WILL-O'-THE-WISP

BY VAIDENON OF HUSTAN, WARDEN OF THE INKHORN FELLOWSHIP

Fen-Fire, Corpse-Candle, Ilvir's Lantern

> "Fenmen will tell you there are three lights on the marsh, and that two of them are harmless. They will not tell you which two. I think, in truth, they are not always sure."
>
> — Vaidenon of Hustan, Warden of the Inkhorn Fellowship, Tashal, Morgat 720 TR

Version 1.0 · November 2026 · 4hmlb.com/library/bestiary/will-o-the-wisp.html · send word to vaidenon@4hmlb.com

Across every fen in Hârn, on still nights, lights move: pale, bluish, sometimes golden, always just ahead, and always where the ground is worst. Hârnic folk give them many names and one warning: never follow. The Fellowship distinguishes three lights. *(Inkhorn)* Two are not creatures at all. The third is one of Ilvir's ethereal brood, and it hunts souls.

THE WARDEN'S NOTE

I crossed the Thard fens by the old causeway in Nuzyael, with a drover and his dog. We saw a light on the second night. The drover spat, turned his back on it, and began, loudly and badly, to sing. The dog lay down across my feet. When I looked again the light was gone, and the drover said that was the whole of the trick: give it nothing to want.

THE FELLOWSHIP RULING: WHAT THE WISP IS

The true wisp is an **ethereal Ivashu**, one of the soul-gatherers that Ilvir sends to roam the ethereal world (Religion: Ethereal Ivashu; Ghosts 1: Ilvir cleanses and recycles souls into Ivashu, and his agents search for disembodied souls). It is not an ilsiri, a ghost, or a demon. Most lights seen over fens, however, are natural fen-fire, and some are the corpse-candles of drowned ghosts.

THREE LIGHTS

Fen-fire is a natural light. Rotting stuff in the fens gives off a vapour that sometimes burns with a cold, pale flame on windless nights. *(Inkhorn)* It drifts with the air, has no aura (Sensitivity finds nothing), and harms no one, except those who take it for a lantern and walk into a bog after it. Nine lights in ten are fen-fire.

A **corpse-candle** is a manifestation of a drowned ghost: an ethereal effect, intensity 3 (Ghosts 2; Drowned Dead). It hangs over the place where the body lies and does not move far. Sensitivity reveals a ghost. Following it leads to the body, and often to the drowned ghost's haunt.

Ilvir's Lantern, the true wisp, is a creature. It is a globe of soft light a hand's breadth across, with a darker heart. It hovers at head height, moves against the wind, and draws back as fast as anyone approaches. It is drawn to the lost, the tired, and the lonely. It leads them off the causeway into deep mire and open water and waits beside them while they drown. When the body dies, the wisp takes the soul in Mental Conflict before it can begin its death-journey. The soul goes to Araka-Kalai, where Ilvir remakes it into an Ivashu (Ghosts 1).

DISTRIBUTION

Wisps haunt waterlogged wilds where men must cross on causeways and trackways: the Anoth delta, the marshes about Lake Benath, the fens of the Kald and Thard valleys, the wet moors of Rethem, and the Fenlands of Kaldor. *(Inkhorn)* A fen with an old causeway, a ruined chapel or a battle-site has more. They are commonest in late autumn and winter, when nights are long.

NATURE AND SENSES

The wisp has no body. It perceives auras by Sensitivity and reads the mood of the lost with Telepathy. It speaks no language, but it can make its light flicker and dance like a lantern carried by a walking man. It cannot touch anything. Its only weapons are the light that lures and the Mental Conflict in which it takes a soul.

DEFENCE

Like all natural ethereals, the wisp is immune to everything but enchanted weapons, magic, psionics, and divine intervention. Injury becomes fatigue, and a failed "shock roll" against Aura dissolves it for 2d6 hours (Religion 17; the Fellowship's convention). A Passage of the Soul said at once over the dying gives the soul Divine Grace and a quick journey, and denies the wisp. Fenmen keep to staked

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causeways, carry rope, travel in company, and never answer a light.

SPECIAL RULES

THE LURE (INKHORN)

Once a night, the wisp may lure. It rolls Manifestation (a visible light, intensity 2). On a success, everyone who sees the light tests WIL × 4: at WIL × 3 if alone, lost, exhausted (Fatigue 3+), or drunk, and at WIL × 5 if he knows the light for a wisp.

CS: unaffected, and sees the light for what it is. **MS:** unaffected. **MF:** follows for 1d6 × 10 minutes, then may test again; companions may restrain him (a grapple). **CF:** follows until he falls into mire or deep water, or is restrained. The follower crosses bad ground: a Stumble roll each 10 minutes, and on a failure he is in mire or water (Skills 10; Mire Grip if bog-dead lie near).

SOUL-TAKING

When anyone dies within AUR × 5 feet of the wisp, it engages the departing soul in Mental Conflict before the death-journey begins (Religion: ethereal Ivashu always engage in Mental Conflict). If the wisp wins, the soul goes to Ilvir and leaves no ghost. A soul given Divine Grace by a timely Passage of the Soul is beyond its reach.

RELIGIOUS VIEWS

- Ilvir: Ilviran priests call the wisp Ilvir's Lantern and hold that it carries the lost to be made anew. They will not harm one (Inkhorn).
- Siem: Siemites say the wisps steal the lights of the Ilsiri. They are wrong, but they hate them (Inkhorn).
- Peoni and Larani: both teach the wisp as a peril to the soul and bless causeways with markers and prayers (Inkhorn).
- Morgath: Morgathians compete with the wisps for drowned souls (Ghosts 1).

FOLK TALES

Jack of the Causeway

A drover of the Thard fens followed a light he took for his brother's lantern. His dog would not go, and howled until men came with ropes. They found him chest-deep in the mire, still smiling at nothing, and the light gone.

Two Lights

Fenmen say: a still light is a dead man, a moving light is a hungry one. Go to the first with a priest, and away from the second with a rope.

The Ilviran Allegory

An Ilviran sermon tells of a wisp that guided a lost child safely home instead of drowning her, and of Ilvir laughing at it. The priests disagree about what the story means.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- Pilgrims crossing the fens on a causeway vanish one by one; the PCs see lights each night.
- A corpse-candle hangs over the same pool every night: a murdered tax-collector lies there, with the lord's seal.
- An Ilviran priest offers good silver to anyone who can bring him news of "a lantern that does not drown".
- A dying companion in the fens, a light approaching, and no priest.

ENCOUNTERS

Ethereals (Campaign 14, subtable 16): Elmithri/Water Sprite. The Fellowship proposes that a result of "In fen or marsh at night" be resolved on this table:

D100	RESULT
01–60	Fen-fire (a natural light; no creature)
61–85	Corpse-candle (a drowned ghost: see Drowned Dead)
86–00	Ilvir's Lantern (a wisp)

Wilderness at night in Marsh: 1 in 10 encounters is a light; resolve on this table.

RUMOURS

RUMOUR	TRUTH	WHERE
Lights on the fen: a traveller was led off the causeway and drowned.	true	the Anoth delta, the Kald and Thard fens, Kaldor Fenlands
If you turn your coat inside out, the fen-lights cannot lead you.	false	anywhere
The Ilvirans pray to the fen-lights.	partly	Tharda, Rethem

ECONOMIC DATA

ITEM	PRICE	SOURCE
None	Wisps leave nothing; the drowned they take often carry purses (see Drowned Dead).	—

THE FELLOWSHIP'S ADDITIONS

- The true wisp as an ethereal Ivashu (Ilvir's Lantern), and fen-fire as a natural light
- The Lure and Soul-Taking rules
- Distribution, tales, and the encounter additions

Everything else follows HârnMaster 3 and the Columbia Games articles cited, which the Fellowship commends to every reader.

CREDITS

Writer: Vaidenon of Hustan. Set down by Lesli of Bifel and his homunculus, Claudin.

Sources cited: Columbia Games' *Bestiary* (Ghosts), *Ivashu* (#4611), *Religion* (#4401: Ilvir; Siem; Peoni; Larani; Morgath) and the HârnMaster 3 core rules (Skills 10; Campaign 11 and 14); Drowned Dead, in this Physiologus.

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STAT BLOCKS

ILVIR'S LANTERN (WISP)

Habitat: Fens, marshes, wet moors
Height: a hand's breadth
Weight: Trace
Diet: Souls
Lifespan: Immortal
Group: 1 (rarely 1d3)

ATTRIBUTES

• Str	• Eye	07 Int	20 Fly
• Sta	• Hrg	16 Aur	
• Dex	• Sml	14 Wil	
• Agl			

SKILLS

73 Initiative	80 Dodge
75 Manifestation[1]	70 Mental Conflict
80 Sensitivity	80 Telepathy

[1] Manifestation: light

ARMOUR

None (ethereal)

STRIKE LOCATIONS

None while ethereal. Only enchanted weapons, magic, psionics, and divine intervention affect it (Religion 17).

- The Lure: viewers test WIL × 4 (Inkhorn).
- Soul-Taking: Mental Conflict with a departing soul within AUR × 5 feet.
- Natural ethereal: injury becomes fatigue; a failed shock roll against Aura dissolves it for 2d6 hours.

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