THE GREYHAVEN CHRONICLES / BOOK TWO

ASH AND LANTERN 2

The Roads Without Dawn



One city keeps its morning.
Beyond the walls, the road grows cold.

MARCUS DRAPER

AN ILLUSTRATED CHOOSE-YOUR-PATH ADVENTURE / EDITION 1.0

BEGIN HERE

The road remembers

This is the second Ash and Lantern gamebook. You choose what the traveller does, follow the numbered destinations, and keep a small record of supplies and discoveries. Read a section, then choose an eligible option. Do not read straight through.

Returning from Chapter 1? Keep your traveller's name and path. Copy your actual ending into the inherited-ending row: BOUND for A Light That Never Leaves; FREE for A Sky Without a Cage; COVENANT for The Lanterns We Choose. Copy BRINDLE only if he joined you. Keep the first journal for personal continuity.

Starting here? Choose a name, one path below, and one inherited ending. That choice describes what your traveller did at Greyhaven; it does not lock any ending in this book. Leave BRINDLE unchecked unless continuing a record. You may meet him at the inn.

IRON WARDEN - hold the line. You carry a watchblade and know leverage, protection, and when to wait before a blow.

THORN SCOUT - find another way. You carry a yew bow and working knife. You notice footing, blind spots, and hidden catches.

EMBER KEEPER - understand the light. You carry an ember staff. You know old signals and how to use a flame without letting it rule you.

Begin with **3 CHARGES and 4 PROVISIONS**. Start a fresh Chapter 2 record: do not copy old evidence, currency, wounds, or unused supplies. Iona can offer a road ward later, whether or not you returned the borrowed ward in Chapter 1.

Section numbers stay fixed. Every choice box is clickable in the PDF and also gives a printed page number. Section 1 begins on page 6. The book has a complete ending; it leaves a doorway into Chapter 3.

Light, food, and choices

Charges

A charge is a deliberate burst, not ordinary lantern light. Begin with 3. Subtract one when choosing an option that says to spend one; pay only once. A paid option is unavailable at 0. Ordinary travel, conversations, and uncharged path tactics cost nothing.

Provisions

Begin with 4 portions. Sharing food at the caravan and rebuilding Hearthmere each costs 2, once only. There is no daily food tax or hidden hunger clock. The inn store adds 4 once; saving the grain adds 3 once. Keep a number in the record and never spend below zero.

Conditions

Only choose a path-labelled or conditional option if it matches your record. Flags are the capitalized words in the record boxes. Once marked, a discovery stays unless told otherwise. PROMISE here is Iona's network promise; it is separate from Chapter 1's oath or wage promise.

Rest and setbacks

Section 6 restores charges to 3 for free. Hearthmere offers the same rest once HEARTH is marked. A setback at 54 preserves your supplies, discoveries, and companion. Resolved encounters stay resolved. Unfinished encounters remain available. Brindle never fights or dies.

Revisiting

Never collect a one-time supply or replay a resolved encounter. A revisit lets you reread, use a stated shortcut, or travel elsewhere. No choice has an unstated deadline. Every path can reach every ending; preparation opens alternatives.

Endings and forms

Your inherited ending and new ending are separate. Record both for later books. PDF fields are manual, not an automated game engine. Use a form-supporting reader and save your edited copy. Pencil works on a printout. PDF records do not import into the web games.

KEEP A BOOKMARK HERE

Your road record

Traveller name

☐ Iron Warden ☐ Thorn Scout ☐ Ember Keeper

INHERITED CHAPTER 1 ENDING - CHOOSE ONE

☐ BOUND ☐ FREE ☐ COVENANT

CHARGES: CHECKED = AVAILABLE

☑ 1 ☑ 2 ☑ 3

PROVISIONS

4

☐ MANIFEST - 23 travellers named
☐ DELIVERED - Medicine handed over
☐ INNCACHE - Emergency food taken
☐ BRINDLE - Companion beside you
☐ DRIVER - Tovin rescued
☐ WARD - Iona's road ward
☐ TERMS - Pell heard and agreed
☐ PLANS - Orren's sequence
☐ QUIETKEY - Relay released quietly
☐ CHARTS - Sen's measurements
☐ GRAIN - Seed saved; food taken
☐ ADMITTED - Rusk's permission
☐ GUARDIAN - Final encounter resolved
☐ GUARDBATTLE - Guard disabled

☐ MEDICINE - Supplies carried
☐ HOUND - Road encounter resolved
☐ CARAVAN - Passengers supported
☐ CROSSING - Safe return road
☐ PROMISE - Network terms learned
☐ SEED - One-time refill used
☐ SANCTUARY - Independent cradle
☐ KEY - Governor key recovered
☐ KEYBATTLE - Sentinel disabled
☐ SIGNAL - City mirror answered
☐ HEARTH - Hearthmere supported
☐ COUNCIL - Four parties agreed
☐ STANDDOWN - Guard dismissed
☐ SAFE - Governor stabilized

Chapter 2 ending

Setbacks 0

Keep your Chapter 1 journal. Ending journal for this adventure: page 60.

The road and its people

Use the choices in each section to travel. This guide shows where to find unfinished work; it is not a scale map. Some return choices skip intervening places you have already crossed.

Greyhaven / Empty Wagon Commission, legacy, manifest; rest at 6.	1 / 7 / p. 6 / 12
Wayfarer Inn Passengers, emergency food, Brindle.	12 / p. 17
Flooded Causeway Tovin; one option for a safe crossing.	16 / p. 21
Bell Orchard Iona's promise and road kit.	20 / p. 25
Saintless Sanctuary Pell's terms; independent lamp.	23 / p. 28
Siphon Works Orren's plans and governor key.	26 / p. 31
Star House Sen's evidence; signal mirror.	32 / p. 37
Hearthmere Seed grain; hearth; a second resting place.	35 / p. 40
Meridian Gate Admission, dry ridge route, road council.	38 / p. 43
Control Gallery Veyra; guardian; safe preparation.	42 / p. 47
Dawn Engine Stabilize, then choose the future.	46 / p. 51

Reach the gallery: MANIFEST + PLANS + KEY + ADMITTED + CROSSING.
Form the council: CARAVAN + HEARTH + TERMS + PROMISE.
Choose the covenant: COUNCIL + SANCTUARY, after SAFE.

Your road record is ready. Begin Chapter 2. Go to 1 / p. 6

A Wagon Without a Driver



"We have the horses. We do not have the people."

The wagon reaches Greyhaven at an hour when its wheels should cast a shadow. There is enough light to see them, but no warmth in it.

A patrol found the horses wandering south and led them through the gate. The passenger benches are empty. The wagon lamps burn though their oil bowls are dry.

Mara stands beside the well, reading a list she has already read twice. "Twenty-three travellers left Meridian. We have the horses. We do not have the people."

Weeks have passed since the Hollow Beacon. Greyhaven has begun living with the future you chose there. That future has not made the rest of the world simple.

One of the wagon lamps flickers when you approach. For a moment it seems to recognize your lantern.

Before you follow the missing travellers, remember what you left burning at home.

If your Chapter 1 ending was BOUND: continue. Go to 2 / p. 7

If your Chapter 1 ending was FREE: continue. Go to 3 / p. 8

If your Chapter 1 ending was COVENANT: continue. Go to 4 / p. 9

The Light You Bound

The Hollow Beacon still warms Greyhaven. You can see its glow on the roofs from the well.

Aster speaks through the little listening lantern Elian has fitted beside the gate. It remains a narrow opening in a much larger prison.

"Other lights are calling," it says. "The road carries them past me. I know the sound of a lock taking more than it was offered."

You ask whether it will help you find them.

"Yes. That is an answer to your question. It is not forgiveness for the cage."

You accept the distinction. Aster describes a hidden latch common to old binding mechanisms and shows you how to listen for it through your travelling flame.

There will be a place ahead where that knowledge matters. You would rather it had been learned another way.

RECORD Your inherited ending stays BOUND. It opens a special route at section 28. It does not restrict your choice of ending in this book.

Take Aster's knowledge and accept Mara's commission. Go to 5 / p. 10

The Light You Freed

Ordinary watchfires burn above Greyhaven's gate. Volunteers carry wood in pairs, and the smoke follows the wind instead of standing in a perfect golden column.

The missing wagon was bringing oil and grain. Since you opened Aster's cage, those deliveries have mattered in a way the town can no longer pretend not to understand.

Sella sets a loaf beside your pack. "Freedom still needs breakfast," she says.

Beyond the last field, a small amber spark moves against the grey. It pauses beside the north road, then rises out of sight. Travellers have seen the same wandering light near the flooded causeway.

Aster has not returned to serve you. It may choose to show you a way through. Those are different things, and you intend to remember the difference.

RECORD Your inherited ending stays FREE. Aster can reveal a safe crossing at section 17. It does not restrict this book's final choice.

Accept the work that follows your earlier choice. Go to 5 / p. 10

The Promise You Made

At the Lantern House, willing flames rest in open cradles. Greyhaven keeps a woodpile beside them anyway. A promise is easier to honour when people have prepared to hear no.

As you fasten your pack, one flame turns blue.

"They are taking our morning," says a voice you do not know.

Aster gathers beside it, a warmer light. "The call came along the old road network. I can keep my promise here. You must let them make their own."

You remember the door you opened before asking Aster to stay. It would be tempting to carry that agreement as a ready answer for every light you meet.

Instead you write one sentence in your journal: Ask what they are offering. Do not tell them what they owe.

The blue flame fades. The road remains.

RECORD Your inherited ending stays COVENANT. Your experience opens a special conversation with Pell at section 24. Other endings remain available.

Carry the promise carefully into a different town. Go to 5 / p. 10

Names Before Machinery

Mara spreads a road map across the stable door. Meridian lies beyond the marshes, still bright inside its walls. Reports from the outer villages speak of mornings that never warm the ground.

"Find the caravan first," she says. "A machine can wait long enough for us to count the people."

Nera has enclosed a diagram of the old Dawn Engine. It once distributed light among settlements. Beside a newer line she has written: ASK ORREN WHAT THE BYPASS IS TAKING.

Before you leave, the road wardens make you practise on a hanging sack. Brace, watch, move. The Warden steadies after a blow; the Scout finds a route out; the Keeper learns to lower a flame before it runs wild. None of it promises victory. All of it gives fear something useful to do.

Sella packs four portions of food. Your lantern has three full chambers. The north road is waiting.

RECORD Starting supplies are already recorded: 3 CHARGES and 4 PROVISIONS. Do not add more for rereading this section. Your name, path and inherited ending remain unchanged.

Follow the wagon route north. Go to 7 / p. 12

Rest once more before leaving. Go to 6 / p. 11

A Place to Recover

The Lantern House in Greyhaven keeps a chair near the hearth for travellers who have learned something the painful way.

You hand over your wet coat. The keeper trims your wick, fills its three chambers, and lets you sleep until your hands stop shaking. No one asks you to earn the blanket.

If you came from a setback, your evidence is still in your pack. An unresolved encounter is still unresolved; a machine already stopped does not wake merely because you went home.

Mara's patrol carries news to the road settlements while you rest. Once Hearthmere's communal hearth is repaired, you may take this same recovery there instead. Use the return choice matching where you rested.

You cannot carry the whole road on your back. You can begin again with a steadier step.

RECORD Restore CHARGES to 3. Keep all discoveries. PROVISIONS do not refill here. There is no hidden time limit or permanent injury.

From Greyhaven: return to the wagon road. Go to 7 / p. 12

Only if HEARTH is marked: return from rest at Hearthmere. Go to 35 / p. 40

We Followed the Bell



"A number will not be enough to bring them together again."

A second wagon stands at the marsh-road fork. No blood marks the seats. No harness has been cut. Someone has scratched four words into the wood: WE FOLLOWED THE BELL.

You find the manifest under a folded blanket. Twenty-three names, including the driver, Tovin. The cargo lists grain, medicine, and copper fittings for Meridian. Beside the official route, a pencil line leads toward the Wayfarer Inn.

At the bottom, someone has crossed out the word fuel and written voices.

You copy every name before closing the book. If the people are scattered, a number will not be enough to bring them together again.

To the west, a bell rings once behind the trees. Eastward, the flooded causeway glimmers with a thin, cold light. Something moves in the ditch beside it.

RECORD Mark MANIFEST. It is permanent evidence, not a consumable item.

Check the medicine chest and the cold lamp. Go to 8 / p. 13

Follow the bell toward the Wayfarer Inn. Go to 12 / p. 17

Investigate the shape beside the road. Go to 9 / p. 14

Inspect the flooded causeway. Go to 16 / p. 21

Return to Greyhaven to rest. Go to 6 / p. 11

What the Wagon Still Holds

The medicine chest is jammed under the seat. You loosen the bent hinge with the wagon's own tools and lift out two sealed bottles, bandages, and a list of intended patients.

These supplies belong to the people who have gone missing. You wrap them in the blanket rather than treating them as a prize.

Beside the chest, the oil-less lamp gives off a steady blue light. When you open its shutter, the air around your fingers grows colder. The light is being pulled through a narrow copper fitting, not made by anything inside the bowl.

You close the shutter. The fitting continues to hum.

Whatever feeds Meridian's morning can reach this far from the city. Nera's warning was not about a machine safely contained behind a wall.

RECORD Once only: mark MEDICINE. It is delivered at section 14, where it adds to the passengers' recovery. It is not a healing-stat resource.

Carry the medicine toward the inn. Go to 12 / p. 17

Follow the copper line toward the causeway. Go to 16 / p. 21

Return to the road fork. Go to 7 / p. 12

The Hollow Hound



"Its collar flashes before it springs."

The shape rises out of the ditch one joint at a time. Its body is woven from smoke and stolen light; a brass collar keeps the fragments together.

It turns toward the warmth of your lantern. When you shut the hood, it hesitates. When you open it again, its feet scrape forward over the stones.

This is no starving woodland animal. It is a loose gathering of the engine's overflow, held to a pattern it cannot choose. Its collar flashes before it springs.

You can leave by the higher path to the inn. If you clear the road, later travellers will have one danger fewer to meet. You watch the collar and the momentary stiffness in its forelegs.

RECORD If HOUND is marked, the encounter is already resolved. Go directly to section 11 without paying again.

Stay behind the wagon wheel and study its attack. Go to 10 / p. 15

Spend 1 CHARGE to break the collar's binding from a distance. Only if you have a charge. Go to 11 / p. 16

Avoid the encounter and take the high path to the inn. Go to 12 / p. 17

When the Collar Dims



"You need to act while the binding is weak."

The hound leaps. You put the wagon wheel between you and its teeth. Cold light washes through the spokes, and the creature lands with its collar briefly dark.

There is your opening. The binding gathers again only after it has found its feet.

An Iron Warden can pin the collar against the wheel with a controlled blow. A Thorn Scout can catch its fastening with the wagon's long cargo hook. An Ember Keeper can close a lantern shutter in time with the fading pulse, unthreading the pattern before it draws itself tight.

You need not be stronger than the whole creature. You need to act while the thing holding it together is weak.

Brindle, if with you, waits well behind the wagon. He has no part in the strike.

Use your path's tactic while the collar is dark. Go to 11 / p. 16

Rush it while the collar is flashing. Go to 54 / p. 59

Withdraw by the high path before another leap. Go to 12 / p. 17

The Shape Left Behind



"Only the collar remains."

The collar breaks. The hound collapses on the wet stones, its outline still for a moment before the stolen light loosens into thin threads.

They drift toward the copper line beneath the road. You cover the broken fitting with a flat stone; the last thread fades before it can be drawn back in.

No living animal lies beneath the smoke. Only the collar remains, cold enough to sting through cloth.

You hang it from the wagon's brake handle as a warning to the next patrol. The engine has begun making danger from the warmth it takes. That is a different problem from a few unlit lamps, and a harder one to leave outside the city's calculations.

The inn bell rings again, patient and human in the distance.

RECORD Mark HOUND. It stays resolved on every return visit.

Follow the bell to the passengers. Go to 12 / p. 17

Continue toward the flooded arches. Go to 16 / p. 21

Return to the road fork. Go to 7 / p. 12

The Wayfarer Inn



"Finding people and getting them home are different tasks."

The bell hangs beneath a roof that has mostly fallen. Someone pulls its rope whenever the mist thickens, giving anyone on the road a sound to follow.

Twenty-two people shelter under the stable awning. A woman named Mera is counting them against a list written on the back of a flour sack. When you show the manifest, she finds the missing name at once.

"Tovin went to the causeway. He thought there was still a dry arch."

There is room by the little cooking fire, but not much to put over it. The passengers have begun offering their portions to one another and pretending they are not hungry.

Behind the stable, something scratches at a loose board. From beyond the orchard comes the faint answer of smaller bells.

You have found most of the caravan. Finding people and getting them home are different tasks.

Open the inn's marked emergency store. Go to 13 / p. 18

If you have 2 PROVISIONS: help feed and settle the passengers. Go to 14 / p. 19

Check behind the stable. Go to 15 / p. 20

Look for Tovin at the causeway. Go to 16 / p. 21

Visit the Bell Orchard. Go to 20 / p. 25

Find the roadside sanctuary. Go to 23 / p. 28

Food Kept for This Day

A painted hand on the store-room door points to a hook beneath the lintel. The key is still there.

The innkeeper has left a note: FOR TRAVELLERS WHEN THE ROAD FAILS. Inside are four dry portions, wrapped against damp. Mera checks the seals before helping you carry them out.

You record what you take. If the road recovers, someone will need to refill this chest for people neither of you will meet.

A child watches you write and asks whether writing makes the food last longer.

"It makes it harder to pretend it appeared by itself," Mera says.

You leave the key on its hook. Supplies are useful; the custom that puts them here is useful too.

RECORD Once only: if INNCACHE is not marked, add 4 PROVISIONS and mark INNCACHE. A revisit adds nothing.

If you now have 2 PROVISIONS: share food with the caravan. Go to 14 / p. 19

Return to the stable awning. Go to 12 / p. 17

A Meal and a List

You put food into the common pot and stay to help serve it. It is an ordinary task, made awkward by cramped hands and too few bowls.

Mera asks each passenger what they can do when the road opens. Two know bridgework. One keeps accounts. Another has driven winter routes for thirty years and remembers a ridge stair behind Meridian's gatehouse.

"We can carry messages," Mera says. "We can take turns at the crossings. But don't promise our work to a council we haven't been allowed to speak at."

You write that down with the rest.

If MEDICINE is marked, you give Mera the chest and its patient list. She finds someone who knows how to use it; you do not need to play healer to make sure it reaches the right hands.

For the first time since arriving, people begin speaking about the journey home rather than the night ahead.

RECORD First visit requires 2 PROVISIONS: subtract 2 and mark CARAVAN. Later visits cost nothing. If MEDICINE is marked, also mark DELIVERED now. Keep both marks; a later visit can deliver medicine collected afterward.

Go after Tovin. Go to 16 / p. 21

Carry the passengers' terms to the orchard. Go to 20 / p. 25

Visit the sanctuary. Go to 23 / p. 28

Return to the inn paths. Go to 12 / p. 17

Brindle at the Stable

If Brindle came from Greyhaven with you, the sound is his tail tapping a loose board. He has found a dry patch beside the youngest passenger and seems pleased with the arrangement. Call him when you are ready; there is no new rescue to perform.

If he did not join you in the first adventure, Mera leads you behind the stable. The brindled dog has been travelling with the caravan, accepting meals in exchange for warning when strangers approach.

He sniffs your sleeve, then looks down the road. You crouch and let him choose the distance between you. After a while he leans against your knee.

You recognize the dog from Greyhaven. There is no need to pretend you have never crossed paths before, or that every companion is acquired in a moment of triumph.

Sometimes a familiar creature simply decides to walk beside you.

RECORD An inherited BRINDLE mark stays checked. He never fights, is never spent as a resource, and cannot be lost to a setback.

Invite Brindle to come with you; mark BRINDLE. Go to 12 / p. 17

If he has not joined you, leave him safe with Mera for now. Go to 12 / p. 17

Water Over the Road



"The passengers? Did they reach the inn?"

White stones disappear beneath black water. A pale thread moves between them, vanishing whenever you look straight at it.

The causeway is the short route toward the Siphon Works and Meridian. It is not yet a route a tired family could safely follow. A rope and clear markers would make it one.

Farther out, a man is clinging to a broken arch. A cargo strap has caught around his leg. He sees your lantern and lifts a hand before the current forces it down again.

You can hear him, faintly: "The passengers? Did they reach the inn?"

Tovin has not asked about his wagon. You call that the others are sheltered and begin judging the distance to the arch.

There is also a longer ridge road. You may explore without fixing the flooded crossing, but someone must eventually make a safe route for the caravan.

Attempt Tovin's rescue from the bank. Go to 18 / p. 23

First secure the causeway crossing. Go to 17 / p. 22

Take the bank path to the Siphon Works. Go to 26 / p. 31

Use the longer path toward Meridian Gate. Go to 38 / p. 43

Return to the inn for now. Go to 12 / p. 17

Stones That Can Be Trusted

You test each anchor before putting weight on the line. The water hides the gaps between the old arches; one good rope is worth more than a confident stride.

An Iron Warden can brace the line above the current. A Thorn Scout can find the sound stones and mark them with lantern hooks. An Ember Keeper without another guide can spend a charge to show which old wards still hold beneath the flood.

If your inherited ending is FREE, a wandering amber light settles on the first safe stone. Aster waits while you fix the rope, then moves to the next. It never asks you to follow without testing the footing yourself.

When the line is secure, you make a marker high enough to see from the inn road. This crossing will remain after you have gone.

WARDEN or SCOUT: secure the crossing; mark CROSSING. Go to 16 / p. 21

If your inherited ending is FREE: follow Aster and mark CROSSING. Go to 16 / p. 21

Spend 1 CHARGE to locate safe anchors; mark CROSSING. Only if you have a charge. Go to 16 / p. 21

Leave this crossing and seek the dry ridge route instead. Go to 38 / p. 43

One Person Above the Current

You tie the rescue line around a stone post before throwing the loose end. Tovin catches it with both hands.

The strap around his leg is caught on the broken arch. Pulling hard now would hold him under the water. He needs a moment of slack to free it.

A Warden can steady the line while he works. A Scout can send a knife along the rope in a loop of cord. A Keeper can spend a charge to loosen the frozen buckle without burning the leather.

If none of those is right for you, move the wagon jack from the bank and use it to hold the line. It is slower, but secure. You talk to Tovin while you work so he knows you have not left.

He frees the strap. This time, when you pull, the river gives him back.

RECORD If DRIVER is already marked, Tovin is safe. Go directly to section 19 without repeating the rescue.

WARDEN or SCOUT: use your trained rescue method. Go to 19 / p. 24

Spend 1 CHARGE to loosen the buckle. Only if you have a charge. Go to 19 / p. 24

Use the jack and keep talking; no charge needed. Go to 19 / p. 24

Pull hard before the trapped strap is free. Go to 54 / p. 59

The Driver's Account

Tovin coughs water onto the stones, then asks you to count the passengers again. You read the names until he stops trying to sit up.

He knows you. If you remember the young man guarding a mill ledger, he remembers that encounter too. You may have fed him, promised to speak for him, taken the pages quietly, or disarmed him. He has since taken work on the road. None of those histories needs to be rewritten to make this one possible.

"The city waved us out," he says. "Then the gate closed behind the next wagon. Veyra thinks she is saving everyone. Make her look at the road."

He gives you his city supply seal. It confirms the manifest, but does not replace the evidence you still need.

Two passengers come from the inn to help him back. You watch until they reach the higher ground.

RECORD Mark DRIVER. Tovin remains safe and returns to the inn. Note any connection with your Chapter 1 journal; no earlier choice is erased.

Investigate what the city is taking. Go to 26 / p. 31

Make the causeway safe for the rest of the caravan. Go to 17 / p. 22

Check on the passengers. Go to 12 / p. 17

The Bell Orchard



"Someone ought to write its name down."

Small bronze bells hang from leafless trees. Some ring when the breeze passes. Others make a faint tone before the air reaches them, as though answering a distant hand.

Iona tends them with a cloth. Each carries a settlement's name. She shows you three that no longer answer at all.

"Not destroyed," she says. "Drawn down. There is a difference."

The orchard once carried offers of light and requests for help along the road. A lantern could send what it had to spare. A settlement could ask without being guaranteed an answer.

Now the bells ring in one direction, toward Meridian. Iona has been keeping notes of every silence.

You ask why she stays.

"Because someone ought to be here when a place stops answering. Someone ought to write its name down."

Learn the network's original promise. Go to 21 / p. 26

Ask Iona for help on the road. Go to 22 / p. 27

Climb toward the Star House. Go to 32 / p. 37

Visit the Saintless Sanctuary. Go to 23 / p. 28

Return to the inn. Go to 12 / p. 17

What Sharing Once Meant

Iona rings two bells together. Their notes separate cleanly, neither swallowing the other.

"Each light may refuse. No settlement may take another's share."

The promise sounds simple until she asks you to explain how it would work in a hard winter. Who decides a share? Who may close a local switch? Who keeps the accounts when the largest city is also the largest customer?

You cannot answer all of it. Iona seems relieved rather than disappointed.

"Good. Then we have something to discuss. An oath that ends every question is only another kind of lock."

She lets you copy the old terms and her list of silent bells. This promise is related to Greyhaven's oath, but it concerns a network of neighbours. Remembering one does not mean you have already learned the other.

RECORD Mark PROMISE. This is Chapter 2's network promise, not the wage promise or OATH from Chapter 1.

Ask Pell what those terms would mean in practice. Go to 23 / p. 28

Take the list of silent bells to the observatory. Go to 32 / p. 37

Return to the orchard paths. Go to 20 / p. 25

Iona's Road Kit

Iona opens a little chest beneath her bench. Inside are spare shutters, lamp cord, and a brass ward patterned to turn aside a burst from the city's conduits.

If you returned the borrowed ward after your first adventure, that was the right place for it. This is a different tool, offered for this road. If you kept the old one, Iona checks its worn face and exchanges it for the road ward; two wards would not give you two protections.

She also sets a seed lantern beside yours. Patient amber light fills its measured chambers.

"Carry a question as carefully as you carry a flame."

You agree to leave the road ward with a watch station after the work is done. Iona closes the chest before you can mistake a generous moment for an endless supply.

RECORD Mark WARD. Once only, if SEED is unmarked: restore CHARGES to 3 and mark SEED. Later visits do not refill. You never gain a second ward.

Accept the road kit and return to the orchard. Go to 20 / p. 25

Carry the kit to the sanctuary. Go to 23 / p. 28

The Saintless Sanctuary



"What do you need?"

No statue stands beneath the ruined arch. Travellers have left a bench, a water jar, and a lantern for anyone who needs a place to stop.

Inside the cracked glass, a small amber light flinches when your shadow crosses it. A copper pipe runs from its base into the road. Each pulse of blue down the pipe makes the light smaller.

"Pell," it says when you ask a name. After a pause: "What do you need?"

You could answer with the inn, the caravan, the villages, every person you have met who lacks warmth. The list would be true. It would also be another weight laid on something already being drained.

Instead you sit on the bench where Pell can see your hands. The pipe hums. You let the silence last long enough to become a choice.

Listen to Pell without asking for service. Go to 24 / p. 29

Examine the pipe and the independent lamp cradle. Go to 25 / p. 30

Return to Iona. Go to 20 / p. 25

Follow the pipe to the Siphon Works. Go to 26 / p. 31

Return to the inn. Go to 12 / p. 17

Terms, Not Permission Taken

Pell speaks in short pieces, resting between them. It once offered light to travellers. When the city's bypass opened, an offer became a connection it could no longer close.

If your inherited ending is COVENANT, you describe exactly what Aster agreed to, including the open door. Pell asks to see that same right written into any new network. Your experience makes the conversation easier; it does not let you speak for Pell.

Otherwise, listen until the terms are complete. It will share for a season if it can stop, if its local switch truly works, and if refusal does not bring punishment to the inn.

You repeat the terms back. Pell corrects one word. You change it.

The correction matters more than a smooth speech would have. For a moment, the small flame grows steadier.

RECORD TERMS means Pell's agreement was heard, not that Pell has been compelled. Returning never renews or expands that agreement automatically.

If inherited COVENANT or EMBER KEEPER: record the terms; mark TERMS. Go to 25 / p. 30

Otherwise, spend 1 CHARGE on a gentle listening light; mark TERMS. Only if you have a charge. Go to 25 / p. 30

Otherwise, stay and listen patiently without magic; mark TERMS. No charge needed. Go to 25 / p. 30

Leave the conversation unfinished for now. Go to 23 / p. 28

A Switch Close Enough to Reach

The sanctuary's cradle once stood on its own. The city pipe was added later, through a hole cut roughly in the stone.

You close the little isolation tap before touching the coupling. Pell brightens at once, then looks toward the closed valve as if expecting it to turn back by itself.

A Warden can brace the pipe while removing its clamp. A Scout can unwind the collar without cracking the glass. A Keeper can soften the old seal with a small controlled charge. Alternatively, use the spanners left under the bench and work slowly through Iona's labelled fittings.

You seat the lantern in its independent cradle. Its own switch is now within reach of the light that uses it.

Only if TERMS is marked does Pell offer to warm the inn. The repair gives it freedom to choose; it does not purchase its labour.

RECORD SANCTUARY stays repaired. At the ending, Pell shelters the inn only if both SANCTUARY and TERMS are marked.

WARDEN or SCOUT: finish the repair; mark SANCTUARY. Go to 23 / p. 28

Spend 1 CHARGE to soften the seal; mark SANCTUARY. Only if you have a charge. Go to 23 / p. 28

Use the hand tools patiently; mark SANCTUARY. No charge needed. Go to 23 / p. 28

Hear Pell's terms before doing the repair. Go to 24 / p. 29

The Siphon Works

Copper pipes cross above the road like exposed roots. Beneath them, a small door opens into a workshop full of discarded couplings.

Orren recognizes Nera's handwriting before he recognizes your purpose.

"She always underlines the part people will try to skip," he says.

He has the engine plans, but he has also seen Meridian's wards fail during a winter storm. Forty thousand people live inside those walls. He will not help you replace one catastrophe with another.

Through an inner grille you see a slender brass sentinel folded around a blue core. The governor key turns inside its chest once with every pulse from the main pipe.

You set the manifest on Orren's bench. The names are from the city too. Some of its people are simply standing on the other side of its protection.

RECORD If KEY is already marked, do not replay its encounter. You may reread section 31 or take another route.

Only with MANIFEST: show Orren the travellers' names. Go to 27 / p. 32

Inspect the quiet release on the sentinel's relay. Go to 28 / p. 33

Confront the siphon sentinel. Go to 29 / p. 34

Return to the sanctuary. Go to 23 / p. 28

Go back to the causeway. Go to 16 / p. 21

Continue toward Meridian Gate. Go to 38 / p. 43

An Emergency Made Permanent

Orren finds a name he knows, then another. He brings the plans out from under a stack of scrap.

The Dawn Engine's emergency bypass was meant to borrow briefly from the road network during a storm. Veyra left it open. The extra supply strengthened the city wards, but it also raised a veil that caught daylight and warmth before they reached the outer fields.

"Every morning the gauges said the city was safe," Orren says. "No gauge said who was cold."

He marks the governor on the drawing. It must be stabilized with its key before the bypass closes. The remaining network can then be regulated, dismantled, or rebuilt around local control.

You ask whether he will help after the lever moves.

He puts on his work coat. "If I give you this plan, I ought to stand beside it."

RECORD Requires MANIFEST. Mark PLANS. Orren follows the work through the final repair; his presence never consumes a supply.

Look for a quiet way to recover the governor key. Go to 28 / p. 33

Prepare to disable the sentinel. Go to 29 / p. 34

Seek independent proof at the Star House. Go to 32 / p. 37

Return to the workshop routes. Go to 26 / p. 31

The Hidden Latch

The relay has a service catch hidden behind the main coupling. You can see why someone might miss it in a hurry: turning the obvious handle would tighten the lock.

A Thorn Scout can work the catch through the inspection gap. If your inherited ending is BOUND, Aster names the latch through the speaking flame in your lantern.

"Knowing a cage is useful," it says quietly. You do not answer as though that makes the cage acceptable.

Others can spend a charge to reveal the catch through the metal. Or, with PLANS, you can have Orren hold the relay steady while you follow the service sequence by hand.

The sentinel need never wake. It was built to protect a coupling, not to understand why that coupling should sometimes be opened.

SCOUT: release the catch; mark QUIETKEY. Go to 31 / p. 36

If inherited BOUND: use Aster's knowledge; mark QUIETKEY. Go to 31 / p. 36

Spend 1 CHARGE to find the latch; mark QUIETKEY. Only if you have a charge. Go to 31 / p. 36

Only with PLANS: follow Orren's slow service sequence; mark QUIETKEY. Go to 31 / p. 36

Prepare for the sentinel to wake. Go to 29 / p. 34

Withdraw to the workshop. Go to 26 / p. 31

Brass Limbs Unfold



"Taking the opening carefully matters more than striking hard."

The sentinel unfolds from the pipework. Its fingers end in narrow tools, but there is no mistaking how it means to use them.

It closes both arms over the blue core. When the arms open, the pipe behind it swells with pressure. A heavy strike is coming.

You shelter behind a bolted worktable. The blow lands hard enough to make its legs scrape the floor, but the table holds. Afterward the sentinel's right arm hangs low. Its chest shutter has not quite closed.

An Iron Warden can keep the damaged arm pinned away from the core. A Thorn Scout can circle behind its loose shoulder. An Ember Keeper can echo the core's pulse and hold the shutter open for a breath.

You have an opening. Taking it carefully will matter more than striking hard.

Use your path's tactic after the heavy strike. Go to 30 / p. 35

Attack the covered core before its arms open. Go to 54 / p. 59

Back away and try the service latch. Go to 28 / p. 33

Retreat to Orren's workshop. Go to 26 / p. 31

The Cooling Core



"The tools were made for a worker who had no magic at all."

The sentinel tries to gather itself. Its damaged arm catches against the table, leaving the governor key turning behind a half-open shutter.

Cold blue light begins to collect around the key. A ward or lantern charge can turn the pulse aside. Without either, lower the workshop's insulated service hood over the core and use the long-handled tongs hanging beside it. The tools were made for a worker who had no magic at all.

You take the key and pull the relay pin. Brass limbs settle onto the stones. The core goes dark, and the pipe's frantic pulse becomes steady.

Orren comes out when you call. He looks at the fallen machine, then at the key in your hand.

"Now we can do the careful part," he says.

If WARD: turn the pulse aside and mark KEYBATTLE. Go to 31 / p. 36

Spend 1 CHARGE to turn the pulse aside; mark KEYBATTLE. Only if you have a charge. Go to 31 / p. 36

Use the service hood and tongs; mark KEYBATTLE. No charge needed. Go to 31 / p. 36

A Key Is Not a Plan

The governor key is heavier than it looks. Its teeth are arranged in unequal pairs so it can fit the control in only one direction.

If QUIETKEY is marked, the sentinel remains folded at its station, isolated from the relay. If KEYBATTLE is marked, it lies still beside the table, its work finished. Either way, the key belongs in the governor now.

Orren wraps it in a strip of cloth. "Do not turn it until the return is steady. That is why I wrote down the order."

If PLANS is missing, you still need his explanation. Possessing a tool is not the same as knowing what it will move.

You check the manifest again before putting the key away. The purpose of the machine has become complicated. The purpose of finding the missing people has not.

RECORD Mark KEY permanently. It is not spent when used. Keep QUIETKEY or KEYBATTLE to remember how you recovered it.

Only with MANIFEST: get or review Orren's plans. Go to 27 / p. 32

Take the evidence to Meridian Gate. Go to 38 / p. 43

Check on Pell before approaching the city. Go to 23 / p. 28

Return to the workshop routes. Go to 26 / p. 31

Above the False Morning



"The sun has not stopped."

The Star House stands high enough for its brass roof to rise above the veil. Halfway up the stairs, your face warms in a shaft of sunlight.

Astronomer Sen meets you at the open dome. His coat is patched at the elbows, and his notebooks are weighted with stones against the wind.

"The sun has not stopped," he says. "Come here. You should see that before I explain anything else."

Below the balcony, dark fields stretch toward a city full of golden windows. Above the veil, morning has arrived exactly when his tables said it would.

Sen sets a warmed metal disk beside another brought up from the road. You can feel the difference without trusting his title or his instruments.

Someone has called the darkness inevitable. Here is a place where that claim can be tested.

Copy the measurements and learn what they prove. Go to 33 / p. 38

Help raise the old signal mirror. Go to 34 / p. 39

Go down to Hearthmere. Go to 35 / p. 40

Return to the Bell Orchard. Go to 20 / p. 25

Evidence Beyond the Walls

Sen lays the charts side by side: the hours the bypass drew hardest, the shrinking warmth in the fields, the expanding veil.

The curves agree. The engine is causing the darkness; it is not merely protecting the city from a darkness that came on its own.

A controlled closure of the bypass will lift the veil. It does not require releasing every bound light at once. The governor must first be stabilized, and each later choice will still carry a different cost.

You copy the measurements, including the observations that did not fit Sen's first theory. He insists on those too.

"If the council is allowed to question the figures, they may trust the answer. If it is only allowed to applaud, we have built another machine."

He packs a travel case. When you are ready, he will supervise the daylight measurements from the city roofs.

RECORD Mark CHARTS. These open an evidence-based, noncombat route past the final guardian. They do not by themselves create a shared council.

Help him signal Meridian. Go to 34 / p. 39

Bring the evidence to Hearthmere. Go to 35 / p. 40

Take the charts toward the city. Go to 38 / p. 43

Return to the observatory paths. Go to 32 / p. 37

Someone Answers

The signal mirror has not been raised since the road bells began carrying messages. Its lever is frozen, and the crank needs both oil and patience.

A Warden can hold the frame while Sen clears the hinge. A Scout can climb to the upper catch. A Keeper can spend a charge to loosen the frost. Or you can work the hand winch together, one notch at a time.

When the mirror reaches the light, Sen sends the old road signal: PEOPLE OUTSIDE. ANSWER.

For several breaths, nothing changes. Then a shutter flashes on a city roof.

Sen lowers the handle carefully. "There. Now someone knows we are still looking back."

You cannot tell whether the person who answered has any power. You can tell that the walls have not made everyone inside them blind.

WARDEN or SCOUT: raise the mirror; mark SIGNAL. Go to 32 / p. 37

Spend 1 CHARGE to free the hinge; mark SIGNAL. Only if you have a charge. Go to 32 / p. 37

Work the hand winch with Sen; mark SIGNAL. No charge needed. Go to 32 / p. 37

Hearthmere Keeps a Fire



"Then we need another pair of hands."

The market has forgotten the hour. Empty stalls stand beneath a sky that looks like evening even when Sen's charts say noon.

Councillor Edda is breaking a ruined stool for the communal hearth. She saves the sound wood first, as though there will certainly be another market and someone will need a place to sit.

"We can move the seed grain or move the old people," a worker says. "Not both before the damp gets in."

Edda hands you the pry bar. "Then we need another pair of hands."

There is no speech about deserving help. People are cold. Food must be cooked. Grain must stay dry if anyone is to plant next spring.

A different sort of answer to the city's arithmetic is being built here, one useful task at a time.

Move the seed grain to the dry cellar. Go to 36 / p. 41

If you have 2 PROVISIONS: help rebuild and feed the hearth crews. Go to 37 / p. 42

Only if HEARTH is marked: rest free at the repaired hearth. Go to 6 / p. 11

Go toward Meridian Gate. Go to 38 / p. 43

Return to Sen's observatory. Go to 32 / p. 37

Next Spring in a Sack

The sacks are awkward, not impossibly heavy. You find a handcart, clear the cellar stair, and work with the people who know which floorboards will hold.

If Brindle is with you, he waits by the door. The last thing a crowded stair needs is a helpful dog underfoot.

Edda checks every sack for damp before it goes onto the raised shelf. These are not tonight's meals. They are the chance of growing meals next year.

When the last sack is safe, she opens a different cupboard and takes three portions from the emergency food store.

"Not the seed," she says, seeing your glance. "We kept the two separate for a reason. Take these where they can do some work."

You mark the cupboard tally. It will not fill itself merely because you return and ask again.

RECORD Once only: if GRAIN is unmarked, mark GRAIN and add 3 PROVISIONS. Returning adds nothing. The food comes from the emergency store, not the seed grain.

If you have 2 PROVISIONS: help the hearth crew. Go to 37 / p. 42

Return to Hearthmere's paths. Go to 35 / p. 40

People Who Will Stay

You set food beside the workbench and join the hearth crew. One person mixes mortar while another clears the blocked flue. Edda keeps the older villagers away from the draught without asking them to be grateful for it.

As the new fire catches, you tell her about the road network and the city bypass.

"We can send workers," she says. "And shelter the crews when they come through. But we will have a seat wherever the decisions are made. Not an invitation to speak after the decision. A seat."

You write the distinction down.

The hearth is warm enough now for the grain workers to come in and straighten their backs. For a little while, no one has to choose between being useful and being warm.

RECORD First visit requires 2 PROVISIONS: subtract 2 and mark HEARTH. Revisits cost nothing. The repaired hearth offers free full lantern recovery through section 6.

Carry Hearthmere's offer to Meridian. Go to 38 / p. 43

Rest here at the repaired hearth. Go to 6 / p. 11

Return to the village paths. Go to 35 / p. 40

The City That Still Has Morning

Inside Meridian's walls, windows shine like sunrise. Outside, people wait beneath awnings that drip cold water onto their blankets.

Captain Rusk stands at the supply entrance with a spear across the way. Her orders admit cargo and turn away additional mouths to feed.

If SIGNAL is marked, she recognizes the old mirror code on Sen's note. "That was you," she says. "I wondered who was still up there."

You can ask to enter, but an accusation alone will not take you to the engine. Bring the manifest, the plans, and the governor key. Rusk knows how to check a seal and how to read a name.

Behind the gatehouse, a dry stair climbs the ridge. Mera's passenger was right: there is another road around the flood. It needs clearing before a caravan can use it.

RECORD If ADMITTED is marked, you may go directly to section 42 only when CROSSING is also marked. Otherwise finish a safe route at 17 or 39.

Only with ADMITTED + CROSSING: enter the control gallery. Go to 42 / p. 47

Only with MANIFEST + PLANS + KEY: present your evidence. Go to 40 / p. 45

Clear the dry ridge route. Go to 39 / p. 44

Bring the road settlements together. Go to 41 / p. 46

Return to Orren and the Siphon Works. Go to 26 / p. 31

Return to Hearthmere. Go to 35 / p. 40

Return to the causeway. Go to 16 / p. 21

The Road Behind the Gate

The old stair is half hidden by thorn and loose shale. It is dry, and it reaches the road above the inn without crossing the flooded arches.

A Scout finds the old markers quickly. A Warden can shift the fallen stones. A Keeper can spend a charge to reveal the marks beneath the lichen. Without magic or either specialty, borrow the gatehouse broom and spade and clear the steps one by one.

Rusk sends a guard to help when she sees what you are doing. She has not admitted you to the engine, but she can recognize a road that will keep people out of the water.

You fix a rope along the exposed turn and mark both ends. Whatever happens behind the city walls, the missing caravan now has a route home.

WARDEN or SCOUT: clear and mark the ridge; mark CROSSING. Go to 38 / p. 43

Spend 1 CHARGE to reveal the markers; mark CROSSING. Only if you have a charge. Go to 38 / p. 43

Clear it patiently with the gatehouse tools; mark CROSSING. No charge needed. Go to 38 / p. 43

A Sister on the Manifest

Rusk reads the plan first. Then she checks the governor key. When she reaches the manifest, her hand stops on a name.

"Mera?"

You tell her about the stable awning, the bell, and the list on the flour sack. If CARAVAN is marked, you can also tell her that the passengers have eaten and begun planning their return. Otherwise you promise no comfort you have not provided.

Rusk lowers the spear. "My last letter told her the road was safe."

She cannot mend that by pretending not to believe you. She stamps the petition and unlocks the stair to the control gallery.

Before going in, you must have a safe road for the travellers. The city's machinery will not be an excuse to forget the first task Mara gave you.

RECORD Requires MANIFEST + PLANS + KEY. Mark ADMITTED permanently. Rusk's permission does not replace the CROSSING requirement.

Only with CROSSING: enter the control gallery. Go to 42 / p. 47

First clear the dry ridge route. Go to 39 / p. 44

First gather the road council. Go to 41 / p. 46

Return to the gate routes. Go to 38 / p. 43

An Agreement with Empty Spaces

You gather the offers on a table outside the gate. A council cannot be created by writing other people's names beneath a plan they have not seen.

With CARAVAN, Mera offers message carriers and road crews. With HEARTH, Edda offers shelter and labour. With TERMS, Pell's conditions can be read in Pell's own words. With PROMISE, Iona brings the network's original limits.

If one is missing, leave its place empty and go ask. Do not invent an answer because the machinery is waiting.

When all four are present, the discussion is slow. People disagree about shifts, stores, and which town will repair which stretch. The page gains crossings-out as well as signatures.

If DRIVER is marked, Tovin speaks for the routes he knows. If not, Mera leaves his chair open and speaks for the passengers. A council is not held hostage by one missing voice, but it remembers whose account it still owes a hearing.

RECORD COUNCIL requires all four named preparations. SANCTUARY is separately required for the covenant ending; an agreement needs working local control as well as words.

Only with CARAVAN + HEARTH + TERMS + PROMISE: mark COUNCIL and return to the gate. Go to 38 / p. 43

Return to the passengers. Go to 12 / p. 17

Return to Hearthmere. Go to 35 / p. 40

Return to Pell. Go to 23 / p. 28

Return to Iona. Go to 20 / p. 25

Veyra's Arithmetic



"Every day I meant to close it."

Chief Engineer Veyra stands under a wall of pressure gauges. The numbers nearest the city line are marked in green. The outer-road gauges have been turned face down.

"Forty thousand people," she says before you speak. "One night to keep the wards from failing. The bypass worked. Every day I meant to close it."

You lay the manifest where she can see it. "These are some of the people your gauges stopped counting."

The Meridian Guard plants its feet across the controls. Its hammer rests on the stone between you. Veyra has set it to prevent any interruption she has not authorized.

She will hear evidence of a safe closure, or a practical agreement about who will do the work afterward. Without either, you will have to disable the machine that protects her decision.

There is still time to go back and bring more than a weapon.

RECORD Requires ADMITTED + CROSSING. If GUARDIAN is already marked, go directly to section 46.

If CHARTS or COUNCIL is marked: make your case. Go to 43 / p. 48

Prepare to get past the Meridian Guard. Go to 44 / p. 49

Return outside for evidence or allies. Go to 38 / p. 43

Show Me Where They Survive

If CHARTS is marked, you spread Sen's measurements beside Orren's plans. The darkness follows the bypass load. A controlled closure will lift the veil; it will not make the sun abandon Meridian.

If COUNCIL is marked, you show Veyra the agreed shifts, stores, local switches, and places where the signatories still need to settle a detail. They have brought work, not just a demand that someone else be braver.

"Show me the part where they survive," she says.

You point to the governor sequence. Then to the names. If you have both pieces of preparation, you can show how safe machinery and willing people support one another. If you have only one, Orren can still explain the repair, and Rusk can begin organizing emergency crews.

Veyra reads for a long time. Finally she orders the guard to stand aside.

"I will answer for the bypass," she says. "First, let us close it correctly."

RECORD Requires CHARTS or COUNCIL. Mark GUARDIAN and STANDDOWN. No charge is spent. This does not create any missing council or sanctuary preparation.

Take your place at the governor controls. Go to 46 / p. 51

The Hammer and the Conduits



"Even now, you listen."

The Meridian Guard raises its hammer. Copper conduits run behind it, close enough that a wild blow could crack them.

You move toward the empty stone pier instead of meeting it beneath the pipes. The hammer falls where you stood. Stone rings; the city gauges jump and settle.

The guard must lift the hammer before it can strike again. During that effort, the plate over its control core slides aside.

A Warden can jam the hammer's hinge with a fallen iron brace. A Scout can cross behind its planted foot. A Keeper can match the core's pulse long enough to delay the closing plate. Or spend a charge to hold the shutter wide.

Veyra calls a warning about the return line. Even now, you listen. Opposing her decision does not make her knowledge useless.

Use your path's tactic after the hammer falls. Go to 45 / p. 50

Spend 1 CHARGE to hold the plate open. Only if you have a charge. Go to 45 / p. 50

Strike wildly at the conduits behind it. Go to 54 / p. 59

Retreat outside the gallery. Go to 38 / p. 43

The Last Guard Falls



"Breaking it has not yet warmed a single field."

The plate catches on its damaged hinge. Behind it, a control rod runs between two copper contacts.

You must separate the contacts before taking the rod. A brass ward can shelter your hand from the cold discharge; a lantern charge can turn it aside. Without either, use the insulated maintenance lever beside the pier and keep your body behind the stone.

The rod comes free. The guard tries to lift its hammer once more, then settles heavily to the floor. Its core dims through amber to black.

Orren reaches the return wheel before the falling arm can touch it. Veyra catches a loose gauge against her coat.

No one cheers. The machine was dangerous, but breaking it has not yet warmed a single field. Now the people in the room must finish the work it was stopping.

If WARD: remove the rod safely; mark GUARDIAN and GUARDBATTLE. Go to 46 / p. 51

Spend 1 CHARGE to remove the rod; mark GUARDIAN and GUARDBATTLE. Only if you have a charge. Go to 46 / p. 51

Use the insulated lever; mark GUARDIAN and GUARDBATTLE. No charge needed. Go to 46 / p. 51

Before the Lever Moves



"Ask the room to listen before anyone decides."

Living lights circle above the gallery in brass restraints. Their brightness makes it difficult to see the bars until you deliberately look for them.

Orren steadies the return. You fit the governor key and turn it only when the pressure reaches the mark on his plan. Veyra opens the relief channel in small steps. The machine's violent pulse becomes a regular beat.

The governor is stable. Closing the extraction bypass is now safe; all three final choices will close it and lift the veil. The question is what will replace the system that kept Meridian bright at everyone else's expense.

If CHARTS is marked, Sen reports from the roof as the veil begins to thin at its edge. Otherwise the pressure and return instruments still establish the safe mechanical condition. The sun does not need a witness to continue rising.

You keep your hand near the lever and ask the room to listen before anyone decides.

RECORD Requires GUARDIAN. Mark SAFE. The stabilized setting holds while you finish preparations. Re-enter through 42 and go directly here; do not replay the guard.

Consider what comes after the bypass. Go to 47 / p. 52

Leave the governor stabilized and finish preparations outside first. Go to 38 / p. 43

Who Gets to Keep the Morning?

You can keep a regulated central beacon. The veil will lift and the city will lose its endless artificial morning. A public ledger can limit its demands, but the lights inside will remain bound.

You can dismantle the extraction network and open the restraints. Morning will reach the road, and the lights will be free. Meridian's wards will go out. Patrols, watchfires, and neighbours will have to replace them; the preparations you made will change how hard that beginning is.

With COUNCIL and SANCTUARY, you can found the Covenant of Open Lanterns. Local switches already work, and the settlements have agreed to share responsibility. Each light must still be allowed to leave.

Veyra looks at the names again. This time she will not decide alone. You have heard enough voices to know that no lever can relieve you of the need to explain what you choose.

RECORD Requires SAFE. Choose one ending. Your Chapter 1 ending remains a separate fact; it does not change when you choose here.

Keep a regulated central beacon under public oversight. Go to 48 / p. 53

Dismantle extraction and release the lights. Go to 49 / p. 54

Only with COUNCIL + SANCTUARY: found the Covenant of Open Lanterns. Go to 50 / p. 55

Return outside to complete preparations before deciding. Go to 38 / p. 43

A City with Open Windows



"The lock remains. Now everyone can see who holds its key."

You close the extraction bypass. The veil loosens above the fields, and real morning enters Meridian through windows that have been glowing all night.

The central beacon remains. Its output is rationed; its controls answer to a public ledger. Rusk orders the road gauges turned toward the room again. Veyra agrees to report at every winter council, with the outer settlements allowed to inspect the figures.

Inside the restraints, the lights grow quieter as the demand falls. They are still restrained.

You do not call public oversight the same thing as freedom. You have chosen to keep a certain protection while making its price visible. The people who benefit will no longer be able to claim that the road's cold was somebody else's weather.

At noon, a worker opens a gallery window to let the ordinary air in. For once, the city and the fields share the same hour.

RECORD ENDING: REGULATED. Record "A City with Open Windows." This is the web game's bind outcome.

See how the road settlements begin again. Go to 51 / p. 56

The First Ordinary Sunrise



"You have ended the extraction, not abolished the winter."

The bypass closes. Then, one restraint at a time, the rings open.

The first light rises so slowly that you wonder whether it believes the opening will stay. Others follow through the engine's open roof. Some pass without looking back. One circles the gallery before leaving, as though memorizing the way out.

Meridian's wards go dark. Beyond them, sunlight spills across the fields.

The city bell calls the first ordinary watch to its stations. With your preparations, people may already know where the food, shelter, and volunteers are waiting. Without them, the work will begin in confusion and cost more than it needed to.

You have ended the extraction, not abolished the winter. But the warmth returning to the road is no longer being borrowed from someone who cannot refuse.

Veyra steps outside without a gauge in her hand. She turns her face toward the sun.

RECORD ENDING: RELEASED. Record "The First Ordinary Sunrise." This is the web game's free outcome.

Find out what your preparations made possible. Go to 51 / p. 56

The Roads We Keep Together



"You let them leave."

Pell speaks first. Its terms are read aloud while the local switch stands open. From the highest ring, a blue light answers. Two others ask to leave before any agreement is discussed.

You let them.

Some offer a season of service. Others offer only the journey to the next town. The new network must be able to accept those different answers without secretly turning them into the same obligation.

Edda chairs the first road council. Veyra serves as its engineer. Meridian accepts the same limits as its smallest neighbour, and every settlement keeps a switch it can reach.

The first shared lantern is lit at the Wayfarer Inn. Its door stays open. Beside it, the passengers post a work roster with blank spaces for people who have not yet decided what they can give.

The road will need tending again tomorrow. This time, more people have a say in how.

RECORD Requires COUNCIL + SANCTUARY. ENDING: SHARED. Record "The Roads We Keep Together." This is the web game's accord outcome.

Walk the first stretch of the shared road. Go to 51 / p. 56

The People in Your Ledger

Read the lines that match your record. These are the consequences of the smaller work.

With CARAVAN, the passengers travel home together, fed and organized. Without it, patrols eventually escort them home; their recovery takes weeks. If DELIVERED is marked, Mera brings a list of patients who received the supplies you carried.

With DRIVER, Tovin takes the reins of the first reopened wagon. Without it, the new patrol finds him alive, too weak to drive until spring.

With HEARTH, Hearthmere shelters the first road crews. Without it, Meridian sends emergency food into a village facing a lean winter. With GRAIN, the seed is dry and ready for planting; without it, some is spoiled and neighbours must share their spring stores.

With SANCTUARY and TERMS, Pell warms the inn by choice. Otherwise, candles and ordinary fires serve it until a willing local watch is arranged.

None of these people disappears because your attention moved on.

RECORD Copy the outcomes that matter to you into the ending journal. They are narrative consequences, not new rewards to collect.

Remember the light you left in Greyhaven. Go to 52 / p. 57

A Choice That Still Exists

Read only the paragraph matching your inherited Chapter 1 ending.

BOUND: Aster remains in the Hollow Beacon. You return with the truth about the wider network. Whether you regulated, released, or shared Meridian's light, that new choice has not opened Greyhaven's cage. Aster listens to your account. You owe it honesty without asking honesty to stand in for freedom.

FREE: Aster remains free. An amber spark follows the first supply wagon for a little way, then leaves the road. You do not mistake companionship for a summons it must always answer. Greyhaven continues keeping its ordinary watchfires.

COVENANT: Aster hears the news through Greyhaven's willing lanterns. It renews its promise for another season, with the door still open. What you did in Meridian does not silently alter the agreement at home.

Your traveller has made two decisions now. One is not a correction written over the other.

RECORD Keep both ending fields on your record. Later books will be able to refer to each decision separately.

Return to the people who sent you. Go to 53 / p. 58

The Road Leads Home



"People answer their own names."

Mara meets the returning caravan by the well. This time she reads the list while people answer their own names.

Sella has found more bowls. Nera listens to your account of Orren's return channel with the expression of someone grateful that, for once, a warning was read before a valve was turned.

If Brindle is with you, he lies across your boots while you write. Otherwise Mera has news of the dog at the inn, safe among people who now know how to share a meal.

There is no need to set out again tonight. Greyhaven has work for tomorrow and room for you at the hearth.

Later, a sealed message arrives from Saltmere. A watch bell has been heard beneath the sea, answering towers that should have been silent for generations. Mara leaves the letter beside your finished journal rather than opening it over your shoulder.

You have earned the right to finish one story before beginning the next.

RECORD Chapter 2 is complete. Saltmere points toward Chapter 3, The Bells Beneath the Sea. Keep both endings and your companion record; PDF records are not web save files.

Complete your ending journal. Go to 55 / p. 60

Begin a new journey: reset Chapter 2 discoveries and supplies first. Go to 1 / p. 6

Found Before the Cold

The warning was there. You recognize it too late, as a weight shifts or cold light strikes across the place you meant to stand.

You retreat if you can. When you cannot, someone else makes the difference: a road patrol, Orren at the workshop, or a gallery worker who refuses to let the guard mistake an injured traveller for a completed task.

You wake beneath a dry blanket. Your pack is beside the bed. If Brindle travels with you, he has arranged himself where no one can leave without stepping over him.

The setback has not destroyed the evidence or undone a repair. An encounter you have not resolved will still require an answer. But you have learned the timing of its danger, and you do not have to repeat the mistake to prove you were brave.

Outside, people are still doing the work that makes a second attempt possible.

RECORD Record one SETBACK. Keep discoveries, remaining provisions, and companions. Section 6 restores CHARGES to 3. There is no death ending or permanent loss of progress.

Recover fully at the Lantern House before returning. Go to 6 / p. 11

The traveller's journal

Your record tells which roads opened. These notes tell why you took them. Keep this page with Chapter 1's journal for the next book.

What were your Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 endings?

Did this journey change how you understand your choice for Aster?

What happened to the caravan, Tovin, Hearthmere, and Pell?

Which encounter did you resolve peacefully, and which by force?

What promise will your traveller carry toward Saltmere?

Completed on:

The second road

Ash and Lantern 2: The Roads Without Dawn
The Greyhaven Chronicles, Book Two
By Marcus Draper / Deskatur
Illustrated gamebook, edition 1.0 - November 2026.

This original branching book adapts Chapter 2 of the Ash and Lantern web series. The city, characters, engine conflict, legacy routes, preparations, and three final outcomes follow that adventure. Dialogue, tactical sequences, and the traveller's reflections are expanded for reading.

The dice-free book rules use three lantern charges, counted provisions, and permanent discoveries. There are no hit-point totals, focus arithmetic, or currency purchases. All three paths can reach all three endings. The new ending does not replace the inherited choice from Chapter 1.

Illustrations
Six new AI-generated paintings show Iona, Pell, Sen, Hearthmere, Veyra, and the road council. Six established Chapter 2 art assets supply the road, inn, engine, and three enemies. Enemy states are displayed from their existing three-panel artwork. New images were made with OpenAI image generation; no commissioned hand-painting is claimed.

Continuing the series
Book One: The Hollow Beacon
Chapter Three: The Bells Beneath the Sea
Chapter Four: The City That Waited
The Saltmere message opens the next adventure without withholding this one's conclusion.

Reading and printing
Choice boxes link to their destination pages. Form fields are manually editable in a compatible PDF reader; save a copy to keep your answers. A printed copy works with pencil. For US Letter duplex printing, use actual size and flip on the long edge. This is not an imposed booklet or a commercial binding file.

The original web adventures are available through deskatur.com. Book records are not importable JSON saves. The editable source package contains the manuscript, artwork, layout code, and validation notes for future revisions.



Who gets to keep the morning?

Twenty-three travellers are missing. A city glows behind its walls. Along the road, bells fall silent and a small living light asks whether it is allowed to stop giving.

Follow the caravan. Hear the people outside the gates. Then decide what safety should cost - and who has been paying for it.

54 STORY SECTIONS / 3 ENDINGS
ILLUSTRATED ENCOUNTERS / CLICKABLE CHOICES
FILLABLE RECORD AND ENDING JOURNAL

DESKATUR ORIGINALS / MARCUS DRAPER