

Core Rules

The one roll, quiet play, character creation, and the table tools used in every case.

Welcome

Gale's Landing is a family tabletop game where heroes investigate strange happenings in a small harbor town and set right what's wrong. One person runs the game (the Game Master, or GM); everyone else plays a hero. Each mystery plays in about three sessions of three hours, and the rules take five minutes to learn.

What you need

- Six-sided dice: about 4 per player
- 10 small tokens for Courage (sea glass, beads, or coins)
- Printed character sheets and action cards (see Printables and Action Cards)
- Index cards, a pencil, and a small notepad or dry-erase board for each player
- Optional: a flashlight for the GM to play ghostly signals in a dim room

How a session goes

The GM describes where the heroes are and what they notice. The players decide what their heroes do, by saying it, pointing, or laying down a card. When the outcome is uncertain, someone rolls dice. The story moves forward either way.

Quiet Play

Every action in this game can be taken without speaking, and quiet play counts exactly as much as talking. These tools are for everyone at the table, so no one is singled out for using them.

Ways to act without words

- **Lay down an action card.** Each player has a hand of cards: Look, Sneak, Bold, Talk, Fix, Help, Ask, and Wait. Placing one says what your hero does. The GM fills in the rest and can check details with a yes-or-no question.
- **Point.** Point at a spot on the map, an option card, a token, or another player's hero.
- **Write or draw.** A notepad or dry-erase board works for anything longer.
- **Pass it through someone.** A player can whisper or show a note to another player, who reads it aloud.

- **Signal.** Thumbs up means yes, thumbs down means no, a flat hand means “not sure, give me a second.”

Choices as menus

Instead of asking “What do you do?”, the GM offers two or three options, often written on index cards and laid on the table: “The cellar door, the stairs, or wait and watch?” Players tap a card or hold up fingers. Anyone may suggest something else, but no one has to.

No spotlight, no clock

- There is no strict turn order. The GM checks in with a glance rather than calling on someone by name.
- Decisions never need an instant answer. “Wait” and “pass” are always fine.
- Big group decisions are made as a huddle: each player places a token on the option card they like.

Speaking for your hero

When a hero talks to someone in the story, the player can say the words, describe them (“I ask her about the storm”), write them, or play the Talk card and let the GM summarize. All four are equally good.

Companions (optional)

Any hero may have an animal or gadget companion who acts on the player’s signals: point at something and the companion goes to it. Companions are a fun option for anyone, never a requirement.

Table jobs

Offer each player a job at the table. These are important, and none of them needs any talking:

- **Map keeper:** holds the map and moves the heroes’ tokens on it.
- **Case-board keeper:** pins clue cards to Ada’s case board and arranges them.
- **Evidence keeper:** holds the evidence and clue cards and lays them down when they’re needed.

Let players pick their own jobs, and trade whenever they like.

Comfort tools

- **Pause card.** Anyone can tap it to stop the game for a break, no reason needed.
- **Skip card.** Tap it to fade a scary or uncomfortable moment out. The GM moves on without asking why.
- **Turn down the spooky.** The GM keeps fright gentle: creaks, cold drafts, and flickers, never gore or anyone getting badly hurt.

Notes for the GM

- Before the first session, go over the rules and pick characters at home in a low-key setting, so nothing is new at the table.
- Let every player know, privately and ahead of time, that cards and pointing are a normal way to play.
- React to a played card with the same energy you'd give a spoken line. Don't praise speaking or comment on who is quiet.
- When a player hesitates, offer a menu or say "No rush, I'll come back to you." Then do come back.
- Silence at the table usually means thinking. Give it room.

Starting a session: the recap

Open each session by rebuilding "what happened last time" together. Put out the case board, the handouts, and the name cards from last session, and let the players lay them out in the order things happened while you narrate over the top: "First you met Pearl... then the whispers in the walls..." Players can add to the story or just arrange the cards. It takes five minutes, gets everyone back into the story, and needs no talking from anyone who doesn't want to.

Ending a session: the check-in

Take one minute at the end of every session. Lay out two cards, **Best moment** and **More of this**, along with the session's option cards, character name cards, and evidence. Each player puts one token on whatever was their favorite moment, and one on whatever they'd like more of. Nobody has to explain their choice.

What the tokens tell you is the best guide for planning the next session. If a quiet player keeps choosing ghost scenes, or Jess, or the puzzles, give them more of it.

The Rules

The whole game runs on one roll: pick a stat, roll that many dice, and read the highest one.

Three stats

Every hero has three stats, rated 1, 2, or 3.

STAT	USE IT TO
Brave	Climb, run, hold a door, face something scary, protect someone
Clever	Search, notice, figure things out, fix or build, read old writing
Kind	Talk, calm, convince, comfort, understand a ghost's feelings

When to roll

Roll only when the outcome is uncertain and interesting. Opening an unlocked door needs no roll. Prying open a rusted hatch while the stairs creak behind you does.

How to roll

1. The GM says which stat fits, or the player's action card suggests it.
2. Roll as many dice as that stat. Add 1 die if someone helps, and 1 die for a Courage token. Never roll more than 4 dice.
3. Look at the single highest die.

HIGHEST DIE	RESULT
6	Great! It works, plus a bonus: a clue, an advantage, or something cool
5	Yes. It works
3–4	Yes, but... It works with a twist or a cost
1–2	Not yet... It doesn't work, and something changes

A hard task, like climbing a slick wall in a storm, uses one fewer die (always at least 1).

Failing forward

A low roll never stops the story. It adds a problem, a scare, or a new path. If the heroes miss a key clue, they find it another way, a little later or at a price.

GM tools: twists for “Yes, but” and “Not yet”

Pick one, or roll a die:

1. A noise gives you away. Someone is coming.
2. Something breaks, spills, or is lost: a flashlight dies, the rope frays.
3. It takes too long. The tide, the weather, or the villain gets closer.
4. A scare: take 1 Fright.
5. You get it, but leave a clue behind that the villain will find.
6. You get something else instead: a different clue, a different path.

Helping

Play the Help card or point at a teammate to add 1 die to their roll. If the roll comes up “Yes, but” or “Not yet,” the helper shares the twist.

Team efforts

Some jobs take everyone at once: lifting a heavy chest, ringing a frozen bell, hauling a stone off the sea floor. For these, one hero rolls, and every other hero and ally who pitches in adds 1 die, up to the usual limit of 4 dice. A team effort always succeeds in the end. A low roll just means it takes longer or comes with a twist.

Countdown clocks

When something is coming, like a storm, a villain, or the tide, draw a circle on an index card, split it into 4 slices, and put it where everyone can see. Fill in one slice when time passes in a big way, or when a roll says “it takes too long.” When all four slices are full, the thing arrives. A clock never ends the game. It just means the heroes have to deal with what’s coming before they’re ready.

Suggested clocks for each mystery:

MYSTERY	CLOCK	WHEN IT FILLS
The Lighthouse Mystery	The Storm (Session 2)	The storm hits, and Victoria’s boat arrives
The Lighthouse Mystery	Victoria’s Move (Session 3)	The break-in at Finch’s Books & Tea happens
The Midnight Bell	The Fog (Session 3)	The fog reaches the belfry before the clapper is hung
The Beast of Saltmarsh Cove	The Corbetts Return (Session 2)	The skiff comes back while the heroes are aboard
The Whispering Inn	Kenzie’s Patrol (Session 2)	Someone comes into Room 9

The finale uses its own, bigger version: the 8-slice Gray Clock.

Courage

Each hero starts every session with 2 Courage tokens. Spend one to:

- Add 1 die to a roll, before rolling

- Add a helpful detail to the scene (“There’s a coil of rope by the door”)
- Shake off 1 Fright

Earn a token when you helped a teammate and the roll came up “Yes, but” or “Not yet,” so you share the twist. You can also earn one by acting kindly toward a ghost or a rival, at the GM’s call, about once per scene at most. And you earn one, once per session, when your hero acts on their promise. You can hold up to 5 tokens.

Nerve and Fright

Heroes don’t get hurt in this game; they get scared. Each hero has 4 Nerve. A scary moment, a fall, or a run-in with a villain costs 1 Fright, which crosses off 1 Nerve.

At 0 Nerve, a hero is **Spooked**: they freeze up. A Spooked hero stays in the scene, but can only Help or Wait. When a teammate comforts them, with a Help card, a Kind roll, or a few kind words, they shake it off and get 2 Nerve back. If no one can reach them, they recover at the end of the scene. A hero can never be killed or badly harmed.

Nerve comes back fully between sessions, and partly (2 Nerve) after a real rest: hot cocoa, a warm fire, friendly faces.

Special moves

Each hero’s role grants one special move, usable once per session. See Making Characters.

Making Characters

A hero takes about ten minutes to make, and every step is picking from a list. Players can circle choices on the sheet instead of saying them.

1. Pick a role

ROLE	BRAVE	CLEVER	KIND	SPECIAL MOVE (ONCE PER SESSION)
Seeker	1	3	2	Sharp Eyes: ask the GM one question about the scene and get a true, useful answer
Defender	3	1	2	Stand Firm: take a Fright meant for someone else, and gain 1 Courage
Listener	1	2	3	Heart Sense: feel what someone, or something, wants right now; the GM shows you with a card, gesture, or image
Tinkerer	2	3	1	Rig It: build a gadget from junk that solves one problem (a pulley, a signal mirror, a lock pick)
Wanderer	2	2	2	Lucky Break: turn any roll into a 6 after seeing the dice

2. Pick a name, or roll a die

D6	FIRST NAME	LAST NAME
1	Wren	Holloway
2	Sam	Calder
3	Juniper	Ashby
4	Max	Penrose
5	Ivy	Quill
6	Theo	Marlow

3. Pick why you're in Gale's Landing

- Your great-aunt Ada Finch invited you, saying she needs your help
- You're writing a school report (or a book) about real ghosts
- You're on vacation and the inn is out of rooms, except one facing the island
- You dreamed of the lighthouse before you ever saw it

4. Pick a keepsake

Choose one small item with meaning: a brass compass that never quite points north, a grandparent's pocketknife, a sketchbook, a lucky stone with a hole in it, an old film camera, or a silver whistle. Once per adventure, the keepsake will matter.

5. Pick gear

Every hero has a flashlight, a notebook and pencil, a phone (no signal on the island), and a backpack. Pick two more:

- Rope (50 feet)
- Toolkit
- Instant camera
- Walkie-talkies (a pair)
- Chalk and a measuring tape
- Thermos of cocoa (restores 1 Nerve, twice)
- Binoculars
- Bag of salt (ghosts find it rude; it's for emergencies)

6. Pick a companion (optional)

A companion acts on its player's signals. Point at something and it goes there. Once per scene, it adds 1 die to the roll listed.

COMPANION	WHAT IT'S GOOD AT	BONUS DIE ON
Pip, a nosy seagull	Flying ahead, stealing small objects, squawking alarms	Look
Biscuit, a scruffy terrier	Sniffing out trails, digging, barking at bad guys	Brave (chasing, digging)
Nuts, a clockwork crab	Squeezing into tiny spaces, picking locks, snipping rope	Fix
Wisp, a lantern sprite	Glowing in the dark, sensing ghosts, carrying signals	Kind with ghosts

7. Make a promise

Pick, or write, one short promise your hero has made to themselves. Once per session, when your hero acts on their promise, they earn 1 Courage. Some ideas:

- I'll never leave a friend behind.
- I'll find out the truth, whatever it is.
- I'll protect anyone who can't protect themselves.
- I'll prove I'm braver than people think.
- I'll find out what my prologue secret really means.
- I'll make sure someone forgotten gets remembered.

8. Fill in the sheet

Set Nerve to 4 and take 2 Courage tokens. You're ready.

Action Cards

Each player gets one full set of these cards; copy each onto an index card, with the name large on the front and the line below as a reminder. Laying one down is the same as saying it out loud.

CARD	WHAT IT MEANS	USUAL STAT
Look	I search, examine, or keep watch	Clever
Sneak	I move quietly, hide, or follow someone	Clever
Bold	I climb, run, push, grab, or face something scary	Brave
Talk	I talk with someone: ask, convince, or comfort	Kind
Fix	I open, repair, build, or use my gear	Clever
Help	I help a teammate (+1 die for them)	(theirs)
Ask	I want to know more. Tell me or give me choices	none
Wait	I hold back and see what happens, or pass	none

Signal cards

Give each player three more cards: **Yes**, **No**, and **Not sure**. These answer any question from the GM or another player.

Table cards (one set for the whole table)

- **Pause:** stop for a break
- **Skip:** fade out this moment and move on
- **Option cards:** a stack of blank index cards the GM writes choices on during play

Using a card with a target

Combine a card with pointing: lay down Look and point at the map's cellar, or Talk and point at a character's name card. The GM confirms: "You're checking the cellar door, right?" A thumbs up or the Yes card settles it.

Character name cards

Write each important character's name on an index card and put it on the table when the heroes meet them. Players can point at the card to talk to that person or ask about them.

Atmosphere

A little sound and light goes a long way, especially in the spooky scenes. None of this is needed, but all of it is cheap. Most of the sounds are easy to find by searching for them as "ambience" videos or in a free sound-effects app.

The soundboard. Every sound below is ready to tap in the Gale's Landing Soundboard, organized by mystery. Open it on a phone or laptop at the table. For longer background tracks, Tabletop Audio has free 10-minute ambiances, and the BBC Sound Effects archive allows free personal use.

Everywhere

- Dim the room for night scenes, and bring the lights back up for daytime and safe places.
- Keep a flashlight by your seat for ghostly lights, and a small bell or a glass and spoon for tolls.
- Play quiet background sound at low volume, so it's felt more than heard.

MYSTERY	BACKGROUND SOUND	SPECIAL EFFECTS	LIGHTING AND PROPS
The Lighthouse Mystery	Waves and gulls by day, wind and rain for the storm	A foghorn, a thunderclap when Victoria arrives	Flashlight for Eliza's signals; a mug of cocoa at Ada's
The Midnight Bell	A quiet old building, a ticking clock	A church bell tolling twelve, footsteps on stairs	Glass and spoon for Josiah's tolls; a candle (or electric candle) for the belfry
The Beast of Saltmarsh Cove	Lapping water, distant buoy bells	A deep moan for the beast, an outboard motor, seal barks	Two green glow sticks for the beast's eyes; a bucket of water to splash a hand in
The Whispering Inn	A crackling fire, then rain on windows once it goes out	Faint whispering, a door clicking locked	Turn the "fire" (an LED candle) off when the hearth dies, and back on at the end
The finale	Low wind and silence, more than anything	Whispers, the bell, the foghorn, all four Watches flaring at once	Lights very low; light one candle per Watch and blow them out as Watches fall

Watch your players. If anyone reaches for the Skip or Pause card, bring the lights up and turn the sound down right away.

Printables

Copy or print these pages for the table.

Character sheet

Name	
Role (circle one)	Seeker · Defender · Listener · Tinkerer · Wanderer
Brave	1 · 2 · 3
Clever	1 · 2 · 3
Kind	1 · 2 · 3
Special move	☐ used this session
Nerve	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Courage tokens	(keep them on the sheet)
Why I'm in Gale's Landing	
My promise	
Keepsake	☐ it mattered
Gear	Flashlight, notebook, phone, backpack, plus:
Companion	
A drawing of my hero	

Extra names for made-up townsfolk

D6	TOWNSPERSON
1	Mabel Crane, the town clerk, who loves her gavel
2	Ozzie Brandt, the grumpy librarian with a soft heart
3	Pearl Okafor, who runs the inn and knows all the gossip
4	Lenny Shaw, a fisherman who saw the lights first
5	Dot Pelletier, Jess's grandmother, who remembers Eliza as an old woman
6	Hal Greer, a council member who's undecided about the vote

Before each session

- ☐ Action cards, signal cards, and Pause and Skip cards on the table
- ☐ Blank option cards and a marker
- ☐ Character name cards for anyone the heroes may meet
- ☐ A sketch map of this mystery's main location
- ☐ A flashlight, or a glass and spoon, for ghostly signals
- ☐ Snacks, and cocoa if you want to be thematic