THE GREYHAVEN CHRONICLES / BOOK FOUR

ASH AND LANTERN 4

The City That Waited



A city kept safe from tomorrow.
A people ready to choose it.

MARCUS DRAPER

AN ILLUSTRATED CHOOSE-YOUR-PATH ADVENTURE / EDITION 1.0

BEGIN HERE

The fourth road

This is the fourth Ash and Lantern gamebook. Read a numbered section, choose an eligible option, and follow its destination. Do not read straight through. Section 1 begins on page 6. The ending journal is section 63 on page 68.

Returning readers: keep your name, path, optional Brindle, and all three earlier endings. Chapter 1: BOUND, FREE, or COVENANT. Chapter 2: REGULATED, RELEASED, or SHARED. Chapter 3: SEALED (The Names Above the Water), RELEASE (A Shore Without Chains), or WATCH (The Watch That Ends at Dawn).

Starting here: choose a name, a path, and one history for each earlier chapter. At Greyhaven, Aster was bound, freed, or joined a willing covenant. Meridian kept a regulated engine, released its lights, or shared the work. Saltmere sealed its deep gates, moved uphill, or established a rotating watch. Chapter 3's choice opens a shortcut here; none of these histories locks an ending.

IRON WARDEN: a watchblade, a steady stance, skill with protection and leverage.
THORN SCOUT: a yew bow, a working knife, an eye for footing and catches.
EMBER KEEPER: an ember staff, a travelling lantern, knowledge of signals and binding light.

Begin with **3 CHARGES and 4 PROVISIONS**. Use a fresh Chapter 4 record. Do not copy old supplies, wards, wounds, money, or discoveries. Copy BRINDLE only if he was with you; otherwise you may meet him at section 9.

The web game uses dice, health, and focus. This book uses decisions and permanent discoveries. Each path has free ways to complete every ending. Ordinary light and uncharged path tactics cost nothing.

Vesper's 312 citizens are living people. The pressure dome is independent of the time loop and Saltmere's sea barrier. Stopping the loop does not collapse the dome or suddenly age the citizens three hundred years. The years outside are still lost, and their consequences matter.

Light, supplies, and choices

Charges and the Lantern Flare

Begin with 3 charges. Spend 1 only when a choice explicitly says so; paid choices are unavailable at 0. Learn FLARE at section 42. It interrupts a fight's opening exchange and leads to the wounded stage, not instant victory. It is offered only at the opening and cannot be repeated during that encounter. Retreat ends an unfinished encounter; a new attempt starts afresh.

Rest and once-only refills

Section 6 restores charges to 3 for free. The garden oil at 31 and Vale's kit at 42 each refill once only. Mark OIL or KIT when used. A later visit grants no refill. Ordinary travel, conversations and path tactics are free.

Provisions

Begin with 4. Listening over food at section 16 costs 2 once only. The pantry adds 4 once and the well basket adds 3 once. There is no travel tax or hidden clock. Record a number; never spend below zero. Waking-room and supply-route work use expedition stores, not your provisions.

Conditions and revisits

Capitalized record words are discoveries. Choose conditional options only when you meet their requirements. Once earned, discoveries remain. Never replay a resolved guardian or collect a cache twice. On a revisit, use an unfinished choice, a stated shortcut, or a return route.

Setbacks and endings

At section 60 add one setback and keep supplies and discoveries. Unfinished fights reset; completed ones stay resolved. Brindle never attacks or dies. You may return for preparations before choosing an ending. Emergency hold keeps the city safe while you do so. Once chosen, follow the epilogue; keep all four endings separately.

Reading and printing

Choice boxes are clickable and give physical page numbers. Form fields are manual, not an automated game. Use a form-supporting PDF reader and save a played copy, or use pencil on paper. For US Letter duplex printing use actual size or fit to printable area, and flip on the long edge. This is not an imposed booklet. Book records do not import into the web game.

KEEP A BOOKMARK HERE

Your Vesper record

Traveller name

☐ Iron Warden ☐ Thorn Scout ☐ Ember Keeper

CHAPTER 1 HISTORY - CHOOSE ONE

☐ BOUND ☐ FREE ☐ COVENANT

CHAPTER 2 HISTORY - CHOOSE ONE

☐ REGULATED ☐ RELEASED ☐ SHARED

CHAPTER 3 HISTORY - CHOOSE ONE

☐ SEALED ☐ RELEASE ☐ WATCH

CHARGES: CHECKED = AVAILABLE

☑ 1 ☑ 2 ☑ 3

PROVISIONS

4

☐ REGISTER - 312 living citizens
☐ DELIVERED - Medicine at the Hearth
☐ SHARD - Shardwing resolved
☐ MARKET - People heard and fed
☐ SEAL - Civic transit seal
☐ IVEN - Lift keeper rescued
☐ TRUTH - Adra's honest account
☐ OIL - Garden refill used
☐ LENS - Calibration lens
☐ ROUTE - Supply route tested
☐ KIT - Vale's refill used
☐ BASKET - Three meals collected
☐ ATLAS - Blank page read
☐ DIAL - Master dial obtained
☐ MAGFIGHT - Magistrate disabled
☐ LEVIFIGHT - Leviathan disabled
☐ CARTFIGHT - Cartographer disabled

☐ MEDICINE - Supplies carried
☐ BRINDLE - Companion beside you
☐ PANTRY - Four meals collected
☐ PASSAGE - Pressure route safe
☐ CHARTER - Final amendment
☐ RELEASEKEY - Safe clock sequence
☐ WARD - Letter keeper's protection
☐ PLANS - Refuge understood
☐ HEARTH - Waking rooms ready
☐ FLARE - Shutter technique learned
☐ NEL - Observations credited
☐ CLOCKS - Transit lifts aligned
☐ ASSEMBLY - Citizens' council
☐ MAGPEACE - Magistrate stood down
☐ LEVIPEACE - Archive access restored
☐ CARTPEACE - Cartographer stood down

Chapter 4 ending

Setbacks 0

Keep all four endings. Your ending journal is section 63 / page 68.

The city and its people

Follow the choices to travel. This guide locates unfinished work, rather than showing a scale map. Return routes may skip familiar connecting streets.

Descent Camp / Arrival Hall Rest at 6; citizen register; medicine; Brindle.	1 / 7 / pp. 6 / 12
Arcade / Evening Market Shardwing; supplies; market voices.	10 / 14 / pp. 15 / 19
Civic Gate Pressure passage; Magistrate; transit seal.	17 / pp. 22
Broken Lift Iven; controlled release sequence.	23 / pp. 28
House of Unsent Letters Adra's account; brass ward.	26 / pp. 31
Founders' Garden Charter; one-time oil refill.	29 / pp. 34
Spiral Archive Refuge plans; Leviathan; calibration lens.	32 / pp. 37
Open Hearth Waking rooms; medicine delivery; supply route.	38 / pp. 43
Workshop / Stillwater Well Flare and refill; Nel's evidence; supply basket.	41 / 43 / pp. 46 / 48
Clockless Observatory Transit clocks; unfinished atlas.	46 / pp. 51
Assembly Steps Check entry discoveries; convene the citizens.	49 / pp. 54
Atlas Engine / Tomorrow Chamber Cartographer; final decision.	51 / 55 / pp. 56 / 60

Reach the Cartographer: REGISTER + PLANS + LENS + PASSAGE + SEAL.
Peaceful resolution: CLOCKS + HEARTH + RELEASEKEY.
Permanent passage ending: ASSEMBLY + ROUTE + CLOCKS, after DIAL.

Your record is ready. Begin Chapter 4. Go to 1 / p. 6

Beyond the Last Bell



Someone is calling the city home.

The pressure lock closes behind you. For a moment there is only the sound of Sen counting, a hand on the gauge, and your own breath inside the dry stone chamber.

Then the inner door opens.

A city shines beneath the sea. Fish move beyond a glass dome; inside, laundry hangs between balconies and a woman is calling someone in to supper. Your lantern burns without flickering.

Mera stands beside you with a box of paper held as carefully as medicine. She has brought both.

"Vesper," Sen says, reading the name above the terrace. "The plans called it a refuge."

Down in the square, a bell sounds once. The woman calls again, in precisely the same voice. A red scarf lifts from a balcony and settles into the shape it held a moment before.

You have come a long way to find a place that has barely moved.

Chapter 3 SEALED: follow the service lock records. Go to 2 / p. 7

Chapter 3 RELEASE: arrive with the evacuation survey. Go to 3 / p. 8

Chapter 3 WATCH: follow the returning crews' signal. Go to 4 / p. 9

The Door Beyond the Seal

After Saltmere's deep gates were sealed, Sen surveyed the machinery before anyone could forget why the new limits mattered. Behind the old bells, a service lock led toward lights farther below.

Nothing about this door reopens the memory intake you closed. Saltmere's living memories remain returned; the limited barrier still uses only its old mechanical echoes. Vesper has its own pressure dome, independent of that system.

The recovered maintenance plates share a notation with the new city's clock. Sen lays a rubbing beside a diagram of three linked safeguards.

"Not an instruction to turn anything yet," the astronomer says. "A language we can use when we find the right controls."

You carry the plates into the camp. The choice you made on the coast has brought a tool, not an excuse to make the next choice without asking anyone.

RECORD Keep Chapter 3 SEALED. The maintenance plates offer a release-sequence option at section 25 without rescuing Iven.

Join the expedition at the descent camp. Go to 5 / p. 10

Below the Flooded Streets

Saltmere's people have moved uphill. Its old bells are silent. When a survey boat passes over the flooded lower streets, the crew sees light rising from much farther down than any house on the old maps.

Sen traces it to an independent dome. The evacuation crews volunteer their pumps, portable seals, and experience of carrying frightened people through narrow places.

Vesper's air does not come from the barrier you surrendered to the sea. It has its own working machinery. Reaching it does not undo the coast's evacuation.

One crew member tests every latch twice. "People believe a door is safe because the last person got through," she says. "I'd rather have a gauge."

You help unload the pressure gear. Somewhere inside the city, citizens are waiting for an all-clear the outside world never sent. This time, the first visitors have brought a way to come back.

RECORD Keep Chapter 3 RELEASE. The evacuation crews can secure the pressure passage at section 18 without a charge.

Join the expedition at the descent camp. Go to 5 / p. 10

A Signal Between Watches

The returning bell crews noticed the windows during a change of watch. One row brightened while another darkened, repeating too carefully to be a reflection.

They reported it before going home. Their relief crew kept watching. By the time Sen arrived, there were three sketches from three different people, each with a name and a time beside it.

The smaller coastal locks continue their work. Vesper's dome is separate from them. Your descent does not abandon the watch or take its crews away indefinitely.

A fresh team carries letters, food, and an account of what life on the coast is actually like. They have agreed to speak honestly if the citizens ask whether the surface is safe.

"Safer with people looking after one another," one says. "Not safe from ever being sad."

You suspect that distinction may matter more down here than any instrument in Sen's case.

RECORD Keep Chapter 3 WATCH. Returning crews offer a free truth-telling option with Adra at section 27.

Join the expedition at the descent camp. Go to 5 / p. 10

The Refuge That Forgot to End

Sen spreads a map on a crate. Its outer ring marks the pressure dome. A second drawing marks something entirely different: a field that repeats fragments of one evening inside selected streets and rooms.

"The dome supports itself," Sen says. "Stopping the loop will not open the sea. But we need the actual plans before touching the clock."

Mera gives you a blank ledger. She wants names before theories. People are easier to discuss as a problem when no one has bothered to ask who they are.

A porter waits at the Arrival Hall. The square beyond smells of bread that seems always about to leave an oven.

You look back toward the descent lock. It will remain your way to rest, ask questions, and reconsider. Nothing useful is gained by pretending that uncertainty belongs only to the people you came to help.

RECORD Start with the 3 CHARGES and 4 PROVISIONS on your fresh Chapter 4 record. Re-reading this commission adds no supplies.

Meet the porter in the Arrival Hall. Go to 7 / p. 12

Rest and prepare at the descent camp. Go to 6 / p. 11

A Night Outside the Evening

The expedition's camp stands beyond the loop's strongest field. Here a cup stays where it falls, a candle grows shorter, and tired people can sleep until they have rested.

Mera has labelled the dry beds. Sen has posted the pressure readings beside the lock. Neither asks you to prove how brave you were before offering a place to sit.

You clean the lantern and check its shutter. If Vale has fitted the flare mechanism, it cools while you rest. The city remains open to another attempt.

Beyond the terrace, Vesper repeats a small gesture you cannot quite see. You think about the difference between being held safe and being held still. For now, you allow yourself an ordinary sleep.

RECORD Restore CHARGES to 3. Keep provisions and discoveries. Rest is free and repeatable. It does not refill any once-only cache.

Return to the Arrival Hall. Go to 7 / p. 12

Walk to the Glass Arcade. Go to 10 / p. 15

Only with HEARTH: return to the waking rooms. Go to 38 / p. 43

Three Hundred and Twelve



Living people. Not echoes.

"Welcome to Vesper," the porter says. "Please give your name for the register."

He looks down at the fresh page in Mera's ledger. When he speaks again, the practiced welcome has gone.

"You were not here yesterday. Or whatever we call it."

His name is Jun. Together you count 312 citizens in the refuge register. Jun checks households against the doors he knows, then asks you to write that they are living people. Not echoes. Not memories someone might release from a jar.

Their bodies have experienced only fragments of the evening. Ending the field will not force three hundred missing years through their flesh. The years were lived elsewhere, by people they expected to see again.

Jun shuts the register gently. "Then there are two kinds of bad news. Tell us which one is true."

RECORD Mark REGISTER. This count and record are required to interpret the refuge plans.

Open the emergency medical locker. Go to 8 / p. 13

Follow the pawprints by the baggage lift. Go to 9 / p. 14

Enter the Glass Arcade. Go to 10 / p. 15

Visit the Founders' Garden. Go to 29 / p. 34

Return to the camp. Go to 6 / p. 11

The Locker That Stayed Locked

The medical locker is outside the repeating field. Its latch has spent three hundred real years corroding while the labels inside stayed dry.

You support the door before loosening the pin. A Warden levers the hinge without twisting the frame. A Scout clears the catch with a working knife. A Keeper warms the seized joint with ordinary lantern heat. None of these patient methods needs a charge.

Inside are sealed medicines and clean dressings. Jun reads the old inventory, then crosses out the amounts you take. The line remains crossed out.

It is a small relief, seeing an action stay done.

These supplies will be useful when ordinary sleep, hunger, and fatigue return to the citizens. Finding them is not the same as putting them where they can help.

RECORD Mark MEDICINE. Visit section 39 with MEDICINE to mark DELIVERED. The locker grants no charges or provisions.

Return to the Arrival Hall. Go to 7 / p. 12

Carry the supplies toward the Open Hearth. Go to 38 / p. 43

An Entirely Ordinary Dog

If Brindle came with you, he has slipped beneath a canvas cover on the baggage lift. If he stayed on the coast, the next supply team has brought him down after finding him beside your old pack.

He emerges with dust on his nose and a satisfied expression. Evidently the route was obvious.

You kneel, and he leans against your leg. The dome, the fish, and the impossible city interest him less than whether you have time to scratch behind his ears.

Jun watches with a smile that does not seem borrowed from an earlier evening.

"Does he know where he is?"

"Beside me."

"That sounds useful."

If you leave Brindle with the camp, he will be cared for. If he joins you, he will stay clear of machinery and fights. You have no need to make his trust into another duty.

RECORD Brindle never attacks or dies. He does not spend provisions. If already with you, this is the same companion.

Let him join you: mark BRINDLE. Go to 7 / p. 12

Leave him with the camp; erase BRINDLE if marked. Go to 7 / p. 12

The Cup and the Crack



The cup returns. The crack remains.

A cup falls from a table in the Glass Arcade. You hear it strike the stones. Then it rolls uphill, rises to the edge, and settles beside an untouched plate.

Across the passage, a crack in a service window remains exactly where it was.

You watch again. The cup repeats. The crack does not heal. The field preserves living bodies and familiar routines, not every brick and hinge in Vesper. Wear has continued while the evening kept turning inward.

A shape peels away from the roof. Sea-glass wings catch fragments of amber light. The loose guardian turns toward the cup, then toward the unfamiliar lantern on your belt.

The upper walkway offers a way around it. Down another passage you hear the market, still conducting an evening's business that no one can quite finish.

RECORD If SHARD is marked, the creature is already resolved. Choose another route; do not replay its fight.

Confront the loose shardwing. Go to 11 / p. 16

Take the upper walkway to the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Continue to the Civic Gate. Go to 17 / p. 22

Look for the Lantern Workshop. Go to 41 / p. 46

Return to Jun. Go to 7 / p. 12

The Shardwing



Its wings carry a borrowed sky.

The guardian spreads its glass wings across the arcade. Light moves through them in broken pieces, painting a sky on the floor that no one here has seen.

Its first movement is a shield: both wings fold around the bright command knot at its centre. Striking now would scatter sharp fragments across the narrow path.

A Warden can wait behind a stone pillar and turn the next dive aside. A Scout can draw it toward the low awning where its wings cannot fully open. A Keeper can shutter the lantern and reveal it only after moving beyond the creature's line of sight.

If Vale has fitted your flare shutter, one charge will scramble its command long enough to ground it. Otherwise, its own movement can give you the opening.

Use your path's tactic and bring it down. Go to 12 / p. 17

Only with FLARE: spend 1 CHARGE to interrupt its opening attack. Go to 12 / p. 17

Strike into the folded glass wings. Go to 60 / p. 65

Withdraw along the upper walkway. Go to 14 / p. 19

A Wing That Cannot Close



You are not part of its instruction.

The shardwing hits the stones. One wing is cracked, and the command knot flashes through the gap. Its next sweep comes low, trying to return you to the place where it first found you.

You step behind the table instead. The cup repeats its small journey, but you are not part of that instruction.

When the creature pauses, its wing hinge lies within reach. You can wedge the hinge with a fallen table brace and break the command knot with blade, knife, or staff. No further burst of light is needed.

The difficult part is waiting while the glass still moves. A damaged guardian can be more dangerous than a whole one if you mistake its failure for surrender.

Wait out the sweep, then wedge the hinge and break the knot. Go to 13 / p. 18

Reach through the moving wing. Go to 60 / p. 65

Leave the unfinished encounter and reach the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Something That Stays Fallen



The cup returns. The guardian does not.

The shardwing folds onto its broken wing. The command knot darkens, and the glass no longer tries to put itself back together.

You stand clear through one more repetition of the cup. The guardian remains motionless. It belongs to the city's machinery, not to the protected routine.

Beneath it lies a supply satchel. The contents are soaked beyond use, but the strap is sound. You use it to pull the sharp remains out of the walkway and leave a warning marker beside them.

Jun will need to know that the arcade is passable. More than that, he may want to know that something in Vesper has finally been allowed to finish.

RECORD Mark SHARD. No provisions are recovered from this satchel; do not collect a repeated reward.

Continue to the Evening Market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Return to the arcade routes. Go to 10 / p. 15

The Loaf Sold Many Times



"I would like to say something else."

Tessa holds out a loaf and asks whether you want it cut. Then she stops before you can answer.

"I know what I usually say next. I would like to say something else."

The market glows beneath small trees. Some stalls sit inside the loop's tight field; a pantry near the service passage lies beyond it. Tessa has learned which meals stay eaten, though she cannot yet explain why.

Her neighbours gather at the sight of your fresh supplies. They ask about the coast, the sunlight, and whether their relatives are waiting. You do not answer the last question before you know enough to answer it honestly.

Tessa clears a place to sit. Whatever happens to Vesper should begin with a conversation people can remember choosing.

Collect the pantry's expedition supplies. Go to 15 / p. 20

With 2 PROVISIONS, or if MARKET is marked: share fresh food and listen. Go to 16 / p. 21

Go to the House of Unsent Letters. Go to 26 / p. 31

Visit the Open Hearth. Go to 38 / p. 43

Follow the passage to the Stillwater Well. Go to 43 / p. 48

Return to the arcade. Go to 10 / p. 15

These Will Stay Eaten

Tessa shows you a pantry shelf beyond the loop marker. Four wrapped meals sit on it. Jun has already checked the label, the doorway, and the fact that yesterday's empty basket remained empty.

"These will stay eaten," Tessa promises.

You pack the meals and mark the shelf. Her neighbours retain their own stores; these are supplies set aside for the expedition, not food taken from hungry people.

Jun checks once more after you close the door. Then he laughs at himself and leaves it closed.

You understand the hesitation. In a city where little actions have been undone for so long, trust may begin with an empty space that is allowed to remain empty.

RECORD Only if PANTRY is unmarked: mark PANTRY and add 4 PROVISIONS. Later visits add nothing.

With 2 PROVISIONS, or if MARKET is marked: return for the shared meal. Go to 16 / p. 21

Return to the market stalls. Go to 14 / p. 19

Listen Before You Promise

The fresh food has an unfamiliar taste: not better than Tessa's bread, simply new. A child bites twice and looks surprised that the second bite is different from the first.

You ask the market folk what they want to know before the clock changes. They answer with practical questions. Will the air remain? Where can someone sleep? Who is alive above? Can a person stay if a neighbour wants to leave?

Tessa writes their answers to one another. They want a real morning, truthful information, and a voice in deciding where to meet it. None asks you to guarantee a painless future.

A quiet man at the edge of the table says he is frightened of forgetting the evening. Tessa reaches for his hand.

"We can remember it," she says, "without having to keep living it."

RECORD First visit only: spend 2 PROVISIONS and mark MARKET. On later visits spend nothing. MARKET is one requirement for a citizens' assembly.

Carry their questions to Adra. Go to 26 / p. 31

Help prepare the waking rooms. Go to 38 / p. 43

Return to the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Emergency Rule

The Brass Magistrate stands before the central district. A bronze warrant unfolds from its chest in narrow hinged leaves. The date on the seal is three hundred years old.

"No citizen may leave during the emergency."

Behind it, layers of later decrees cover a copy of the city charter. The earliest text has almost disappeared beneath instructions for preserving order until an all-clear arrives.

The transit seal in the Magistrate's hand opens the inner doors. Beside them, pressure gauges show that the connecting passage also needs repair. Permission and safe passage are separate tasks.

You could force your way past the guardian. You could also look for the rule it was never told to stop obeying.

RECORD PASSAGE and SEAL are separate discoveries. Once SEAL is marked, this guardian stays resolved.

Make the pressure passage safe. Go to 18 / p. 23

If SEAL is unmarked: challenge the Magistrate. Go to 19 / p. 24

Only with CHARTER and no SEAL: present the final amendment. Go to 22 / p. 27

Find the original charter in the garden. Go to 29 / p. 34

Go to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

Return to the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

The Space Between Two Doors

A door can open correctly and still be unsafe to pass through. The old gauges do not agree, and one equalizing valve has been held in place with wire.

A Warden braces the frame while a worker replaces the worn collar. A Scout follows the valve sequence and finds the sticking return. A Keeper reads the signal lamps, checking each against the mechanical gauge. Patient work with Sen's printed instructions is also possible for any path.

If your Chapter 3 ending was RELEASE, the evacuation crews bring portable seals and hand pumps. They have already learned that a frightened crowd cannot wait while someone argues with a broken latch.

You test the passage empty before inviting anyone inside. Both doors close, the pressure settles, and the far latch opens without a groan.

RECORD Once PASSAGE is marked, it remains safe. No repeat payment is required.

Use your path's method or the printed instructions; mark PASSAGE. Go to 17 / p. 22

Only with Chapter 3 RELEASE: use the portable equipment; mark PASSAGE. Go to 17 / p. 22

Spend 1 CHARGE to reveal the old signal sequence; mark PASSAGE. Go to 17 / p. 22

The Brass Magistrate



The emergency has become the law.

The warrant snaps shut. The Magistrate raises a staff across the passage, its other arm shielding the transit seal.

It is waiting for you to cross a painted line. The first attack will follow that line, not your intentions.

A Warden can set a loose paving block where the staff will land and turn the blow aside. A Scout can step over the line at its broken edge, drawing the guardian off balance. A Keeper can answer the warning lamp with a delayed signal and move during the hesitation.

The decrees hanging behind it tremble in the air from the pressure vents. You keep clear of the glass, and wait for a movement you can use.

Use your path's opening tactic. Go to 20 / p. 25

Only with FLARE: spend 1 CHARGE to interrupt the command. Go to 20 / p. 25

Rush the seal behind its raised guard. Go to 60 / p. 65

Withdraw and investigate the charter. Go to 17 / p. 22

A New Decree



Its damaged rules grow stricter.

The Magistrate's shield arm jams. The warrant plates rattle, and a different instruction sounds from within the damaged frame.

"Movement is evidence of noncompliance."

It strikes sooner now, no longer waiting for the line. You shelter behind the stone pier until the staff bites into the gap between paving blocks. The open shoulder housing exposes the locking pin that holds its seal arm shut.

You can remove the pin during the recovery. Striking again before the staff is trapped would put you inside a faster pattern you have not yet measured.

Beyond the guardian, a citizen watches from a doorway. You motion for them to stay back. The argument with the machine must not be settled through someone else's injury.

Trap the staff, then release the shoulder pin. Go to 21 / p. 26

Follow the old timing and attack too soon. Go to 60 / p. 65

Retreat before another strike. Go to 17 / p. 22

The Warrant on the Stones



No new decree follows.

The Magistrate falls beside the stone pier. Its ceremonial cloth settles over one bent leg. The staff no longer moves, and the warrant leaves lie open on the floor.

You recover the transit seal from its released hand. A worker brings a board to cover the sharp edge of the broken frame.

No new decree follows. The silence is useful, but it does not tell anyone what a fairer rule would be. That work still belongs to the people beyond the gate.

You set the warrant beside the guardian rather than throwing it away. Someone may need to know exactly what was ordered here, and how long it was allowed to continue.

RECORD Mark SEAL and MAGFIGHT. Do not mark MAGPEACE. The guardian remains resolved.

Return to the Civic Gate routes. Go to 17 / p. 22

Carry the seal to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

Shelter Is Not Imprisonment



The oldest rule has room for change.

You place the charter rubbing before the Magistrate. The original seal and the founders' signatures remain visible beneath the final amendment.

Emergency authority expires when the citizens can assemble safely. Shelter is a duty, not a right to imprison the people sheltered.

The guardian reads the clause twice. You wait rather than helping it toward an answer. At last the warrant folds inward, leaving only the oldest page exposed.

"Amendment authenticated."

It gives you the transit seal and steps aside. For the first time, its staff touches the floor as a support instead of a barrier.

Behind it, a citizen crosses the painted line, then looks back. Nothing orders them to return. They stand there for a moment, learning what that feels like.

RECORD Requires CHARTER and no SEAL. Mark SEAL and MAGPEACE. This resolution cannot be replayed.

Return to the Civic Gate. Go to 17 / p. 22

Carry the seal toward the assembly. Go to 49 / p. 54

Two Days That Were Real



"The second line first."

The Broken Lift hangs between floors. Lamps mark a narrow maintenance ledge where Iven has wedged a bar against the last intact cable.

This shaft lies outside the repeating field. While the market returned to its evening, Iven spent two real days keeping the cage from dropping. His voice is hoarse when you call to him.

"Don't take the bar until the second line is carrying the weight."

Two expedition workers bring a pulley to the safe platform. You check the anchor with them. Iven does not need a speech about courage; he needs someone who will follow the order of the work.

Beyond the shaft's glazed arches, fish pass without noticing the small light he has kept burning.

RECORD If IVEN is marked, he is already safely ashore at camp. Do not repeat the rescue.

Anchor the second cable and rescue Iven. Go to 24 / p. 29

Only with IVEN, or Chapter 3 SEALED: reconstruct the release sequence. Go to 25 / p. 30

Go to Sen at the Clockless Observatory. Go to 46 / p. 51

Return to the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Let the Rope Take It

You put weight on the new line before asking Iven to trust it. A Warden controls the anchor. A Scout checks the pulley path for snags. A Keeper gives clear lamp signals through the shaft. The expedition workers take the other positions.

Iven eases the bar a finger's width. The new cable holds. Only then do you pass him the safety loop.

He reaches the platform and tries to stand straight, as if the rescue will be unfinished until he can pretend he did not need it. You sit beside him instead. After a moment, he sits too.

"The clock can stop," he says. "It was always meant to."

He shows you three worn marks on a maintenance plate. His hands shake too much to draw them yet. You hold the paper and let him point.

RECORD Mark IVEN. No charge is needed. The rescue and the release sequence are separate discoveries.

Work out the manual release with Iven. Go to 25 / p. 30

Return to the lift routes. Go to 23 / p. 28

Accompany him to the descent camp. Go to 6 / p. 11

The Years Do Not Fall at Once

With IVEN, you compare his gestures with the maintenance markings. With Chapter 3 SEALED, Sen can instead translate the recovered bell-chamber plates. Both sources describe the same three safeguards.

Isolate the loop. Protect the bodies. Advance the clock.

There is no step in which missing centuries are forced into a living person. The machine held those bodies through fragments of time; it did not store three hundred years of ageing as a debt to collect later.

You copy the sequence and its checks in large, plain marks. The guardians refused to use it because they could not certify that life afterward would be painless.

That is not a mechanical fault you can repair by promising harder. It is a limit the people must be allowed to understand and choose beyond.

RECORD RELEASEKEY means knowledge of the controlled sequence, not the final dial. It is not consumed.

With IVEN: complete his explanation and mark RELEASEKEY. Go to 23 / p. 28

With Chapter 3 SEALED: translate the plates and mark RELEASEKEY. Go to 23 / p. 28

Leave without recording the sequence. Go to 23 / p. 28

The House of Unsent Letters



"Tell me what you know."

Adra keeps the letters in bundles tied by street and household. She taught many of the writers to form their first words. Some bundles have been waiting for the same promised collection since the flood.

Mera sits beside her. Between them lies a letter addressed to someone who would have been old even if the surface had never changed.

"Do not tell me they are waiting," Adra says. "Tell me what you know."

You tell her that centuries have passed outside. You do not invent a happy exception for every name she touches. Neither do you claim to know the fate of a person whose record you have not found.

Adra keeps one hand on the nearest bundle. The other reaches for blank paper. Before the city chooses its morning, it deserves an account that does not hide the grief in the margins.

Help prepare the honest account. Go to 27 / p. 32

Inspect the letter keeper's ward. Go to 28 / p. 33

Go to the Spiral Archive. Go to 32 / p. 37

Visit the Founders' Garden. Go to 29 / p. 34

Go to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

No Comfort Made from a Lie

You work through the questions from the market. Adra separates what is known, what can be checked, and what must remain uncertain. Mera records the sources beside each answer.

A Warden makes room for frightened people to speak without being shouted down. A Scout traces the dates and names that can still be compared. A Keeper explains the difference between the protected bodies and the ordinary world outside. Any path can also help by listening and copying the account carefully.

If Chapter 3 ended with WATCH, returning crews describe the coast as it is now. They do not make hardship into a reason to stay frozen, or hope into a guarantee.

Adra signs the finished pages. She will help the city hear them together, and she insists that every citizen be allowed to read the records behind them.

RECORD TRUTH is Adra's honest public account. It opens the archive's peaceful access route and helps prepare the assembly.

Work patiently with Adra; mark TRUTH. Go to 26 / p. 31

Only with Chapter 3 WATCH: invite the returning crews; mark TRUTH. Go to 26 / p. 31

Spend 1 CHARGE to reveal faded dates, then check them with Adra; mark TRUTH. Go to 26 / p. 31

The Letter Keeper's Ward

A brass disc rests in a dry drawer below the correspondence. The label describes protection against a guardian's command pulse, intended for maintenance workers carrying documents through restricted machinery.

Adra gives it to you after making a note of where it has gone.

"The last keeper always said she would return for it. I would prefer you actually did."

You fasten it inside your coat. It cannot shield you from the sea, and it cannot decide how the citizens should live. Against the Cartographer's final pulse, however, it may keep your hands steady long enough to release a latch.

You promise to bring news as well as the metal. Adra says news can arrive first.

RECORD Mark WARD. It is not consumed and does not stack with older chapters' wards. It offers one final-fight option.

Return to Adra. Go to 26 / p. 31

Take the ward toward the archive. Go to 32 / p. 37

The Tree That Never Grew



The tree has been young for centuries.

The olive tree is young enough to bend beneath your hand. Its roots occupy a patch inside the loop. Beyond the marker, the surrounding stone has worn smooth with real time.

At the tree's feet lies the original city charter. The founders put it in a public garden so no official could hide the agreement that gave the refuge its authority.

Later decrees hang at the gate, but none can alter the seal pressed into this stone.

You imagine someone planting the tree for a future they expected to enter. The unfinished statue beside it has one hand extended, not toward a weapon or a crown, but toward the space where people would gather.

In a service niche, a protected oil jar remains outside the field.

Copy the final amendment. Go to 30 / p. 35

Use the gardener's reserve. Go to 31 / p. 36

Return to the Civic Gate. Go to 17 / p. 22

Visit Adra and the letters. Go to 26 / p. 31

Return to the Arrival Hall. Go to 7 / p. 12

The Founders Left an Exit

The final clause is shorter than the emergency decrees piled above it. Shelter is a duty. The right to restrict movement ends when citizens can assemble safely. No guardian may renew an emergency merely because the future contains risk.

You make a rubbing of the words, seal, and signatures. The edges show no later repeal. Jun brings a second sheet so a copy can remain here after yours travels to the gate.

"They thought someone might need this," he says.

You look at the date. The founders could not have known which machine would refuse to stand down, or which stranger would read the stone. They left a way to question the rules anyway.

You roll the copy carefully. An old promise is about to meet the thing that kept everyone from using it.

RECORD Mark CHARTER. If the Magistrate was already defeated, this does not change MAGFIGHT into MAGPEACE.

If SEAL is unmarked: present the amendment to the Magistrate. Go to 22 / p. 27

Return to the Civic Gate. Go to 17 / p. 22

Remain in the garden. Go to 29 / p. 34

Oil Outside the Loop

The gardener's jar has a clear line marking the reserve for visitors. Below it, enough oil remains for the garden lamp. You take only the marked portion.

Your lantern steadies. You place the empty measuring cup where the next visitor can see it has been used, then set the broken seal beside the jar.

The olive leaves make no sound. Somewhere beyond the glass, a current moves a forest of seaweed that has known many ordinary seasons while this small tree has known none.

You promise to return when the trunk has grown another ring. It is not a promise you can keep by leaving the city exactly as you found it.

RECORD Only if OIL is unmarked: mark OIL and restore CHARGES to 3. Later visits grant nothing. Free rest remains available at section 6.

Return to the garden paths. Go to 29 / p. 34

Knowledge Behind Bronze



A refuge was meant to have an after.

A mechanical serpent coils around a raised cradle in the Spiral Archive. Its bronze plates move with the quiet scrape of tools returned to a drawer. Inside the cradle, a calibration lens catches the light of your lantern.

The records beyond it describe a refuge meant to hold only until the flood passed. Surface relays failed. No one sent an all-clear. The guardians gradually made the absence of a message into proof that none could ever be trusted.

Adra's public account can restore the original access rule: citizens are authorized readers of their own city's knowledge. Otherwise you will have to reach the lens through the creature guarding it.

A table near the doorway holds the refuge plans. You lay the citizen register beside them before drawing conclusions about what the machinery preserves.

RECORD Once LENS is marked, the guardian is resolved. Do not replay its fight or access reset.

Only with REGISTER: compare the register and refuge plans. Go to 33 / p. 38

Only with TRUTH and no LENS: restore public access. Go to 37 / p. 42

If LENS is unmarked: face the Archive Leviathan. Go to 34 / p. 39

Return to Adra. Go to 26 / p. 31

Go to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

Two Machines, Two Purposes

The dome diagram and the time-field diagram occupy separate sheets. Sen's first reading was correct. One machine manages pressure and air. Another repeats selected fragments of life within it.

Stopping the loop will not collapse the dome. The living citizens will continue from the bodily time they have experienced. Their hunger and sleep will become ordinary again, which is why waking rooms and supplies matter.

The clock needs a calibration lens and controlled safeguards. The lens is here; the manual sequence can be reconstructed at the Broken Lift. The guardians have refused both because they want proof that tomorrow will not hurt anyone.

You copy the plans rather than relying on reassurance alone. A claim that sounds kind can still be dangerous if no one has checked how it works.

The final page has a space for a release date. It was left blank on purpose.

RECORD Requires REGISTER. Mark PLANS. The pressure dome is independent of both the loop and Saltmere's old sea barrier.

Return to the archive. Go to 32 / p. 37

Investigate the manual sequence at the lift. Go to 23 / p. 28

Ask Sen to test the transit clocks. Go to 46 / p. 51

The Archive Leviathan



Guarding knowledge from its readers.

The serpent lifts its head above the lens cradle. Each plate bears a small cataloguing mark. It has made itself into a moving wall of records that no reader may approach.

Its first coil closes around the cradle. Striking into that guard would risk the lens as well as your hand.

A Warden can hold a shelf brace across the next sweep and turn the head aside. A Scout can move along the narrow service rail outside the coil. A Keeper can echo the inspection signal and use the pause to reach the drive housing.

A lantern flare, if learned, will interrupt the same opening movement. Whatever method you choose, the lens must survive the encounter.

Use your path's tactic to open the outer coil. Go to 35 / p. 40

Only with FLARE: spend 1 CHARGE to interrupt the guardian. Go to 35 / p. 40

Strike through the guarded lens cradle. Go to 60 / p. 65

Retreat and seek the public access rule. Go to 32 / p. 37

The Broken Catalogue



The aisle clears twice.

A plate shears from the outer coil. The Leviathan recoils, then sweeps the aisle twice in quick succession. Its cataloguing marks flash out of order.

You take shelter inside a stone alcove. The creature can no longer complete its careful guard, so it has begun clearing the entire space around the lens.

After the second sweep, the return spring draws its head briefly away from the cradle. The drive housing opens. A maintenance wedge rests in the alcove beside you, polished by hands that once expected to service this machine rather than fear it.

Wait for the spring. There is room for one deliberate movement, not a chase through the coils.

Wait for the return spring, then wedge the drive housing. Go to 36 / p. 41

Follow the first sweep into the second. Go to 60 / p. 65

Withdraw to the archive entrance. Go to 32 / p. 37

A Lens in a Quiet Room



The room belongs to readers again.

The Leviathan settles across the archive floor. Its plates stop shifting, and the head rests beside the open cradle. Nothing moves when you approach the lens.

You lift the glass by its brass rim. A scratch on the housing marks the orientation; you copy it before wrapping the lens in cloth.

The knowledge beyond the guardian has not become simpler because the guardian is broken. People will still need to read it, question it, and decide what to do with it.

You leave a clear path around the fallen coils. The archive's next visitors should not have to climb over the result of your struggle to reach their own records.

RECORD Mark LENS and LEVIFIGHT. This encounter remains resolved.

Return to the refuge plans. Go to 32 / p. 37

Carry the lens to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

An Authorized Reader



The people have always belonged here.

Adra's account names the living citizens and the records they have a right to inspect. You feed the copy into the archive's access desk. Adra has included the citizens' names and the original reader-access clause.

The Leviathan raises its head. Its plates shift once, and a small lens in the brow turns toward the desk.

The old rule still exists beneath the restrictions: knowledge of the refuge belongs to the people sheltered in it.

The guardian uncurls. The calibration cradle opens, and the creature settles beside the shelves in a maintenance rest. You lift the lens without stepping over a broken plate.

When Adra arrives, she does not thank you for giving the city its records. She asks where the reading lamps are kept. You help her find them.

RECORD Requires TRUTH and no LENS. Mark LENS and LEVIPEACE. REGISTER is still separately required to interpret PLANS.

Return to the refuge plans. Go to 32 / p. 37

Carry the lens toward the assembly. Go to 49 / p. 54

The Open Hearth



"Somewhere to sit down."

Tessa and Corin are preparing rooms beyond the loop's tightest field. The mason has opened the air vents; the baker is checking which stores will last after hunger stops repeating its familiar pattern.

"Everyone asks where the citizens will go," Corin says. "First they need somewhere to sit down."

Some people will wake frightened. Others will be hungry before they are ready to listen. A private corner, a bed, and a clear route to the camp are not small details beneath the importance of the final choice. They are how that choice becomes bearable.

Tessa gives you a list of unfinished work. There are no heroic titles beside the tasks, only names and places to put things.

Prepare the waking rooms and deliver any medicine. Go to 39 / p. 44

Only with HEARTH: build the supply and return route. Go to 40 / p. 45

Only with HEARTH: rest at the Open Hearth. Go to 6 / p. 11

Return to the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Go to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

A Place for the First Night

You test a bed before making it. One joint fails. Corin replaces it while you move the next frame away from a blocked vent.

A Warden helps lift the partitions. A Scout traces the clear exit paths. A Keeper checks the fixed lamps against the new routine. Anyone can lay blankets and carry dry food from the expedition's stores. The work does not require spending your personal provisions.

If MEDICINE is marked, you put the supplies on the labelled shelf and mark DELIVERED. You may do that on a later visit if you found the locker after preparing the rooms.

Tessa closes a curtain around the first finished bed, then opens it again to show how the latch works from inside. Rest must not become another thing people are ordered to accept.

RECORD Mark HEARTH. If MEDICINE is marked, also mark DELIVERED. Revisits cost nothing and do not refill supplies.

Return to the Open Hearth. Go to 38 / p. 43

Connect the rooms to the descent camp. Go to 40 / p. 45

A Route That Works Both Ways

The old passage is wide enough for an empty person and awkward for someone carrying food, bedding, or a neighbour who cannot walk easily.

You test it with actual loads. A hand pump needs a second handle. A door needs a stop so it cannot close on a carrying sling. Corin marks the turns with signs readable from both directions.

The route connects the waking rooms to the descent camp. It can support an evacuation, a small supply link, or a wider exchange if the transit clocks are aligned and the citizens agree.

You walk it once more from the far end. A route home should not depend on remembering a set of instructions given while someone was frightened.

RECORD Requires HEARTH. Mark ROUTE. This work is free; the permanent two-way passage also needs ASSEMBLY and CLOCKS.

Return to the waking rooms. Go to 38 / p. 43

Report the tested route at the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

Vale's Lantern Workshop



"Preferably with yourself attached."

Vale turns your lantern in practical, oil-stained hands. She is interested in the travelling flame, which moves with you instead of sitting inside one of the city's fixed signals.

"The guardians keep asking the lamps where everything belongs," she says. "Yours can answer badly for a moment. On purpose."

She shows you a shutter that will release a brief flare. It interrupts a guardian's command without touching the dome machinery. It needs a charge and must cool before another encounter.

The rest of the workshop is less dramatic: spare wicks, clean glass, a bench for repairs. Vale points to a stool and asks you to sit while she checks the hinges. You have finally met someone who treats a dangerous light as an object with maintenance needs.

Learn the flare and accept the one-time repair kit. Go to 42 / p. 47

Visit Nel at the Stillwater Well. Go to 43 / p. 48

Return to the arcade. Go to 10 / p. 15

Go to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

One Clear Flash

Vale fits the shutter and makes you practise the movement without firing it. Open, close, cover. The flare is brief; leaving the shutter open wastes light and gives the guardian time to recover.

It can interrupt the opening exchange of a fight. It will not complete the fight for you. Afterward the brass must cool, and the next stage belongs to your own judgement.

Vale replaces a worn wick and tops up the lantern from her repair kit. You mark the kit as used so neither of you mistakes it for an endless supply.

"Bring the lantern back in one piece," she says. "Preferably with yourself attached."

You promise to attempt both parts. She says the second is the more difficult repair.

RECORD Mark FLARE. Only if KIT is unmarked: mark KIT and restore CHARGES to 3. The flare costs 1 charge, appears only at fight openings, and cannot be used again during the wounded stage. Later kit visits grant no refill.

Return to Vale's workshop. Go to 41 / p. 46

The Stillwater Well



"It is different."

Nel is counting beside the broad stone rim of the well. She has a slate, a piece of chalk, and the careful expression of someone tired of being told she is noticing nothing important.

"It is different," she says before you ask.

A droplet falls from the spout. Another follows. You listen long enough to hear that the interval is not quite the same.

Adults have watched the clock face, waiting for it to confirm that the city is safe. Nel has watched the water, which never learned to make that promise.

A supply basket hangs from the old well rope. It has caught against a bracket on the dry side of the shaft. You keep clear of it until you have heard what Nel wanted to show you.

Record Nel's observations. Go to 44 / p. 49

Recover the supply basket safely. Go to 45 / p. 50

Visit Vale's workshop. Go to 41 / p. 46

Take the path to the Clockless Observatory. Go to 46 / p. 51

Return to the market. Go to 14 / p. 19

Put Her Name on the Page

Nel shows you her marks. Some intervals are longer; some are shorter. She has checked them against a hanging weight outside the loop, not merely against her own counting.

You ask her to demonstrate again. She does, and the difference remains. The field is losing its grip gradually. Change has already begun without making the citizens vanish.

This observation supports the plans; it does not replace the safeguards needed to stop the clock safely. You explain that distinction, and Nel adds another line to the slate.

When you copy her work, you put her name beneath it. She watches until you have finished.

"People usually say a child noticed," she says.

"This child has a name."

She takes the paper to Adra herself, holding it flat with both hands.

RECORD Mark NEL. Her work changes the personal aftermath; it is not a substitute for PLANS, RELEASEKEY, or CLOCKS.

Return to the well. Go to 43 / p. 48

Bring Nel's evidence to Sen. Go to 46 / p. 51

The Basket on the Bracket

You secure the basket with a second line before loosening the old rope. A Warden holds the new anchor, a Scout frees the snag with a pole, or a Keeper signals the helpers from the dry ledge. Any path can work carefully with the expedition crew.

The old rope parts only after the basket reaches the stones. Nel takes a step back at the sound, then looks at the second line.

"You thought it might do that."

"I thought it was worth having another rope."

Inside are three wrapped provisions stored beyond the repeating field. You mark the recovered basket and leave the ruined rope where no one can mistake it for something safe.

RECORD Only if BASKET is unmarked: mark BASKET and add 3 PROVISIONS. On later visits, add nothing. No charge is required.

Return to the well paths. Go to 43 / p. 48

The Clockless Observatory



The stars have gone on without them.

Sen projects the surface sky across the ceiling. The stars occupy their present positions, not the arrangement Vesper's citizens remember from the evening before the flood.

No one speaks for a while. The new sky is proof of distance measured in time rather than miles.

Below it stand the controls for two old transit lifts. If they can be aligned, the city and coast could maintain a lasting exchange instead of a single difficult journey through the descent lock.

"The dome is stable as the loop slows," Sen says. "Now we test the lifts under the same conditions. A working model is not yet a safe passenger route."

An unfinished atlas lies beside the instruments. Its last sheet has never been filled.

Align and test the paired transit clocks. Go to 47 / p. 52

Read the atlas's unfinished page. Go to 48 / p. 53

Return to the Broken Lift. Go to 23 / p. 28

Go to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

Return to Nel's well. Go to 43 / p. 48

Two Clocks, One Arrival

You help Sen isolate the test circuit from the city's main clock. The pressure dome continues its independent work. When the first transit dial advances, the air gauges remain steady.

A Warden controls the manual brake. A Scout checks the paired stops. A Keeper matches the signal intervals. The expedition can perform each task slowly under Sen's direction, so no path needs a charge to finish the test.

You run the empty lifts before loading them. Then a crew crosses with ballast and returns. Every departure has a recorded arrival.

Sen writes a maintenance interval beside the final reading. The apparatus will need people on both ends. Nothing in these measurements removes the need for wages, relief, or someone willing to close a faulty lift.

RECORD Mark CLOCKS. These tests are required for peaceful resolution of the Cartographer and for the permanent passage ending.

Return to the observatory. Go to 46 / p. 51

Carry the tested results to the assembly. Go to 49 / p. 54

Leave Room

The atlas maps roads beyond the coast, then rivers, hills, and places whose names have changed while Vesper waited. The last sheet is blank except for a pencilled note.

LEAVE ROOM FOR PLACES WE HAVE NOT YET LEARNED TO ASK ABOUT.

You imagine the First Cartographer writing it before fear became the only reliable point on its map. A blank space once meant permission to discover. Somewhere along the way it became something the machine could not tolerate.

You resist the urge to fill the sheet with a promise about where you will go next. The people here have not yet had their first ordinary morning.

You close the book with the page still blank. Its emptiness can be an invitation again, but it need not become another obligation tonight.

RECORD Mark ATLAS. This discovery is optional. Chapter 4 has a complete ending without a further quest.

Return to Sen. Go to 46 / p. 51

Continue to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

The Assembly Steps

Jun has brought the register. Adra carries the account of the world outside. Tessa waits beside a pot of soup. There is room on the steps for a gathering that does not fit the city's familiar evening.

The Atlas Engine lies beyond the inner door. Before entering, check the citizen register, refuge plans, calibration lens, safe pressure passage, and civic transit seal. Missing knowledge can still be found; no hidden clock punishes you for preparing.

A real assembly also needs the market's trust, waking rooms, an honest account, and the manual release sequence. Without those, you can still reach the dial, but you cannot pretend the city has negotiated a permanent partnership with the coast.

Jun opens the ledger to a fresh page and waits for the first person who wishes to speak.

RECORD REGISTER comes from section 7. All five entry discoveries are required for section 51.

Only with REGISTER + PLANS + LENS + PASSAGE + SEAL: enter the Atlas Engine. Go to 51 / p. 56

Prepare the citizens' assembly. Go to 50 / p. 55

Return to the Civic Gate: passage and seal. Go to 17 / p. 22

Return to the archive: plans and lens. Go to 32 / p. 37

Return to the Open Hearth: rooms and route. Go to 38 / p. 43

Return to Sen: transit clocks. Go to 46 / p. 51

Return to Adra: truth and shore routes. Go to 26 / p. 31

Only with DIAL: return directly to the final decision. Go to 55 / p. 60

The Question Belongs to Them



A voice in where to meet the morning.

With MARKET, HEARTH, TRUTH, and RELEASEKEY, the gathering can begin with more than a request for trust. Tessa brings the market's questions. Corin explains the rooms. Adra describes the elapsed years. You show the controlled sequence and its safeguards.

People ask about relatives, air, work, and who will pay for the lifts. Some want the surface immediately. Some cannot bear to leave the streets they know. Several change their minds while listening.

The citizens choose a council to negotiate with Saltmere. They insist that staying and leaving remain personal decisions, and that neither community may close the passage merely to win an argument.

You record the conditions before anyone calls the meeting a success. Jun leaves room beneath them for objections that have not yet been thought of.

RECORD ASSEMBLY needs all four discoveries. The permanent passage also requires ROUTE and CLOCKS.

Only with MARKET + HEARTH + TRUTH + RELEASEKEY: mark ASSEMBLY and return. Go to 49 / p. 54

Listen to the market folk. Go to 14 / p. 19

Prepare the waking rooms. Go to 38 / p. 43

Finish Adra's account. Go to 26 / p. 31

Learn the manual release sequence. Go to 23 / p. 28

The First Cartographer



"Show me a tomorrow."

The Cartographer stands beneath rings of frozen light. Its compass staff draws a line across the doorway, and every point on that line becomes the same fixed moment.

"I saved every life in this city," it says. "Show me a tomorrow that does not undo that work."

You can show tested transit clocks, prepared waking rooms, and a controlled release sequence. You cannot show a future without grief. If those preparations are missing, you must get past the guardian by force to reach the dial.

A Warden can hold the staff against a stone stop. A Scout can move through the broken edge of its circle. A Keeper can answer the fixed signal with a travelling flame. Vale's flare offers another opening if you learned it.

The citizens wait beyond the door. Their safety is real. So is the time being kept from them.

RECORD Requires all five entry discoveries from section 49. If DIAL is marked, use section 49's direct route to 55 instead of repeating the encounter.

Only with CLOCKS + HEARTH + RELEASEKEY: present a safe way forward. Go to 54 / p. 59

Use your path's tactic to break the first fixed circle. Go to 52 / p. 57

Only with FLARE: spend 1 CHARGE to interrupt the opening command. Go to 52 / p. 57

Run straight across the compass staff's guarded line. Go to 60 / p. 65

Return to finish preparations. Go to 49 / p. 54

The Last Fixed Point



The future will not fit its circle.

The outer ring breaks. The Cartographer's stone shoulder cracks, and its compass staff strikes a new centre in the floor.

The next pattern is harsher: two sweeps of the staff, then a pulse that tries to return everything to the circle. You remain behind a stone plinth through both sweeps. The machinery can preserve a routine without understanding why someone steps out of it.

A service latch opens along the damaged backplate. With WARD, you can reach through the final pulse. Without it, an insulated maintenance hook beside the plinth will reach the latch after the pulse fades.

The flare has already had its opening, if you used it. This moment needs timing, not another flash.

Only with WARD: release the latch through the final pulse. Go to 53 / p. 58

Wait through both sweeps and the pulse, then use the insulated hook. Go to 53 / p. 58

Move after the first sweep. Go to 60 / p. 65

Withdraw to the Assembly Steps. Go to 49 / p. 54

The Compass Lies Still



The circle is no longer complete.

The Cartographer falls beside its staff. Its rings slow into emergency hold, keeping the citizens protected while the master dial unlocks.

You wait for Sen's indicators to settle before approaching. The pressure dome remains steady. Nothing here is permission to confuse stopping a guardian with understanding a city.

The dial comes free of its socket. Behind you, the Cartographer lies motionless among pieces of the circle it tried to complete.

The broken rings leave an open space where the machine once tried to fix every point. Someone built it with room in its purpose for a later day. Tomorrow will have to enter that space without its help now.

RECORD Mark DIAL and CARTFIGHT. Emergency hold makes revisiting safe; there is no hidden countdown.

Carry the master dial into the Tomorrow Chamber. Go to 55 / p. 60

Return to complete any remaining preparations. Go to 49 / p. 54

No Promise Against All Sorrow



They will be allowed to live.

You set the tested transit readings beside the waking-room plan and the release sequence. The Cartographer examines each one. Its staff remains across the door.

"There will be loss."

"There has already been loss," you answer. "They deserve to know what it is."

You cannot promise that everyone will sleep well, or that the first surface letter will bring good news. You can show a bed, a working route, and a sequence that will protect the bodies while the clock advances.

"I cannot promise no one will suffer. I can promise they will be allowed to live."

The staff lowers. The machine enters emergency hold and unlocks the master dial. It does not demand that you call its long vigil worthless. You do not demand that it keep performing it.

RECORD Requires CLOCKS + HEARTH + RELEASEKEY. Mark DIAL and CARTPEACE. The guardian remains resolved.

Enter the Tomorrow Chamber. Go to 55 / p. 60

Return to finish any remaining preparations. Go to 49 / p. 54

The Tomorrow Chamber



None of these choices returns the years.

The master dial fits beneath your hand. The pressure dome has its own intact machinery. It will not fail when the loop stops. No missing centuries will be forced into the citizens' bodies.

Vesper can wake within its walls, with a modest expedition link for medicine and letters. Its people can relocate to the coast through the descent locks. Or, with the assembly, supply route, and tested clocks, both communities can maintain a permanent passage.

None of these choices returns the world the citizens expected to find outside. Each offers an ordinary future with work and uncertainty in it.

You explain the proposal in plain words and hear the people gathered here. Even without a formal assembly, the expedition will not force a person onto a lift. The choice establishes the city's shared plan; individual concerns must still be heard as it is carried out.

RECORD Requires DIAL. Choose one Chapter 4 ending, then follow the epilogue. Earlier endings stay unchanged.

Wake Vesper within its own walls. Go to 56 / p. 61

Help the citizens relocate to the surface. Go to 57 / p. 62

Only with ASSEMBLY + ROUTE + CLOCKS: open the permanent passage. Go to 58 / p. 63

Return for further preparations before committing. Go to 49 / p. 54

Morning Behind the Glass



A loaf is eaten once.

You turn the dial. The safeguards isolate the loop, protect the living bodies, and let the clock advance. The dome's pressure gauges do not move.

In the market, a loaf is eaten once. A cup falls and stays on the floor until someone picks it up. In the garden, the olive tree begins the quiet work of another ring.

Vesper remains an independent refuge. A small expedition link carries medicine, letters, and individual journeys, while its people rebuild at their own pace. It is not the staffed two-way network that fuller preparations could have opened, but it is no longer a locked evening.

Jun crosses out the old date. Beneath it he writes: OUR FIRST MORNING.

He leaves the next line blank until tomorrow can earn its own name.

RECORD Record Chapter 4 ending VESPER: Morning Behind the Glass.

Read the personal aftermath. Go to 59 / p. 64

The Sky They Had Forgotten



The sky will wait for her.

You release the loop and organize the journey through the descent locks. Mera speaks with each household before departure. After questions, pauses, and chances to reconsider, the citizens join the relocation; no one is moved by a guardian's decree.

They carry tools, names, seeds, and what history they can pack. The last lamps are banked inside Vesper's quiet dome.

With HEARTH and ROUTE, the prepared rooms and tested passage make the move orderly. Without both, the expedition keeps everyone safe, but crowded temporary quarters and lost stores make the first weeks harder.

Above the lock, the sky seems almost unbearably large. Some people cry. Others look down until they are ready to look up.

On the cliff, Nel begins counting stars. Then she realizes she is allowed to stop. The sky will still be there when she returns.

RECORD Record Chapter 4 ending SURFACE: The Sky They Had Forgotten.

Read the personal aftermath. Go to 59 / p. 64

A Door in Both Directions



Both arrows say: Home.

The clocks advance together. The first lift carries fresh bread down and letters up. On the next journey, a citizen brings a bag packed for the coast while another carries tools back to a workshop beneath the glass.

Saltmere and Vesper appoint crews on both sides. They publish the maintenance costs, the relief times, and the conditions under which a faulty lift must close. Anyone may ask why a door is shut and what is being done to open it again.

Some citizens choose the surface. Others open their shutters beneath the dome. Belonging is no longer a place assigned by a guardian.

At the descent camp, Jun helps paint a new sign. It has two arrows. Under each, someone has written HOME.

The sign will weather. The lifts will need repairs. Today, both directions work.

RECORD Requires ASSEMBLY + ROUTE + CLOCKS. Record Chapter 4 ending PASSAGE: A Door in Both Directions.

Read the personal aftermath. Go to 59 / p. 64

The First Ordinary Tasks

Read the paragraphs that match your record. These are consequences, not unfinished requirements.

With MARKET, Tessa opens her first genuinely new batch of bread remembering that you listened before deciding. Without it, Adra spends weeks helping frightened families understand the change; trust takes longer to build.

With IVEN, the lift keeper sees the first ordinary passengers and takes a full day off before inspecting the cables again. Without it, the expedition rescues him after release; his injured hands need weeks of rest.

With HEARTH, citizens have prepared rooms for their first uninterrupted sleep. Without it, the expedition improvises quarters while Corin works. With DELIVERED, the medical shelf is ready; MEDICINE alone means you still have supplies to hand over. With ROUTE, food and bedding move easily. Without it, every load needs extra help.

With NEL, her observations become the first page of a new schoolbook, with her name beneath them. Without it, someone must explain to her that the repetition has ended. With ATLAS, you leave its final sheet blank by choice.

The guardians you resolved peacefully can rest or be repaired. Those disabled in combat leave damage the city must account for. Neither changes the ending you chose.

RECORD Copy the relevant consequences into your ending journal. The city's long evening is over.

Remember the earlier roads. Go to 61 / p. 66

Back to the Descent Camp

You retreat before the next strike, or lose the opening you thought you had. An expedition worker meets you at the service passage and guides you toward the dry terrace.

The camp has not become less welcoming because you return without the dial. Mera checks your hands before your account of the fight. Sen asks what changed in the guardian's pattern.

You tell the truth: the second sweep, the guarded cradle, the pulse that came after the staff. Knowledge gained badly can still be useful if you keep it instead of hiding it.

Brindle, if travelling with you, stayed clear of the machinery and follows you back. Your ledger remains inside its dry case.

There is time to recover, learn the flare, or find a peaceful answer. A setback has changed the route, not taken the whole journey from you.

RECORD Add 1 SETBACK. Keep discoveries, provisions, and companion. Charges refill only at section 6. Unfinished fights reset; completed encounters remain resolved.

Rest and choose your next approach. Go to 6 / p. 11

Four Choices, Not One Answer

Read only the histories on your record.

Chapter 1 BOUND: Aster remains bound at Greyhaven. Nothing done in Vesper erases that choice. FREE: Aster remains free beyond Greyhaven. COVENANT: the original willing agreement continues, renewed by the people and lights who keep it.

Chapter 2 REGULATED: Meridian's central beacon continues under public oversight. RELEASED: ordinary watchfires mark the roads after the extraction network's removal. SHARED: the willing lights and neighbouring settlements continue their shared work.

Chapter 3 SEALED: Saltmere's living memories remain restored, its deep gates sealed, and its old echoes limited to the barrier. RELEASE: the coast's people remain uphill, with the bells silent. WATCH: the smaller locks continue with relief crews and departure times.

Vesper has added a fourth decision. It has not proved that every earlier choice was secretly the same, or that one later kindness cancels a cost paid elsewhere.

Your traveller can learn, regret, defend, or reconsider those choices. Write that honestly. A journal has room for a person who changes.

RECORD Keep all four chapter endings separately. Chapter 4 does not rewrite any earlier place or promise.

Finish this adventure. Go to 62 / p. 67

The Day After Tonight



"Who wants breakfast?"

Jun brings you the register before you leave the centre of Vesper. He has added no grand title beside your name. Instead, he has written the day you arrived and left room for a later visit.

Adra asks whether the expedition can help trace the addresses on the unsent letters. Mera says they can begin, and that beginning is all she can honestly promise. Tessa asks who wants breakfast.

The question is ordinary enough that everyone stops to hear it.

You think of the lantern that first took you toward Greyhaven's trouble, and the roads that followed. Its brass is scratched. The flame still needs tending. Carrying it has never meant knowing the answer before meeting the people who must live with it.

There may be more roads. Today there is a city making plans for tomorrow.

You open the journal and give this day a page of its own.

RECORD Chapter 4 is complete. Keep your records for any future adventure. No further chapter is required to resolve Vesper's story.

Complete your ending journal. Go to 63 / p. 68

Begin again: reset the Chapter 4 record first. Go to 1 / p. 6

The traveller's journal

Your record shows what happened. These notes remember what you made of it. Keep this page with the journals from your earlier roads.

What were your endings in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4?

What happened to Iven, Adra, Tessa, Jun, and Nel?

Which guardians did you relieve, and which did you fight?

What did your ending offer Vesper, and what work remains?

How has your traveller changed since the Hollow Beacon?

Completed on:

A morning of their own

Ash and Lantern 4: The City That Waited
The Greyhaven Chronicles, Book Four
By Marcus Draper / Deskatur
Illustrated gamebook, edition 1.0 - November 2026.

This book adapts Chapter 4 of the Ash and Lantern web series. Vesper, its living citizens, separate dome and time-loop machinery, guardians, legacy shortcuts, preparation routes, and three outcomes follow the game. Dialogue, tactical decisions, and personal consequences are expanded for reading.

The dice-free book uses charges, provisions, and permanent discoveries. The Lantern Flare becomes a once-per-encounter opening choice after training. No damage calculation is required. Every path has free ways to finish. The book never asks you to track an unstated countdown.

Illustrations
Four new AI-generated paintings depict Adra's letters, Iven's rescue, Nel at the well, and the citizens' assembly. Seven established Chapter 4 web assets supply three environments and four enemy sheets. Combat routes show each enemy ready, damaged, and defeated. Art was made with OpenAI image generation; no commissioned hand-painting is claimed.

Continuity and conclusion
All four chapter endings remain separate. Saltmere's chosen future does not fail merely because you enter Vesper. The citizens do not age centuries when released. The final chapter resolves this city's crisis and leaves room for future roads without requiring another installment.

The series
1. The Hollow Beacon
2. The Roads Without Dawn
3. The Bells Beneath the Sea
4. The City That Waited

The original web games are available through deskatur.com. The editable source includes manuscript, artwork, layout code, and validation notes. Play on paper or fill the PDF manually in a compatible reader. Book records are not web-game save files.



Who gets to decide when tomorrow begins?

Beneath the sea, 312 people have been kept in fragments of one evening. Their guardians saved their lives. Now those same guardians refuse to let them live.

Read the letters that never left. Listen to a child who noticed the world changing. Then help a waiting city choose its first ordinary morning.

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

DESKATUR ORIGINALS / MARCUS DRAPER