The Lantern at Low Tide

120-minute plan · 4 players · Make time and supplies count
The harbor lantern is dark. A ferry waits beyond the shoals while Keeper Mira shelters with a repair crew behind the closed tide gate.
Content notice: Rising water and temporary isolation. Keep everyone on visible dry ledges; describe any difficult rescue from the quay if preferred.

GM overview

Place six tide counters in the short game or eight in the full game. Spend them only for printed action costs, never for discussion or movement. A counter is a useful stretch of working water, not an exact minute. Ask who holds the rope, who watches the water, and who communicates with Mira. Repair and rescue are separate tasks: a working lamp cannot rescue the crew. The service stair needs no rope but costs two tide counters. Three signal lamps are reserved for the ferry, unless the group spends one illuminating the stair. That trade makes the repaired beacon necessary for an immediate return. At one tide counter, announce the wet lower step; zero leaves people sheltered and the ferry offshore, with the safe pause ending always available.

What is really happening

A fuse failed five minutes before Mira closed the gate to protect the crew. The gate did not break the lamp. The small side channel lowers water for a rope crossing; a longer service stair preserves the gate position. Either the repaired lantern or three shore lamps can guide the ferry.

Opening agreement and read-aloud

Agree on subjects to soften or skip. Each player names an ordinary skill and a reason to help. Evidence does not require a successful roll; uncertainty changes time, cost or obligations.
A waiting light moves once beyond the black shoals. Oren puts three covered lamps at your feet. "The ferry can wait. Those people behind the gate cannot wait all night. Tell me which light to send."

Time and preparation

120 minutes: Account for every lamp
Opening agreement: 10 minutes
Hear the harbor's competing needs: 20 minutes
Inspect supplies and both rescue routes: 25 minutes
Allocate lamps and conduct the escort: 30 minutes
Repair, signal, and set tomorrow's rota: 25 minutes
Closure and debrief: 10 minutes
Play the lamp allocation in full: a lit stair accelerates rescue but consumes the third shore lamp. Invite a deliberate choice between collecting the fuse and preserving all three signal lamps.
Starting information: Discover cards in play
Starting state: Working tide windows = 8; Dry rope lengths = 1; Covered shore lamps = 3; Matching fuse collected = false; Side channel open = false; Crew on dry ground = false; Service stair illuminated = false
With 4 players: share the roles of mapper, evidence keeper, speaker and timekeeper.

If the group gets stuck

A blocked dock-gate footway is bypassed through dock-stair-gate. Missing cards can be read from the visible fixtures without changing their facts. If every window is spent, pause calls the reserve crew and keeps the ferry offshore; it never claims the lantern was repaired.

Harbor quay

Read aloud: Three empty stands face the waiting ferry. Oren keeps a hand over the log so the drizzle cannot blur it.
GM: Oren gives the log and signal pattern freely. He will operate any complete signal the players select; he will not invent a fourth lamp. The safe pause gathers help here.

Choice: Read the log and choose a signal keeper

Ask: Who records the sequence, and who keeps the three lamps together?
Requires: Available. Reveal Two entries in the harbor log, Three-lamp signal board
Result: Oren keeps the ferry waiting while you decide on a rescue route.

Choice: Raise the three-lamp return signal

Ask: Keep the beacon repair for tomorrow and use all three shore lamps?
Requires: Crew on dry ground is true. Spend 3 Covered shore lamps
Result: The three lamps rise together; the ferry begins its careful delayed return.
Closure: Three lights and a late arrival

Fuse workshop

Read aloud: A spare glass fuse lies beside a coil of dry rope. Tess has already put the tools into a carrying tray.
GM: Taking the kit consumes a tide window because Tess accompanies the party to check the tray. The fuse is correct. No technical knowledge roll is required.

Choice: Collect Tess's repair tray

Ask: Spend one tide window bringing Tess, the fuse, and an extra rope?
Requires: Available. Spend 1 Working tide windows. Matching fuse collected: true; Dry rope lengths: +1.
Reveal Tess's carrying tray
Result: Tess joins the work with the matching fuse and a dry rope.

Crew dock

Read aloud: Ivo counts four raised hands, then counts them again. A small lever stands apart from the great gate wheel.
GM: The gate sketch identifies the two controls without declaring which plan the party must choose. Mira answers shouted practical questions. She confirms everyone is presently dry.

Choice: Trace the two routes

Ask: Mark the side channel and the high stair; which will carry the crew?
Requires: Available. Reveal Gate and upper stair sketch
Result: Mira confirms both routes and the count of four people.

High service stair

Read aloud: Pale step edges continue well above the wet line. A lamp hook waits at the turn.
GM: The stair is always traversable. Lighting it spends one of the three ferry lamps and grants a rope-free escort action here. Alternatively reach the crew end and escort in daylight from the gate for two windows.

Choice: Hang one shore lamp on the stair

Ask: Use one of the ferry's three lamps to make the upper escort easier?
Requires: Available. Spend 1 Covered shore lamps. Service stair illuminated: true
Result: The turn of the stair is lit; only two lamps remain for ferry signals.

Choice: Guide Mira up to the lit turn

Ask: Use the prepared stair to bring the whole crew up in one window?
Requires: Service stair illuminated is true. Spend 1 Working tide windows. Crew on dry ground: true
Result: The lamp gives Mira a clear meeting point and every worker reaches it.

Tide-gate ledge

Read aloud: "Leave the large wheel alone," Mira calls. "We can cross low water, or climb the old stair. Which work can you afford?"
GM: Do not imply the main wheel is a puzzle solution. Side-channel and rope rescue are two separate decisions. A blocked dock edge still leaves dock-stair-gate.

Choice: Open the small side channel

Ask: Keep the large wheel latched while Ivo watches the water fall?
Requires: Available. Spend 1 Working tide windows. Side channel open: true
Result: The channel drops below the marked crossing stones.

Choice: Bring four people across the guide rope

Ask: Who anchors, counts, and helps Mira receive the last worker?
Requires: Side channel open is true. Spend 1 Working tide windows; Spend 1 Dry rope lengths. Crew on dry ground: true
Result: All four reach dry ground together; their heavy tools stay on the ledge.

Choice: Escort everyone by the high service stair

Ask: Spend two windows and leave the gate untouched?
Requires: Available. Spend 2 Working tide windows. Crew on dry ground: true
Result: The crew climbs above the wet line and reaches the quay tired but dry.

Lantern housing

Read aloud: The lamp case smells of burnt wire. Beyond its glass, the ferry has held exactly the same patch of sea.
GM: Tess handles the fictional isolation and fuse procedure once the kit arrives. A complete ending requires the crew first; otherwise ask which rescue route remains.

Choice: Repair the lantern and welcome the ferry

Ask: With the crew safe, commit one final window to Tess's matching fuse?
Requires: Crew on dry ground is true and Matching fuse collected is true. Spend 1 Working tide windows
Result: Tess closes the housing. Gold light reaches the ferry, and Oren answers from shore.
Closure: A repaired light

Connections and changing routes

Harbor quay - Fuse workshop: Sheltered lane. Available.
Harbor quay - Crew dock: Quayside. Available.
Crew dock - Tide-gate ledge: Inspection footway. Available.
Crew dock - High service stair: High approach. Available.
High service stair - Tide-gate ledge: Upper stair. Available.
Tide-gate ledge - Lantern housing: Service walkway. Available.
Fuse workshop - Lantern housing: Lamp stair. Available.

Oren - Ferry dispatcher

Goal: Bring the ferry in only on a recognizable signal.
Offers: Three covered lamps, the log, and a patient signal watch.
Will not accept: Will keep the ferry outside if a three-lamp pattern is incomplete.
Voice: Checks every promise against a number.

Tess - Lamp apprentice

Goal: Repair the fault and retain a written inspection rota.
Offers: A matching fuse and an extra rope, collected together.
Will not accept: Will not touch the lamp before its fictional isolation latch is secured.
Voice: Names the next small task, then waits.

Ivo - Dock worker

Goal: See four people come home together.
Offers: The gate sketch and a steady end for a rope.
Will not accept: Will not open the main gate over the ledge.
Voice: Counts quietly when worried.

Mira - Keeper on the ledge

Goal: Protect the workers without sacrificing the ferry.
Offers: Leads either the drained crossing or the upper stair.
Will not accept: Will not leave a worker behind for tools.
Voice: Clear instructions with a pause for replies.

Discovery card: Two entries in the harbor log

Give only when revealed in play.
19:10 - lantern extinguished; no gate movement. 19:15 - keeper closed the tide gate; four people counted on the raised ledge. Add a line for your first decision.
Player task: Order the two events and nominate who keeps the next entry.

GM answer: The protective closure followed the electrical fault; blaming the gate wastes the rescue window.

Discovery card: Three-lamp signal board

Give only when revealed in play.
Three covered lamps raised together: safe delayed return. Two lamps: remain offshore. One lamp: acknowledge only. Draw your chosen pattern before displaying it.
Player task: Allocate physical lamp tokens between the stair and the shore signal.
GM answer: Using a lamp on the stair prevents the full shore signal but does not prevent later beacon repair.

Discovery card: Tess's carrying tray

Give only when revealed in play.
Tray: one square-marked spare fuse; one dry rope. Lamp label: square-marked fuse. Checklist: Tess secures isolation latch; exchange matching part; Tess closes housing.
Player task: Match the marks and assign carrying and checking roles.
GM answer: The kit supplies one rope and the repair flag. Its collection costs one window.

Discovery card: Gate and upper stair sketch

Give only when revealed in play.
Small lever - side channel below ledge. Large wheel - water across ledge. High stair - quay, above flood marks. A rope crossing needs the small channel first; the upper escort takes two work windows.
Player task: Trace a complete rescue route and count its windows before committing.
GM answer: Drain then rope costs two windows and one rope; a stair escort costs two windows without rope.

State sheet

Working tide windows: 8 (clock, minimum 0, maximum 8)
Dry rope lengths: 1 (resource, minimum 0, maximum 3)
Covered shore lamps: 3 (resource, minimum 0, maximum 3)
Matching fuse collected: false (flag)
Side channel open: false (flag)
Crew on dry ground: false (flag)
Service stair illuminated: false (flag)

Event: The lower step darkens

Trigger: Working tide windows at most 1
Water touches the lowest step. Name the windows and lamps still available before anyone commits to more work.

At any place: Shelter the crew and hold the ferry offshore

Ask the harbor reserve team to take over and accept a night's delay?
Requires: Available. Crew on dry ground: true
A reserve team follows the marked high route and brings the crew into shelter. Oren sends the waiting signal; blankets and tea replace the race against the water.

Ending: A repaired light

Requires: Crew on dry ground is true and Matching fuse collected is true
The ferry comes home under the steady lantern. Four workers watch from dry ground, and Mira asks Tess to write the next inspection date.
Next: Who helps recover the tools at low tide?

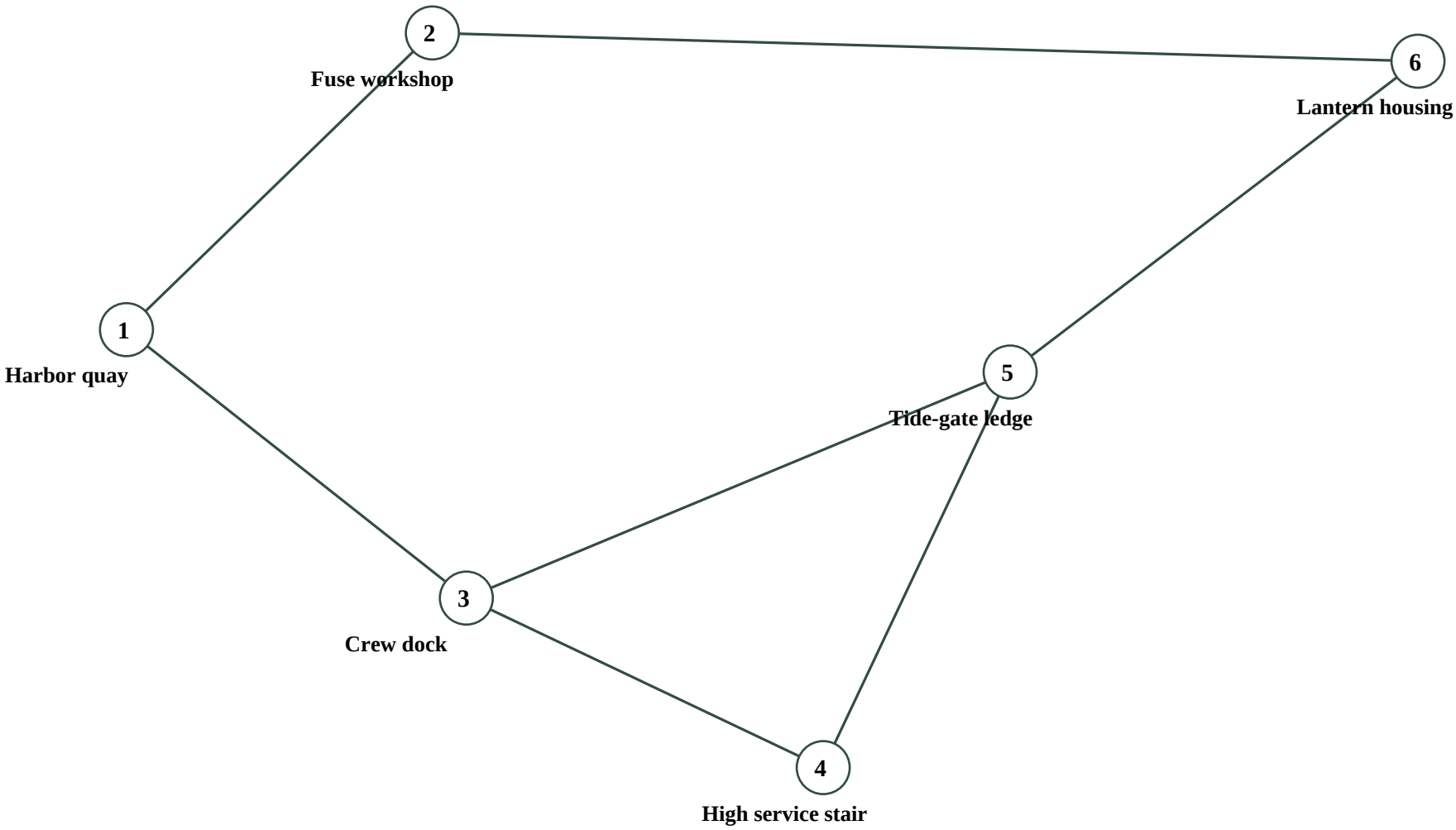
Ending: Three lights and a late arrival

Requires: Crew on dry ground is true
The ferry follows three small lights. Its passengers arrive late, and the beacon remains an honest repair job for morning.
Next: Name the person who guards the spare fuse overnight.

Ending: A night of waiting

Requires: Available
The reserve crew brings everyone to shelter. The ferry waits in open water with an acknowledged signal; the harbor provides breakfast when it can enter.
Next: What practical apology does the harbor offer its passengers?

The Lantern at Low Tide - GM decision map



Dashed paths need conditions. Read Connections and changing routes for costs and direction.