Prologues

Short one-on-one stories the GM runs with each player, showing how their hero ends up in Gale's Landing.

How Prologues Work

Each prologue is a 15-to-25-minute story you run with one player, about the moment their hero first gets pulled toward Gale’s Landing. Run the one that matches the reason the player picked in Making Characters, step 3.

Before you start

- Have the player pick a role first, so their Brave, Clever, and Kind are set.
- Put dice, their character sheet, and a pencil on the table.
- Only you need this page. The player doesn’t need to see it.

How to run a prologue

- Start at passage 1 and read it aloud. The passages speak to the player as “you,” so you can read them exactly as written.
- At the end of each passage, offer the choices. Write them on option cards, or read them out and let the player point, tap a card, or tell you.
- When a passage calls for a roll, the player rolls dice equal to that stat, and you read the highest die against the passage.
- When a passage says to write something down (The Star, The Fire, and so on), have the player note it on their sheet, and jot it in your own notes too.
- Courage and Fright work as usual, but nothing carries over except what the ending says to keep.
- Add a sound effect or a line of description if you like, but keep the pace quick. A prologue is a hook, not a full adventure.

Quiet play tips

- Run prologues one-on-one, somewhere comfortable, with no audience. For a player who’s anxious at the table, this is a low-pressure first taste of the game.
- Every choice can be made by pointing at an option card. No speaking is ever needed.
- If the player hesitates, simply wait, or read the choices again.

At the end

- Read the ending aloud, then give the player their secret written on an index card. They keep it, and they never have to share it with the other players.
- Mark their reward on their character sheet.
- Run each prologue only once per hero. Hold on to the secrets: calling back to one during the campaign is a great way to make a player feel their hero's story matters.

Prologue: Ada's Letter

For heroes whose great-aunt Ada Finch asked them to come.

1. A thick cream envelope arrives with your name written in old-fashioned, curly handwriting. It smells like cinnamon and old paper. Inside is a note: "Come quickly. The lighthouse needs you. Bring your sharpest eyes. Love, Aunt Ada." Tucked behind the note is an old photograph of a woman in a long coat standing in front of a lighthouse. And something small rattles at the bottom of the envelope.

- Study the photograph: go to **2**.
- Shake out the envelope: go to **3**.

2. Roll **Clever**.

- **5 or higher:** On the back, in faded pencil: "E.M., 1926." In the photo, the lighthouse lamp is lit, though it's broad daylight. In the bottom corner, someone has scratched a tiny symbol into the picture: a four-pointed star inside a circle. Write **The Star** on your sheet. Go to **4**.
- **4 or lower:** You don't notice anything special. But when you set the photo down and glance back, the woman seems to be looking straight at you now. She wasn't before. Take 1 Fright. Go to **4**.

3. A brass button drops into your palm, the kind that might come off an old uniform coat. Stamped into it is a four-pointed star inside a circle. Strangely, it's cold, as if it just came out of the sea, and it stays cold no matter how long you hold it. Write **The Button** on your sheet. Go to **4**.

4. Two days later, you're on the last bus of the day, winding along the coast. The sea is gray and the sky is grayer. A mile outside of town, fog rolls across the road so thick the bus has to stop. "That's as far as I go," the driver says. "Gale's Landing's a two-mile walk. Or wait here and see if it lifts."

- Wait on the bus: go to **5**.
- Walk the rest of the way: go to **6**.

5. An old man in a captain's cap is the only other passenger. He's been watching you. "Visiting Ada Finch, are you? Thought so. She's been telling everyone help is coming." He leans closer. "Lights on the island again. First time in fifty years."

Roll **Kind** to get him talking.

- **5 or higher:** He tells you Ada is the only person in town who never believed the old lighthouse keeper was a thief. “Ada’s got a good heart. You’ll do right by her.” Gain 1 Courage. Go to **7**.
- **4 or lower:** He just nods and stares out at the fog for the rest of the wait. Somehow, that’s worse. Go to **7**.

6. Roll **Brave**.

- **5 or higher:** You walk fast, and the fog thins as you go. Through a gap, you see the lighthouse on its island, white and dark and very still. Gain 1 Courage. Go to **7**.
- **4 or lower:** You take a wrong turn and end up on the beach. The fog is so thick you can barely see your feet. Somewhere out on the water, very faintly, a voice calls your name. You find the road again, fast. Take 1 Fright. Go to **7**.

7. By the time you reach town, it’s nearly dark. Finch’s Books & Tea glows warm at the end of the street. The bell over the door jingles when you step in, but no one’s at the counter. A mug of cocoa is steaming there, with a little card that has your name on it.

Through the front window, across the harbor, you can see the lighthouse. As you watch, its dead lamp flashes: three times, a pause, then three times again.

Then a tiny woman with silver hair hurries out of the back room. “Oh, good,” she says. “You’re just in time.”

The end.

Your secret: “The lighthouse flashed at me, and I don’t know why.”

Your reward: If you wrote down The Star, start your first session with 1 extra Courage. If you wrote down The Button, keep it as a bonus item: once per mystery, when you hold it, you can feel whether something nearby is truly strange or just ordinary.

Prologue: The Ghost Report

For heroes writing a report, or a book, about real ghosts.

1. Your assignment is to write about a real local legend, and you’ve decided to find a real ghost. The city library’s Local History Room is quiet and smells like dust. On a high shelf you find a fat old book called *Haunted Harbors of the North Atlantic*. The table of contents lists a chapter called “The Lights of Gale’s Landing.” But when you turn to it, the chapter is gone. Twelve pages have been sliced out, neatly, with a razor.

- Ask the librarian about it: go to **2**.
- Search the shelves yourself: go to **3**.

2. The librarian is a stooped old man with a cardigan and half-moon glasses. Roll **Kind**.

- **5 or higher:** He frowns at the missing pages. “Funny. Only one other person has asked for that book in years. A tall, quiet man, back in June. Long gray coat, even though it was hot out.” He hands you a heavy brass key. “Microfilm room’s in the basement. Old newspapers from all over the coast. We close at six.” Write **The Gray Coat** on your sheet. Go to **4**.
- **4 or lower:** He shrugs. “Kids. Try the microfilm in the basement. We close at six.” Go to **4**.

3. Roll **Clever**.

- **5 or higher:** In the index of a different book, you find one strange entry: “Gale’s Landing: see Watches, the Four.” When you turn to that page, it’s been cut out too. Write **The Four** on your sheet. Go to **4**.
- **4 or lower:** You search until your eyes ache and find nothing but dust. You sneeze so loudly that someone shushes you from three rooms away. It’s almost closing time. Go to **4**.

4. The basement microfilm room is cold and dim. The old machine hums when you switch it on, and its screen glows a soft gray-green. You find a reel labeled *Gale’s Landing Gazette*, with dates going back two hundred years. You only have time to search one year.

- Search 1926: go to **5**.
- Search 1826: go to **6**.

5. October 1926. A headline: “FOG LIFTS AFTER THREE DAYS; RESIDENTS RECALL ‘VOICES.’” The short article says that during a terrible storm, a thick fog covered the town, and many people swore they heard family members calling to them from inside it. Family members who were miles away. Below the article is a photo of the town’s lighthouse, its lamp blazing. Go to **7**.

6. October 1826. It’s hard to read, but you find one odd line in a list of town news: “Mr. J. Pell rang the meeting house bell from dusk until dawn on the night of the fog. Many complaints were made.” Why would anyone ring a bell all night long? Go to **7**.

7. With a loud click, every light in the basement goes out. Only the microfilm screen still glows. You didn’t hear anyone come down the stairs. Roll **Brave**.

- **5 or higher:** You hold still and keep calm. On the screen, the reel is scrolling by itself, very slowly, and stops on a page that isn’t a newspaper at all. It’s handwritten, with no date: “Keep the Watches. All four. Never let them sleep.” Gain 1 Courage. Go to **8**.
- **4 or lower:** You hear slow footsteps on the stairs: step, step, step. Then they stop. Take 1 Fright. When you dare to look back at the screen, it has scrolled to a handwritten page with no date: “Keep the Watches. All four. Never let them sleep.” Go to **8**.

8. The lights snap back on. The librarian is standing at the bottom of the stairs, blinking at you. “Oh! I didn’t know anyone was still down here.” He didn’t come down the stairs a minute ago. He says he’s been upstairs all evening.

That night, you look up bus times to Gale’s Landing. Some reports need a field trip.

The end.

Your secret: “Someone cut Gale’s Landing out of the books before I got there.”

Your reward: Your notebook is full of research. Once per mystery, you can flip through it and ask the GM one question about the town’s history, and get a true answer. If you wrote down The Gray Coat or The Four, also start your first session with 1 extra Courage.

Prologue: The Last Room

For heroes on vacation who end up in the only room left.

1. Rain has been drumming on the car roof for an hour, and every motel along the coast has a “No Vacancy” sign. At last, a wooden sign looms out of the dark: “Gale’s Landing, Est. 1726.” At the end of the main street is the Harbor Inn, an old crooked building with every window glowing gold. The woman at the front desk has a kind face and reading glasses on a chain. “One room left,” she says. “Top floor, facing the island.” She hesitates. “Most folks don’t want that one.”

- Take the room, gladly: go to **3**.
- Ask why nobody wants it: go to **2**.

2. Roll **Kind**.

- **5 or higher:** She smiles. “I’m Pearl. Guests say they see things out on the water at night. Lights. I tell them it’s only the moon.” She hands you an extra quilt. “For luck.” Gain 1 Courage. Go to **3**.
- **4 or lower:** “Oh, people say silly things,” she says quickly, and changes the subject to breakfast times. Go to **3**.

3. The lobby has low beams, creaky floors, and the biggest fireplace you’ve ever seen, with a fire crackling inside. A brass plaque above it reads “Never Let It Die.” Pearl sees you looking. “That fire’s been burning since 1726. My family has kept it going for three hundred years.”

- Sit by the fire for a while: go to **4**.
- Head straight up to your room: go to **5**.

4. The armchair is soft and the fire is warm, and before you know it, you’ve dozed off. You wake with a shiver. The fire has burned down to a few red coals, the lobby is dark, and a thin gray mist is curling in under the front door. Roll **Clever** to bring the fire back.

- **5 or higher:** You feed it kindling and blow gently. The flames catch with a whoosh, and for one moment they burn bright blue. The mist slides back out under the door as if it’s been shooed away. Gain 1 Courage. Write **The Fire** on your sheet. Go to **5**.
- **4 or lower:** It takes ages to get the fire going again. While you work, someone whispers your name from over by the door. When you turn, no one’s there. Take 1 Fright. The fire catches at last. Go to **5**.

5. Your room is tiny, with a slanted ceiling and one big window. Across the black harbor, you can just make out the shape of a lighthouse on an island. Its lamp is dark.

Some time after midnight, something wakes you. Fog is rolling across the harbor toward the inn, and it's moving against the wind. It climbs the building and presses right up against your window. And from inside it, softly, a voice whispers your name. It sounds exactly like someone you love.

- Close the curtains: go to **6**.
- Open the window: go to **7**.

6. You yank the curtains shut and pull the quilt over your head. The whispering goes on for a long time. Roll **Brave**.

- **5 or higher:** You tell yourself it's only the wind, and somehow you fall asleep. Go to **8**.
- **4 or lower:** You lie awake until the whispering finally stops, just before dawn. Take 1 Fright. Go to **8**.

7. You push the window open. Roll **Brave**.

- **5 or higher:** The warm lamplight from your room spills out into the fog, and the fog flinches back as if the light burned it. The whispering stops. Then, across the harbor, the dark lighthouse flashes once. Gain 1 Courage. Write **The Flash** on your sheet. Go to **8**.
- **4 or lower:** Cold air rushes in, and the whispering gets louder, almost turning into words. You slam the window shut and lean against it, heart pounding. Take 1 Fright. Go to **8**.

8. In the morning, the sun is out and the harbor sparkles. Everything looks ordinary. Then you notice the window. On the outside of the glass, drawn in frost on a morning that isn't even cold, is a symbol: a four-pointed star inside a circle.

Your room is on the third floor.

At breakfast, Pearl pours you a cup of tea. "Sleep well?" she asks, and doesn't wait for an answer.

The end.

Your secret: "Something drew a symbol on my window, from the outside, three floors up."

Your reward: Pearl has taken a liking to you. Once per mystery, you can rest at the Harbor Inn and get all your Nerve back. If you wrote down The Fire or The Flash, also start your first session with 1 extra Courage.

Prologue: The Dream

For heroes who dreamed of the lighthouse before they ever saw it.

1. For as long as you can remember, you've had the same dream: a white tower standing over gray water. Tonight, the dream is different. You're inside the tower, at the bottom of a spiral staircase. Iron steps curl up

into darkness. Far above, something glows.

- Start climbing: go to **2**.
- Call out to whoever is up there: go to **3**.

2. The stairs go on and on. Roll **Brave**.

- **5 or higher:** You climb steadily, counting as you go. One hundred and twelve steps. You'll remember that number when you wake up. Gain 1 Courage. Go to **4**.
- **4 or lower:** Halfway up, a rusted step crumbles under your foot. You grab the railing just in time and hang there, legs dangling over the dark. Take 1 Fright. You pull yourself up and keep climbing. Go to **4**.

3. You open your mouth to call out, but in the dream your voice makes no sound at all. Then, from far above, a light flashes once, like an answer. Somehow you know it means yes, come up. You feel welcome. Gain 1 Courage, and climb. Go to **4**.

4. At the top is a room made of glass, high above the sea. In the middle stands an enormous lens of crystal, taller than you, dark and still. Outside, thick gray fog presses against every window, and inside the fog, faint shapes move.

A woman in a long, dark keeper's coat stands at the glass with her back to you. Slowly, she turns. Her lips move, but no sound comes out. She holds out an old brass lantern.

- Take the lantern: go to **5**.
- Try to ask who she is, using gestures: go to **6**.

5. The lantern is warm in your hands. As you lift it, the great lens catches its light and blazes to life, filling the room with white and blue. Outside, the fog shrinks back from the glass. The woman smiles and presses her hand over her heart. Gain 1 Courage. Go to **7**.

6. You point at her, then shrug, palms up: who are you? Roll **Kind**.

- **5 or higher:** She understands, and somehow so do you, without a single word. She's been waiting for a long time for someone who could understand her. She's tired, and she's worried about her light. She touches a silver locket at her throat. Write **The Locket** on your sheet. Then she presses the lantern into your hands. Go to **7**.
- **4 or lower:** You can't understand her, and she looks so sad that it makes your chest ache. Take 1 Fright. She presses the lantern into your hands anyway. Go to **7**.

7. From the fog outside comes a whisper. It's saying your name, in the voice of someone you love. You turn toward it without meaning to.

The woman steps between you and the window and shakes her head, hard: *no.* She takes your hand and lifts the lantern with you. Together you flash it: three times, a pause, three times again.

And you wake up. Go to **8**.

8. It's morning. Your hand is clenched tight around something. When you open it, you find a piece of blue sea glass, cold and wet and smelling of salt water. You live nowhere near the sea.

A week later, waiting in line at a shop, you spin a rack of postcards. One of them makes your breath catch: "Greetings from Gale's Landing." On the front is a white lighthouse on a rocky island. It's the tower from your dream.

The end.

Your secret: "I've climbed that tower before, in my dreams, and someone was waiting for me."

Your reward: Keep the sea glass as a bonus item. Once per mystery, you can hold it, close your eyes, and ask the GM, "Is there a ghost here?" The GM answers truthfully, yes or no. If you wrote down The Locket, also start your first session with 1 extra Courage.