured drifts is called Peg Powler's suds, or Peg Powler's cream. Where her suds lie thick, she is near.

A later writer, Elliott O'Donnell, told it darker. Peg lures men and boys by appearing as a lovely green-haired girl who seems to be drowning, and whoever wades in to save her never comes back. On foggy nights she is said to walk the land and lead travellers astray until they stumble into the river.

Where the legend comes from

Peg Powler — the Tees water hag, Henderson's description, the 'suds' and O'Donnell's version of the drowning lure
`https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peg_Powler`

River Tees — the river, its upper dale and the falls at High Force
`https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Tees`

High Force — the waterfall above the adventure's (fictional) village
`https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Force`

Jenny Greenteeth — the related northern water hag, for GMs who want the wider family of these bogeys
`https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jenny_Greenteeth`

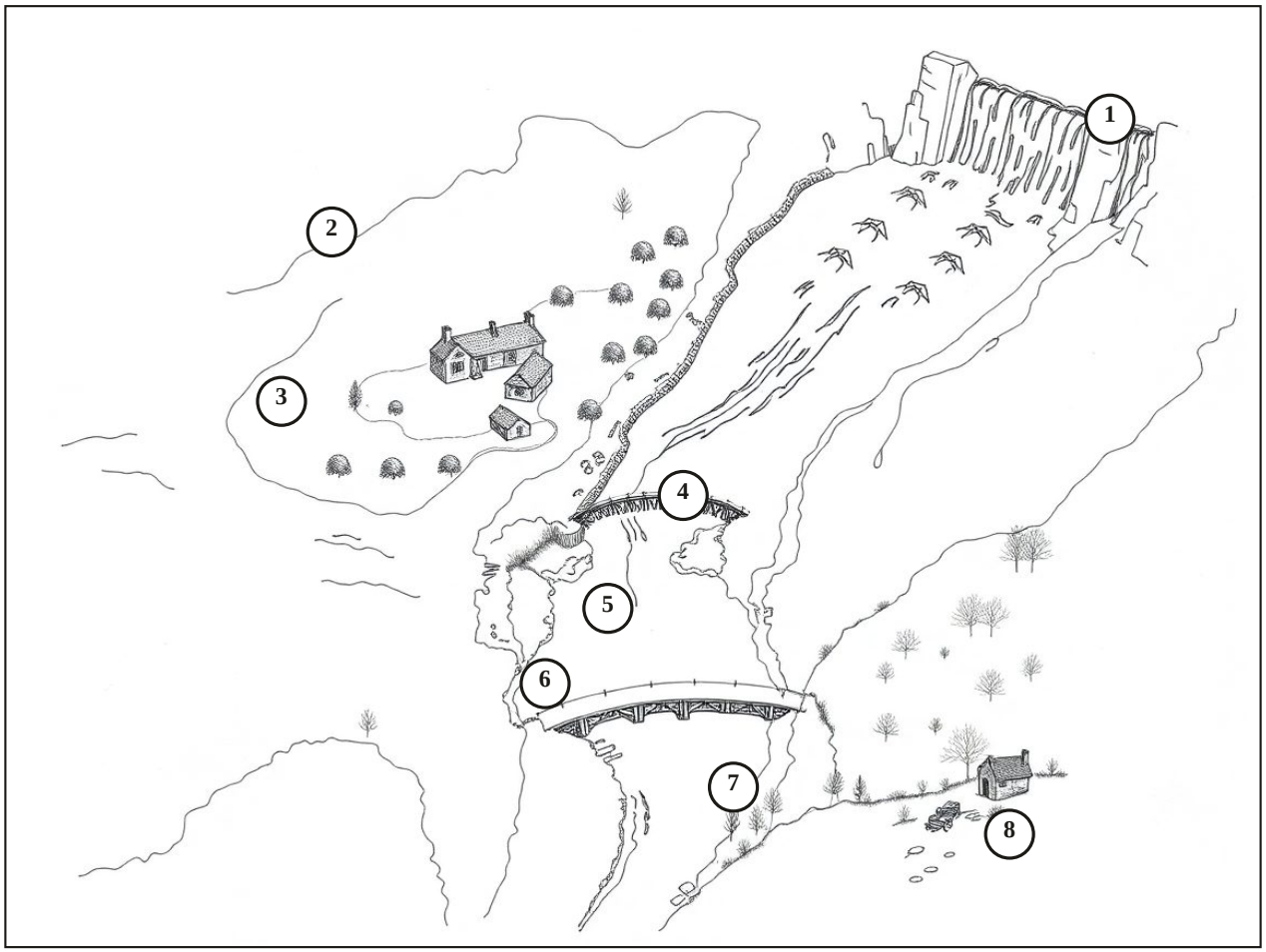
Content notes

- A young man has already drowned (off-screen, before play)
- Peril in deep and fast water
- Voices of loved ones used as a lure
- No harm to children at any point

MAP — PLAYER VERSION

Scarthgill below High Force

The falls, the new weir and its Cream Pot, the drowned ford, the village and the far bank, drawn for play.



SCHEMATIC — NOT TO SCALE, NOT A SURVEY

1. High Force The great falls, white and roaring.

2. The Heather Bell & the green The inn and a few stone houses above the river.

3. Garth's bobbin mill A stone mill with a counting house and a lamp in the window.

4. The weir & sluice A long timber weir; a windlass on the near bank.

5. The Cream Pot A still, black pool lying thick with froth.

6. The old ford Just water here now.

7. The footbridge A narrow wooden bridge to the far bank.

8. Bella Kipling's cottage A lone cottage among the alders across the river.

* * *

PEG POWLER'S RHYME

Keep back, keep back from Tees's side,
where Peg sits under, green and wide;
she combs her hair, she skims her cream,
she calls you sweeter than a dream.

Where Tees runs quick, Peg's arm is thin,
where Tees lies still, she'll have you in.
So cross at the stones where the water's white,
and never answer a voice at night.

Printed for the hawkers of the parish, and sold for a penny.

SLUICE BOOK, SCARTHGILL MILL

No.	Entry	Hand
1	*Mar. 28. Gate shut 6 p.m. per Mr G. Head of water good. — N.D.*	
2	*Mar. 29. Gate opened 2 hrs night, pool flooding the lower field. Fined 2s. by Mr G. — N.D.*	
3	*Mar. 30. Gate shut 6 p.m. Froth very thick below the weir.*	
4	*Mar. 31. Gate shut. Heard a lass crying on the water about 11. Did not go down. God forgive me.*	
5	*Apr. 1. Gate shut. T. Raine not come to work. His boot found at the Pot.*	
6	*— In another hand: 'Gate to stay DOWN after dark. Every foot of water let go is money. J.G.'*	