

The Whispering Inn

A mystery in three sessions that turns out (mostly) not to be paranormal.

Overview

The Harbor Inn, the oldest building in Gale's Landing after the meeting house, has turned terrifying overnight: whispers in the walls, a pale lady in the hall, doors that lock themselves. Guests are fleeing, and Pearl Okafor may lose the inn. The haunting is a hoax staged by a pair of internet ghost hunters, and the heroes must expose them.

For the GM's eyes only: what's really going on

- **The Spectral Seekers.** Brock Steele and Kenzie Vale run a ghost-hunting video show whose views have been falling for a year. They need a real haunting to make it famous again, so they decided to make one.
- **The setup.** Kenzie checked in three weeks ago under a fake name and hid speakers in the heating vents, a projector in an old dumbwaiter shaft, a fog machine in the cellar, and magnetic locks on two doors. Brock arrived last week, "by chance," with his cameras.
- **The hearth.** The inn's great fireplace has burned without stopping since 1726. It's a family tradition passed down to Pearl. To make the lobby cold and eerie on camera, Brock secretly poured a bucket of water on it at 3 a.m. Pearl believes the ghost put it out, and it breaks her heart.
- **The tip.** The Seekers chose this inn because of an anonymous email with the inn's history and a suggestion: "The hearth is the heart of the place. It would be far eerier cold." (Gideon sent it.)
- **The one thing no one can explain.** Late at night, near the dead hearth, a whisper sometimes says "keep the fire." It isn't on any of the Seekers' recordings. Never explain it.

The heroes right two wrongs: exposing the hoax to save Pearl's inn, and rekindling the fire that should never have gone out.

How the tricks work

WHAT GUESTS EXPERIENCE	HOW IT'S DONE
Whispers inside the walls	Tiny speakers hidden in the heating vents, controlled from a laptop
A freezing cold spot in the upstairs hall	Dry ice in a cooler behind a loose baseboard
A pale lady gliding down the hall and through a wall	A projector in the old dumbwaiter shaft, shining onto drifting fog
Doors that lock and unlock themselves	Remote-controlled magnetic locks
Wet footprints that vanish	Footprints painted in water with a stamp, which dry in minutes
The lobby fire went out on its own	Brock and a bucket of water

Cast

CHARACTER	WHO THEY ARE	HOW TO PLAY THEM
Pearl Okafor	Owner of the Harbor Inn, 60s	Warm, chatty, frightened, and heartbroken about the hearth
Brock Steele	Ghost-show host	Loud, dramatic, catchphrases (“Do you FEEL that?”); a fraud, but not cruel
Kenzie Vale	His tech partner and camera operator	Sharp, sarcastic, guilty; she likes Pearl and hates what they're doing
Professor Alistair Fenn	Retired stage magician, long-term guest	Theatrical, delighted by tricks, a great ally
Gideon Shale	A guest	The only one not frightened; reads by the cold hearth every evening
Ozzie Brandt	Librarian, and a secret fan of the show	Starstruck at first, then furious when he learns the truth

Places

- **The lobby:** low beams, creaky floors, and the enormous stone hearth, now cold and black. In the corner stands an old wind-up phonograph with a brass horn, which hasn't played in years.
- **The upstairs hall:** long and narrow, with ten guest rooms. Room 9 has been "under repair" for weeks.
- **The attic:** trunks, old furniture, and dust.
- **The cellar:** the furnace, the root cellar, and the bottom of the old dumbwaiter shaft.

GM tools: night at the inn

Roll a die when the inn is quiet at night:

1. Whispering from the heating vent: words you can't quite make out.
2. A door at the end of the hall clicks locked by itself.
3. Breath fogs in a sudden cold patch, then the air is normal again.
4. Wet footprints lead around the corner and stop.
5. Somewhere below, the faint hum of a machine, then silence.
6. By the dead hearth, the rocking chair creaks once. No one is in it.

Session 1: A Night at the Inn

The heroes check in to the haunted inn, meet its odd guests, and spend a night investigating whispers, cold spots, and a pale lady in the hall.

Scene 1: The case file (15 minutes)

READ ALOUD

Ada's folder holds a printout of a video thumbnail: a man with spiky hair and enormous eyes, pointing at a blurry white shape. The title reads "MOST HAUNTED INN IN AMERICA?! (NOT CLICKBAIT)." Ada has written underneath: "Pearl has had eleven cancellations this week. She's booked you two rooms. Free of charge, and she'd be grateful."

If this is the heroes' first mystery, use this scene to introduce Ada and the case board.

Scene 2: Checking in (30 minutes)

READ ALOUD

The Harbor Inn is all crooked beams and creaking floors, the kind of place that should feel cozy. It doesn't. The lobby is cold. In the huge stone fireplace, where a fire should be crackling, there's only a heap of black, soggy ash. A small woman with a kind face and tired eyes hurries over to you. "Oh, thank goodness. I'm Pearl. Welcome to the Harbor Inn."

Pearl explains, close to tears:

- The hauntings started three weeks ago: whispering, cold spots, and a pale woman in the upstairs hall.
- Four nights ago, the hearth fire went out. "It's burned since 1726. My grandmother kept it, and her mother before her. It has never gone out. Never."
- She's losing guests every day, and can't afford to lose many more.

The guests. Lay out name cards so the players can point at whoever they want to meet:

- **Brock Steele and Kenzie Vale** are filming in the lobby. Brock greets the heroes with a huge grin and a camera in their faces: "Do you FEEL that? That's spiritual energy, folks!" Kenzie, behind the camera, rolls her eyes.
- **Professor Alistair Fenn**, a retired stage magician in a velvet jacket, sits with a pot of tea. "Hauntings are a lot like magic tricks, you know. The trick is never where they want you to look."
- **Gideon Shale** sits alone in the armchair by the cold hearth, reading a book of old sea charts. He's the only guest who doesn't seem frightened. Asked why, he smiles faintly: "I'm not afraid of the dead. It's the living who frighten me." A Listener who uses Heart Sense on Gideon feels only an enormous, quiet grief, like standing at the edge of very deep water.

Scene 3: The night (60 minutes)

Dim the lights. Through the night, the inn's "hauntings" happen one after another. Let the players choose which to investigate, using option cards for each event as it happens:

- **The whispers.** From the heating vent in the hall, a woman's voice whispers: "Leave this place." With Look or a Clever roll, a hero notices it's word-for-word identical every time, with the same breath and the same crackle at the end. On a 6, they feel the vent is slightly warm, as if something electronic is inside.
- **The cold spot.** A patch of the upstairs hall is freezing, and wisps of fog curl along the floor. With Look, a hero notices the fog only comes from one spot along the baseboard. With a Fix roll, they can pry the baseboard loose, but Brock calls everyone down to the lobby for "a disturbance" before they get the chance.

- **The locking door.** A guest room door slams and locks itself with a heavy click. With Look, a hero notices a small metal plate on the frame that wasn't there in old photos of the inn (Pearl has one in the lobby).
- **The wet footprints.** Bare footprints lead down the hall and stop at a wall. A Clever roll reveals they're perfectly identical, left and right, like stamps. Within minutes, they're gone.

Each event costs 1 Fright to anyone who sees it unless they play Look or Wait, studying it calmly.

Throughout the night, Brock always seems to be first to arrive with a camera, and Kenzie is never there. With Look or a Clever roll, a hero notices this.

Scene 4: The pale lady (30 minutes)

At 3 a.m., something wakes the heroes.

READ ALOUD

The hall is filled with a low, drifting mist. At the far end, a woman in an old-fashioned white dress glides toward you, her face blank and pale, her feet not quite touching the floor. She raises one arm and points straight at you. Then she turns, walks into the wall, and is gone.

- Each hero takes 1 Fright unless they play Wait or Look.
- A hero who chases her and plays Look or rolls Clever notices that her edges flickered, just for a moment, like a bad TV signal. On a 6, they notice that where she disappeared, there's an old wooden panel in the wall: the hatch of a dumbwaiter.

As the heroes head back to their rooms, they pass the dark lobby. By the cold hearth, very softly, they hear a woman whisper three words: "Keep the fire."

This whisper is not one of the Seekers' tricks, and it should feel different: warm, close, and sad. Don't explain it. End the session here.

Session 2: Behind the Walls

The heroes search the inn from attic to cellar, find the machinery behind the haunting, and uncover a secret room, plus an old journal and an older song that tell a stranger story.

Scene 1: Morning after (20 minutes)

READ ALOUD

At breakfast, Brock's new video is already playing on every guest's phone: shaky footage of the pale lady, his own terrified face, and the words "WE ALMOST DIDN'T SURVIVE." By ten o'clock, two more families have checked out. Pearl stands by the cold fireplace holding an empty log basket, very still.

Ozzie Brandt turns up, thrilled to meet Brock ("I've seen every episode!"). He'll help the heroes with anything once they're kind to him, and becomes furious when he learns the truth later.

Scene 2: Searching the inn (60 minutes)

Lay out option cards for each part of the inn. The heroes can search them in any order.

The heating vents. Unscrewing a vent cover takes a Fix roll. Inside is a tiny black speaker, no bigger than a matchbox, with a thin wire running deeper into the walls. With a Clever roll, a hero follows the wire's path by tapping on walls: it leads toward Room 9.

The front desk. Pearl's guest book, with Pearl's permission or a Sneak roll. With Look, a hero finds that a "K. Valentine" checked in three weeks ago, the day before the hauntings began, and asked for Room 8, next to the room under repair. The handwriting matches the label on Kenzie's camera bag.

Professor Fenn. With a Talk card, or just by showing him what they've found, the heroes get Fenn's help. He's delighted: "Oh, that's an old one! A projector and a bit of fog. We called it Pepper's Ghost in my day." He explains any trick the heroes have spotted so far, and suggests: "Find where the show is being run from. Every trick needs a backstage."

The attic. Dusty trunks, broken chairs, and moth-eaten quilts. With Look or a Clever roll, the heroes find an old leather journal in a trunk labeled "H. Moss," Pearl's grandmother. Most of it is recipes and guest lists, but one entry from October 1926 stands out:

READ ALOUD

"The fog came in with the great storm and would not leave. All night, voices in it called us by name: my mother's voice, my brother's. We kept the fire, and Eliza kept the light, and old Mr. Abbott rang the bell, and the stone held. By morning it was gone. Mother says it comes every hundred years. Next time it will be the Hunter's Moon."

Campaign clue: Grandmother's Journal. Pearl, shown the journal, cries a little. "She always said the fire was the most important thing in the whole inn. I thought she was being sentimental."

The wax cylinder. In the same trunk, wrapped in a quilt, is a cardboard tube holding a brown wax phonograph cylinder. The label is in the same handwriting as the journal: "KEEP THE WATCH. Mother sings it, so we don't forget. Oct. 1926." Folded inside the tube is a sheet with the words written out. Give the players **handout WI-4**.

Playing it. The only machine that can play the cylinder is the old phonograph in the lobby. Getting its stiff crank turning again takes a Fix roll, or Professor Fenn's help: "An Edison! My grandfather had one just like it." Once it works, any hero can wind the crank and lower the needle without saying a word.

READ ALOUD

The cylinder hisses and pops like a fire. Then, thin and far away, as if from the bottom of a well, a woman begins to sing.

Play **Keep the Watch** from the soundboard, and let it run all the way through without talking over it. Players can follow along on handout WI-4.

- **Pearl** goes very quiet. "Grandma used to hum that while she banked the fire at night. I never knew it had words." The singer is Pearl's great-grandmother.
- **The voice.** A Listener using Heart Sense, or any hero who plays Wait and simply listens, is certain the singer's voice is the same one that whispered "Keep the fire" by the hearth. Don't explain it.
- **The newest verse.** The third verse names Eliza and the great storm, so the singer must have added it that same month. If the heroes have played the Lighthouse Mystery, they know exactly who Eliza was.
- **The chorus is a map.** One for the light, two for the bell, three for the stone, four for the fire: the four Watches, though no one in the song says so. Players who have solved other cases may put it together. Let them.

Bonus clue: The Old Song. Pin handout WI-4 to the case board. It isn't required, but it pays off in the finale: the song's bridge tells the heroes how to see through the Gray.

The cellar. With a Sneak roll (Brock comes down for something now and then), the heroes find a fog machine connected to a hose that runs up the dumbwaiter shaft. At the bottom of the shaft is an empty space where something has been removed: there are clean squares in the dust, the shape of a projector stand.

Scene 3: Room 9 (45 minutes)

All the clues point to Room 9, "closed for repairs." It's locked. Getting in takes a Fix roll on the lock, Pearl's master key, or a Sneak roll during dinner.

READ ALOUD

Room 9 isn't under repair at all. It's a control room. Two laptops glow on the desk, beside a mixing board with sliders labeled WHISPER 1, WHISPER 2, LOCK A, LOCK B, and LADY. A projector sits on a cart by the dumbwaiter hatch. Coolers of dry ice line the wall. And on the bed is a printed script: "FINALE: The Ghost Speaks. Live. Saturday 9 p.m."

- The script describes Brock's plan for a live séance in the lobby, broadcast to his followers. The "ghost" will announce that the inn is cursed and that anyone who stays will be harmed. Pearl would never get another booking.
- With Look or a Clever roll, a hero finds a printed email taped to the laptop lid. It's from an address of random letters: "The Harbor Inn has the best history on the coast. The hearth is the heart of the place. It would be far eerier cold." No name.
- The heroes can take photos, take evidence, or leave everything as it is to catch the Seekers in the act.

READ ALOUD

Footsteps in the hall. The doorknob turns. The heroes have just enough time to hide, under the bed, in the closet, or behind the curtains (Sneak), before Kenzie slips in and closes the door behind her.

Kenzie sits down at the laptop, looks at the script for a long moment, and puts her head in her hands. "I can't do this to that nice lady," she says to the empty room. "I can't."

The heroes can stay hidden or reveal themselves. If they come out, Kenzie is startled but doesn't call for Brock. End the session here, with Kenzie staring at them and the choice hanging in the air.

Session 3: The Ghost Hunters Exposed

The heroes win Kenzie over, turn the Seekers' live séance into a live unmasking, and rekindle the fire that kept Gale's Landing safe for three hundred years.

Scene 1: Kenzie's choice (20 minutes)

Kenzie wants out but is scared of Brock, and of losing everything they've built. A Talk card or Kind roll wins her over. So does showing her Pearl's grandmother's journal, or just letting her talk while the heroes listen (Wait). A Listener's Heart Sense shows her guilt at once, and counts as winning her over.

Once she's on their side, Kenzie:

- Confesses the whole setup, and shows them how every trick works on the mixing board.
- Admits the anonymous email is why they chose this inn.
- Mentions something odd: "There's footage from the hall camera I never showed Brock. I couldn't explain it." She'll show them after the séance.

If the heroes never win Kenzie over, they can still expose the hoax with the evidence from Room 9 and help from Fenn. Kenzie comes clean afterward.

Scene 2: Planning the unmasking (30 minutes)

The live séance is tonight at 9. Lay out option cards; the heroes can prepare any three:

- **Rewire the tricks.** With Kenzie or Fenn's help, a Fix roll changes what the tricks do. The pale lady could appear holding a sign reading "FAKE." The whisper could say "Brock did it."
- **Make signs.** Hand-lettered signs to hold up to the camera at the right moment, showing the evidence. No roll needed, and a perfect job for a player who'd rather not speak on camera.
- **Find the breaker.** A Clever roll finds the circuit that powers Room 9. Flip it at the right moment, and every trick dies at once while the lights come up.
- **Invite witnesses.** Ada, Ozzie, Pearl, and any allies the heroes have made will be in the lobby to see it.
- **Prepare Fenn.** The professor offers to explain the tricks on camera, "with a bit of showmanship, if you'll allow me."

Scene 3: The séance (45 minutes)

READ ALOUD

The lobby is dark except for a ring of candles on the floor and the red light of Brock's camera. He's in full costume: black coat, silver amulet, hair even spikier than usual. "Good evening, Seekers. Thousands of you are watching LIVE as we make contact with the angry spirit of the Harbor Inn." Somewhere in the walls, a whisper begins.

Let the heroes spring their plan in whatever order they like. Each step can be done by speaking, by holding up a sign, or by flipping a switch.

- Each part of the plan the heroes prepared works automatically. Add a roll only where they're improvising: Bold to grab the mixing board remote from Brock, Sneak to slip upstairs, Clever to time the breaker.

- Brock tries to keep the show going (“Spirits are known to interfere with electronics!”). Each time the heroes reveal another trick, the viewer comments, read by Kenzie from her phone, turn against him.
- When all the tricks are out, Brock stands in the middle of the lobby with his mouth open. Then he says, quietly, “I’m turning the camera off now.” Kenzie says, “No. Leave it on.” And she tells the viewers everything.

Scene 4: Keep the fire (30 minutes)

After the cameras are off, there’s one more thing to do.

- **Clearing the hearth.** Shoveling out the soaked ash takes a little work (Fix or just teamwork). At the back of the fireplace, under three hundred years of soot, is an iron fireback cast with a star inside a circle and the words “THE FOURTH WATCH: THE HEARTH. NEVER LET IT DIE.” **Campaign clue: The Fourth Watch.**
- **Relighting it.** Pearl lets the heroes light the new fire. Any hero can strike the match. As the kindling catches, the cold drains out of the lobby all at once, as if a window has closed.
- **The unexplained footage.** Kenzie shows the heroes the hall camera clip. At 3:04 a.m. on the night the fire went out, the camera, pointing out the front window, caught the empty street outside. A thick silver fog rolls up from the harbor. A man in a long gray coat stands in the middle of it, perfectly still, staring at the inn. The fog curls around his feet like a cat. Then the picture fills with static. **Campaign clue: The Unstaged Footage.**

If the heroes ask, the man in the video looks a lot like Gideon Shale. But Gideon checked out this morning, leaving a polite note thanking Pearl for a lovely stay.

Ending

READ ALOUD

A week later, the Harbor Inn is booked solid. Kenzie’s video, “We Faked a Haunting. These Kids Caught Us,” has a million views, and people are driving from three states away to stay at the inn that wasn’t haunted. Brock has left town. Kenzie stayed a few extra days to help Pearl take every speaker out of the walls.

Late one night, after the last guest has gone to bed, Pearl sits by the fire, humming the old song from the cylinder. The rocking chair beside her creaks gently, back and forth, with no one in it. Pearl doesn’t look surprised. She just smiles and puts another log on the fire.

Campaign clues in this mystery

- ☐ **Grandmother's Journal:** the 1926 entry (Session 2, Scene 2)
- ☐ **The Fourth Watch:** the fireback (Session 3, Scene 4)
- ☐ **The Unstaged Footage:** Kenzie's hall camera clip (Session 3, Scene 4)

The anonymous email, the whisper by the hearth, and the wax cylinder (The Old Song) are bonus hints, not required clues.

Keepsake moments

- **Compass:** points steadily at Room 9 from anywhere in the inn.
- **Pocketknife:** opens the vent cover, or cuts the wire to a speaker.
- **Sketchbook:** a drawing of the pale lady shows her shadow falling the wrong way, toward the light.
- **Lucky stone:** through the hole, the pale lady is just colored light on fog.
- **Film camera:** an old-fashioned photo of the séance captures a faint woman's shape by the hearth, where no projector was pointing.
- **Silver whistle:** its note is exactly the pitch that makes the hidden speakers squeal and give themselves away.

Spotlight Checklist

Glance at this between sessions to make sure each hero gets a moment to shine, whatever their role.

STAT OR ROLE	MOMENTS IN THIS MYSTERY
Brave	Chasing the pale lady; sneaking into Room 9; grabbing the remote during the séance
Clever	Noticing the whispers are identical; checking the guest book; finding the breaker
Kind	Comforting Pearl; winning over Kenzie; helping Ozzie when he learns the truth
Seeker	Sharp Eyes notices Brock is always first on the scene, and Kenzie never is
Defender	Stand Firm when the pale lady points straight at a teammate
Listener	Heart Sense on Kenzie (guilt), or on Gideon (bottomless grief); knowing the singer's voice on the cylinder
Tinkerer	Rewire the tricks with Kenzie or Professor Fenn; coax the old phonograph back to life
Wanderer	Lucky Break on the timing of the breaker at the séance