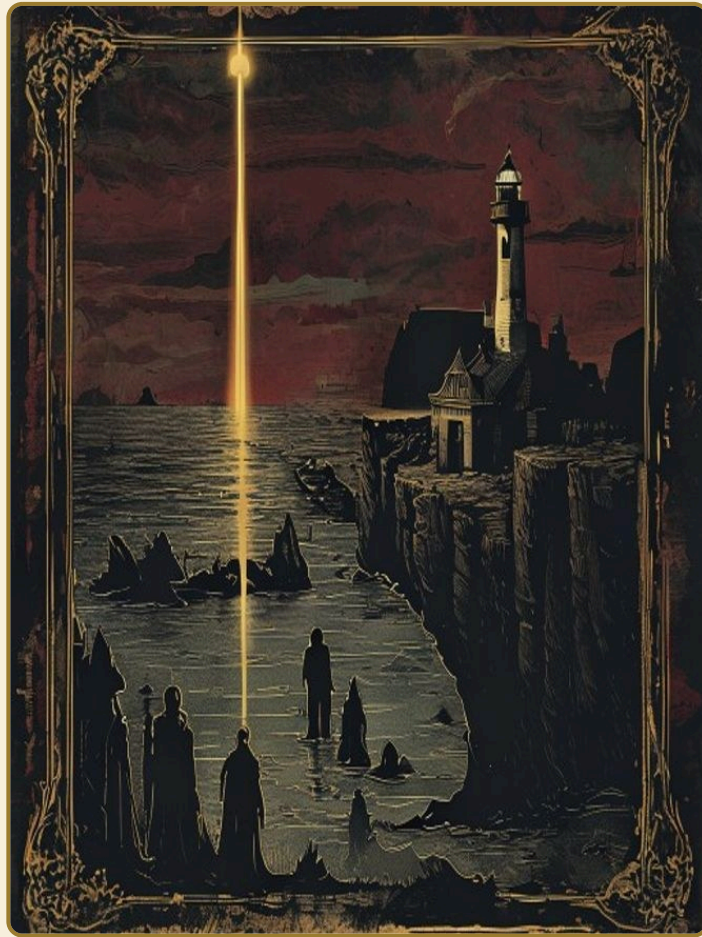


THE WEEKLY ONE-SHOT

# THE KEEPER OF HALCYON LIGHT

*A grounded sea-horror one-shot, where the win is a moral choice, not a kill.*



A one-shot for four characters · 3rd–5th level · 5e-compatible (SRD 5.1)

## AT A GLANCE

- **Party:** 4 players, **3rd–5th level.** (Scales for levels 1–10 and parties of 3–6.)
- **Length:** one 2 hour sitting.
- **Tone:** grounded sea-horror; the win is a moral choice, not a kill.
- **The pitch, in one line:** a lighthouse keeper has kept his lamp burning for sixty-three years and not aged a day — because the thing under his rock won't let him die and stop the light that lures it fresh ships to eat.

## THE VILLAIN'S WANT

*Read this before the players row out. Everything turns on it.*



*Tobin Carrow — sixty-three years on the light, the face of a man of forty-four the whole time.*

Tobin Carrow has kept the light on Gull's Tooth for sixty-three years. He has the face of a man of forty-four, and he has had it the whole time.

The arithmetic is the horror. Sixty-three years ago he let the lamp go dark for one night — drunk, grieving a wife three days in the ground — and in that dark a ship called the *Halcyon* came in on the rocks with ninety souls aboard. He heard them in the water and could not see them. By morning the bodies were gone and the sea below the lighthouse had stopped moving the way water moves. Something down there had eaten well, and it wanted to keep eating.

Tobin has kept the light burning every night since, and he has not aged a day past the night he failed, because the thing under Gull's Tooth will not let him die and stop the light. It needs the beam. The beam does not save ships. The beam keeps the drowned ninety asleep on the bottom — and it lures fresh ships onto the rocks, two or three a year, to feed the thing that holds Tobin's death hostage. He worked out the trade decades ago: a handful of strangers a year against the whole coast, which the thing will drown to the last harbor if the light ever goes out for good.

He hates the light. He cannot put it out. He has tried.

## THE LEVER

Tobin cannot leave the island, cannot die, and cannot stop the lamp without waking the ninety and whatever feeds on them. He needs a keeper to replace him — someone to take the deathless watch so he can finally drown. He has been waiting a long time for visitors who look like they could carry it. He will not force the choice. He will make it look like mercy, because from where he stands it is.



## THE HOOK — THE LIGHT THAT TAKES SHIPS

The party is on the coast road, or aboard a coaster working up the shore, or hired to find out why three ships in two months went down off a stretch of water that has a working lighthouse. However they come, they come at dusk, and the light is already turning.

### READ ALOUD

*Gull's Tooth is a fang of black rock a half mile off a beach littered with the bones of boats. The lighthouse on it still works — you can see the beam swing out over the water, slow and steady, gold against a sky going purple. It should be a comfort. Instead the fishermen mending nets on the beach won't look at it. One of them, an old woman with a needle in her teeth, follows your eyes out to the light and says around the thread, "Don't wave at it. It waves back."*



*The beach at Saltmarrow, the bones of boats, and the beam already turning out on the rock.*

### WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

The light is not warning ships off the rocks. It is calling them onto the rocks. Three weeks ago the coaster *Mareschal* went in with all hands while its captain swore the harbor lamp was dead ahead. The beach village (Saltmarrow, forty families) knows the lighthouse is wrong and has known for two generations. They keep their own boats in by dark and they do not talk to outsiders about Gull's Tooth, because the last time someone rowed out to fix it, the light went dark for one night and a wave took six houses off the beach. They've decided that whatever the light is, leaving it alone costs less than touching it.

**What the party can do.** Ask around, rest, look for a boat. Everyone in Saltmarrow is wary, not hostile. A DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or buying a round at the one tavern, gets the village's half of the truth: the keeper out there never changes, never comes ashore, and never dies. Grandparents remember him looking exactly the same. A DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check on anyone discussing the keeper lands the same note: they pity him, and they are terrified of him, and they will not say which feeling is bigger. A boat can be hired or borrowed only with effort — no local will row the party out, but a leaky dory can be had for coin and a promise to be back by dawn.



## SCENE 1 — THE CROSSING AND THE ROCKS

The water between the beach and Gull's Tooth is calm in a way the open sea around it is not. The party will notice, because something is keeping it calm.

### READ ALOUD

*Halfway across, the swell flattens to glass. The dory glides like it's on a millpond, and the only sound is the oars and your own breathing. Below the hull the water is clear to a great depth, far clearer than seawater should be, and down in the green there are shapes. Pale, upright, swaying with no current to move them. They are facing the light. All of them, every one, turned up toward the beam like a field of flowers turned to a sun.*



*Halfway across — the swell gone to glass, and below the hull a field of the standing drowned, all facing the light.*

### WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

That's the drowned ninety of the *Halcyon*, plus everyone the light has fed to the rock since — the whole host still goes by “the ninety,” for the ship that started it. They stand on the bottom, asleep, held in the beam's gold. They are not aggressive while the light turns. They stir only when it falters. The calm water is the same effect — the thing below smooths the path so its next meal arrives intact. Any character who stares too long (a failed DC 13 Wisdom save) hears, very faintly, ninety voices saying the same single word in time with the light's rotation: *wake*.

### WHAT THE PARTY CAN DO

- **Read the water.** A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or any ranger/sailor's eye confirms the shapes are bodies, standing, preserved, far too many for three lost ships. The count is wrong by decades.
- **Land at the dock.** A rotted jetty on the lee side, one dory already tied there — the dead captain of the *Mareschal's*, oars still shipped, three weeks dry.
- **Try to take one of the dead.** Anything that touches a sleeping body brings the head around to face the boat. The eyes are open. It does not attack. It watches you the rest of the way in, and the others nearest it turn too. Pure dread; no combat yet.

**Outcomes.** By the time the party reaches the jetty they know the lighthouse sits on a mass grave that does not decay, and they know the light is doing something to keep it that way. What they don't yet know is whose side the keeper is on.



## SCENE 2 — THE KEEPER

Tobin Carrow opens the door before anyone knocks. He has been expecting someone like them for a long time.

### READ ALOUD

*The man at the top of the stair is younger than the village made him sound — forty, weathered, a sailor's hands. He looks at your faces one by one the way a buyer looks at horses, then something in him sags, like hope is a weight he's tired of carrying. “You rowed out,” he says. “Good. Sit. There's tea, and I'll tell you the whole of it, because nobody's let me tell the whole of it in a long while. Then I'll ask you for something, and you'll hate me for it, and you'll be right to.”*

### WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

Tobin tells the truth, all of it, without being made to. He explains the night he let the lamp go dark, the *Halcyon* on the rocks, the ninety in the water, and the deathless watch he's kept since. He explains the trade: the light feeds the rock two or three ships a year, and in exchange the thing below stays asleep and stays under Gull's Tooth instead of rolling up the whole coast. He has run that arithmetic for sixty-three years and it always comes out the same. A few strangers against every harbor from here to the capital. He does not pretend it's holy. He calls it murder and he keeps doing it because the alternative is worse, and he is the only one who can.

### THE WANT, PLAINLY

Tobin wants to die. He cannot, while the watch is his, because the thing below will not release a keeper who might let the light fail on purpose. The only way out he has ever found: pass the watch to someone who takes it willingly. A new keeper, freely chosen, and the deathlessness moves to them. Then Tobin can finally drown with the *Halcyon*.

he failed. He will offer this to the party — not as a trap, as a confession and a plea. He will not seize anyone. He has watched too many people die in that water to add a kidnapping to the count.

### VOICE NOTES

Plain, tired, unbearably honest. He has gallows humor about his own situation and none about the dead. “You’d think sixty-odd years alone would teach a man to enjoy the quiet,” he says. “It taught me to talk to a lamp.” He answers every question straight, including the ones the party wishes he’d dodge. When he asks them to take the watch he does it once, quietly, and does not push.

### THE INTERESTING CHOICE — THE SPINE OF THE ONE-SHOT

There is no monster to simply kill here, and the man at the top of the stair is the most honest person the party has met all year. They can:

1. **Refuse and leave** — row back, tell no one, and let Tobin keep feeding the rock. The math holds. So does the body count.
2. **Put the light out for good** — destroy the lamp or the lens and gamble that the ninety can be faced and the thing below can be killed or starved. This wakes everything.
3. **Find a third road** — break what binds the thing to Tobin without waking the whole grave, take the watch in a way that doesn’t doom the volunteer, or learn what the *Halcyon* actually carried that night and why this rock and no other.

## SCENE 3 — THE LAMP ROOM (THE CHOOSING)

Whatever the party decides, the answer lives at the top of the tower, in the light itself. Tobin takes them up because he wants them to see the thing he serves before they judge him for serving it.

### READ ALOUD

*The lamp room is all glass and brass, and the light at its heart is not flame. It’s a cut stone the size of a man’s skull, white-gold, turning on a brass cradle, and the great lens throws its glow out over the water in that slow, steady sweep. Up close you can hear it. Under the click of the gears, the stone is humming, and the hum has words in it, ninety voices deep, and they are not asleep. They are singing themselves to sleep, over and over, and the stone is the lullaby, and Tobin’s hand rests on the cradle the way you’d rest a hand on a fevered child.*



*The lamp room — glass and brass, the white-gold stone turning on its cradle, and Tobin's hand resting on it.*

#### WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

The light is a bound thing, not a lamp. The stone is the heart of the *Halcyon* — what the ship was carrying the night it went down, a holy relic the thing below wanted and got. The relic's glow is the only thing keeping the drowned ninety dreaming and the thing beneath them fed-but-sleeping. Tobin is bound to the cradle: while he keeps the stone turning, he cannot age or die, and the rock stays a local horror instead of a regional one. This is the off-switch and the doomsday device both. Stop the stone and the singing stops. The catch is what the silence does.

#### WHAT THE PARTY CAN DO

- **Stop the lamp.** Halting the cradle, smashing the lens, or prying the stone loose all do the same thing: the singing stops, the water below comes alive, and the ninety begin to climb. (See the turn, and Scene 4.)
- **Take the watch.** A character who lays a hand on the cradle beside Tobin's and says they'll keep it feels the deathlessness pass over like a cold tide. Tobin's hand comes free. He ages sixty-three years in about a minute and goes out the lamp-room door for the last time, down to the water, at peace. The volunteer is now the keeper — bound, deathless, and on the hook for the same arithmetic. A grim, real option.
- **Investigate the stone.** A DC 15 Intelligence (Religion or Arcana) check reads the relic: it is a binding made for mercy, meant to lay the drowned to rest, hijacked into a leash. There may be a way to make it do its first job — to release the ninety instead of holding them — but doing so would mean letting them rise first, all at once, and trusting the relic to finish what it started. High risk. The party's gamble, not a guaranteed win.
- **Ask Tobin to choose for them.** He won't. "I made the choice that made all this," he says. "I'm done choosing for other people's deaths. This one's yours."

## THE TURN — THE BLACK MIRROR BEAT

Whatever the party reaches for, the truth lands the same way it landed on Tobin sixty-three years ago: the light is the murder weapon and the only mercy, and there is no version of stopping it that doesn't kill someone. If they put the lamp out to save the next ships, the ninety they came to pity surge up the rock to drown them. If they take the watch to free a good man, they become the next good man chained to the cradle. If they leave it running, they row home past a field of standing dead and know they chose the same trade Tobin chose, the one they came out here to be disgusted by. The horror isn't the thing under the water. It's that Tobin was right, and now they're holding his arithmetic.



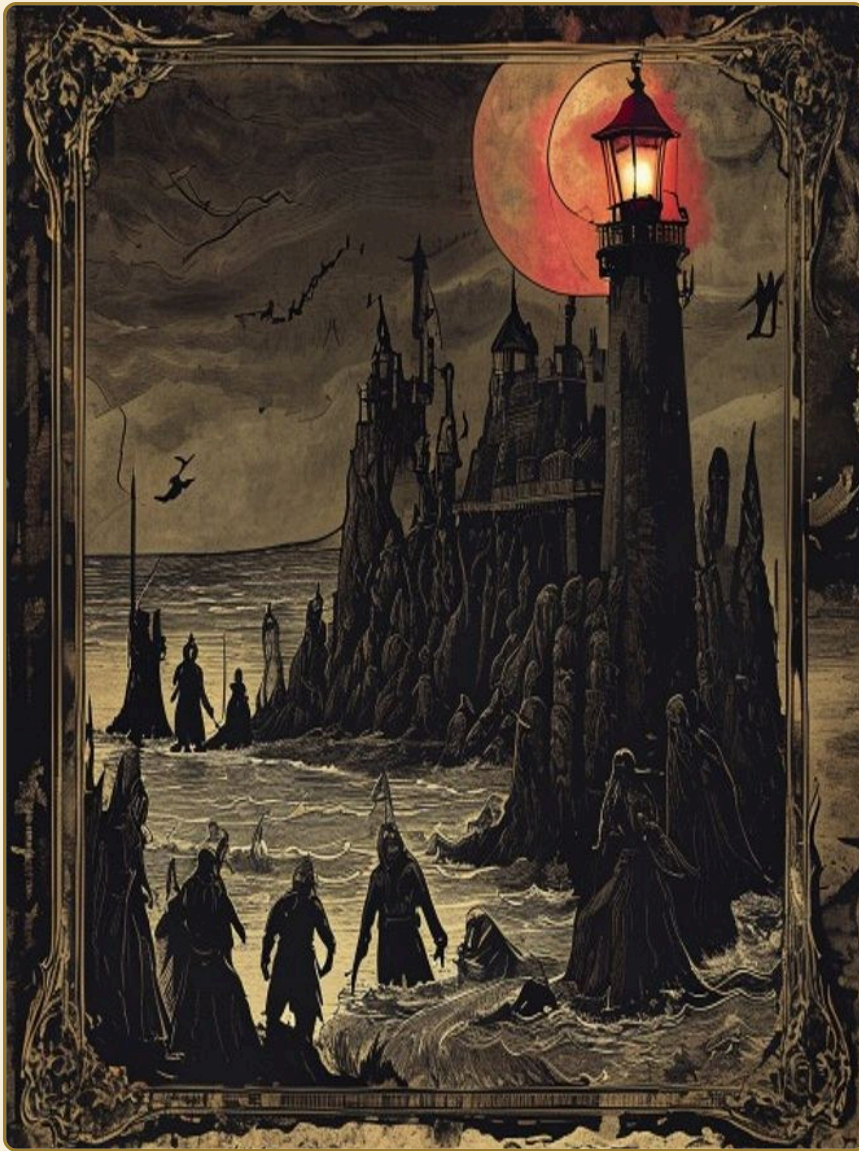
## SCENE 4 — THE TIDE THAT STANDS UP

*Optional climax — only if the party stops the light or wakes the grave.*

The thing beneath Gull's Tooth never fully surfaces — it is the size of the harbor floor and showing it cheapens it. What comes up the rock is **the Standing Tide**: the drowned ninety, risen together, climbing the tower in the dark to put the light back on, or to drag down whoever put it out.

### READ ALOUD

*The singing stops, and for one breath the night is the most silent thing you have ever stood inside. Then the water below the tower hisses white, and they come up out of it. Not swimming. Walking. Pale shapes past counting, climbing the black rock with the patience of a tide coming in, faces turned up to the dead lamp, hands reaching for the cradle, for the stone, for you. The sea behind them is bulging upward, slow, like something vast turning over in its sleep and deciding not to go back down.*



*The Standing Tide — the drowned ninety risen together, climbing the rock toward the dead lamp.*

#### WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

The Standing Tide wants the light back on. It is not a slaughter; it is the drowned trying to return to the only dream they have left, and they will go through the party to reach the cradle. They are slow, relentless, and they come in a rising count, not a wall. A party that relights the stone (or hands it to a new keeper) sees the Tide stop where it stands, turn, and walk calmly back into the sea — instantly, eerily docile, the dream restored. A party that destroys the relic outright frees the ninety to true death (they collapse to bone and sink) but removes the leash on the thing below, which now stirs toward the coast over the following weeks — a campaign-sized problem the one-shot leaves on the table on purpose.

#### MECHANICS — THE STANDING TIDE

Run risen drowned as SRD *zombies*, reflavored as waterlogged sailors, climbing in waves of 2–4 per round up the tower stair until the light is restored or the relic destroyed. They have **Resistance to bludgeoning** (they're already broken) and they do not pursue beyond the lamp room. Their goal is the cradle, not the party — a creature standing

between the Tide and the stone is attacked; a creature stepping aside is ignored. This makes the fight a question of what the party is defending, not a kill-count.

### **MECHANICS — THE CRADLE (THE CLOCK)**

Relighting the stone is an action requiring a free hand on the cradle and either a new keeper's vow or a DC 15 Dexterity (or thieves' tools) check to reseal the relic and restart the gears. Each round the light is dark, add 1d4 to the climbing Tide. The moment the light turns again, every risen drowned stops on the same breath. The scene is a clock, not a damage race.

### **THE RELIC (THE HARD OPTION)**

The stone is **AC 15, 40 HP, vulnerable to thunder and force, immune to poison and psychic**. Destroying it ends the binding: the ninety find true rest, but the thing below loses its leash. Reaching the stone means crossing the lamp room while the Tide climbs for the same prize. The kind of plan this table will either be proud of or never stop arguing about.

### **SCALING**

For 3rd-level parties, cap the Tide at 6 total risen and drop the per-round add to 1d2. For 5th-level, run as written and have the sea itself reach into the lamp room twice during the fight: a tendril of black water (SRD *giant constrictor snake*, reflavored, surfacing for one round then withdrawing) grabbing whoever is nearest the stone.

## **RESOLUTION BRANCHES**

**They refuse and row home.** Saltmarrow says nothing, relieved the strangers didn't touch the light. The beam keeps turning. Two or three ships a year keep going down. The party carries Tobin's math now whether they wanted it or not. No XP for this one. Plenty of weight.

**They take the watch.** Tobin ages, thanks them, and walks into the sea a free man. One of the party is now the deathless keeper of Gull's Tooth, bound to the cradle and the trade. The rest row home a member short, having saved a good man by chaining a friend in his place. The worst victory on offer.

**They relight after stopping it (no one stays).** They survive the Standing Tide and get the stone turning again without taking the watch — which means Tobin is still the keeper, still deathless, still on the hook, and now he knows the party would let him stay there. He doesn't blame them. That's somehow worse. The trade continues exactly as before.

**They destroy the relic.** The ninety find rest. Tobin ages and dies on the lamp-room floor, finally free, with a thank-you the party will hear for a long time. And out past the rocks the water begins, slowly, to come awake. Saltmarrow is safe this season. The coast has a clock on it now, and the party started it. Do they come back when it strikes?

## **WHEN YOUR PLAYERS GO OFF THE RAILS**

They will. Here's where they push, and what holds.

**They refuse to cross to Gull's Tooth.** The bay won't let them leave clean. That night a fresh body washes up on the beach — a name the village flinches at — or, if they try to sail out of the bay, the light "calls" their own boat off course and they wake at dawn anchored under the tower anyway.

**They try to kill Tobin on sight.** He doesn't fight, and he doesn't die. The killing blow lands as a wound that simply doesn't take; he bleeds and keeps talking. The first time they see it, the horror flips — this isn't a monster to put down. If they keep at it, he lets them, tired and sad. "You'll wear out before I do. Everyone does."

**They smash the lamp early (Scene 1 or 2).** Jump straight to Scene 4. The Standing Tide rises now, in the dark, and the party is caught on the rock *without* Tobin's confession to tell them how to stop it. Harder, and earned.

**One PC impulsively volunteers for the watch.** Let them — it's a real option. But make the weight land: the rest row home one short, that PC becomes an NPC bound to the cradle, and you hand the player the new keeper's first log entry to write. A hell of a session-ender.

**They haul a sleeping body to town as proof.** It wakes the instant it leaves the beam's reach. Now there's a risen drowned in the bottom of the dory, and the worst trip home of their lives.

**They reach out to the thing below (magic, prayer, a deal).** It doesn't bargain; it collects. The reaching character gets one image back — the harbor floor, and how many it already holds — and a DC 15 Wisdom save or be shaken (disadvantage on attacks and checks) until a long rest. Dread, not a fight.

**They burn the whole lighthouse down.** The wood burns; the stone doesn't (it's the relic). The beam keeps turning from a blackened tower, the party has announced themselves to the entire coast, and Tobin watches from the rocks. "It was going to be a long night anyway."



## THE GULL'S TOOTH FIELD KIT

*This adventure's toolkit — roll when the party pokes at the edges.*

### D12 — FLOTSAM & JETSAM

#### D12 YOU FIND...

- 1 A sea-chest swollen shut, a child's drawing sealed bone-dry inside.
- 2 A ship's bell, green with verdigris, that rings once on its own each time the light passes over it.
- 3 A bundle of letters in oilcloth, all to the same woman, all unsent, the last dated this year.
- 4 A whalebone charm "for safe harbor," snapped clean in two.
- 5 A full barrel of lamp oil stamped with the crown's mark — someone was still resupplying the light.
- 6 A drowned man's boot, the foot still in it, a folded map tucked in the heel.
- 7 A child's painted toy boat, perfect, that always drifts back to shore no matter how far you throw it.
- 8 A strongbox of coin, every piece from a different port and a different decade.
- 9 A logbook page listing "souls aboard," one name scratched out and rewritten in a shakier hand.
- 10 A length of new rope, taut, tied to nothing, leading straight down into the calm water.
- 11 A wedding ring that fits whichever character picks it up, and slowly tightens.
- 12 A corked bottle: "*If you're reading this the light took us too. Don't trust the calm water.*" The ink is still wet.

### D8 — THE DROWNED REMEMBER (TOUCHING A SLEEPING BODY)

## D8 A FLASH OF...

- 1 A lullaby in a language no one at the table speaks, that the character can't stop humming for an hour.
- 2 The deck of the *Halcyon* tilting, and a child handed up to someone who didn't catch them.
- 3 A name. The character simply knows this one's name — and that it's in no book of Tobin's.
- 4 The view from the bottom, looking up at the gold light, and the awful relief of it.
- 5 A grudge. This one didn't drown by accident, and it remembers the hand that helped.
- 6 Nothing. Just cold, and patience, and the certainty that the character will be down here too.
- 7 The captain's last order, unfinished — the dead are waiting to be told to stand down.
- 8 Warmth. Gratitude that someone finally touched them. This one turns to face the character for the rest of the scene.

## THE RELIC — THE LIGHT



*The white-gold stone — a binding made for mercy, hijacked into a leash.*

The white-gold stone is the heart of what the *Halcyon* carried — a binding made to lay the drowned to rest, hijacked into a leash that keeps them asleep and the coast safe at the cost of fresh ships. **AC 15, 40 HP, vulnerable to thunder and force, immune to poison and psychic.** Original item.

## BOXED LOCATION — THE LAMP ROOM

The top of the tower: a glass drum braced in salt-pitted brass, the great lens taller than a man, turning on gears worn smooth by sixty-three years of one hand keeping them clean. At the lens's heart a cut white-gold stone in a brass cradle, humming a lullaby ninety voices deep. A cot in the corner that has not been slept in for a lifetime. A logbook on the sill with one entry per night, the same three words in the same tired hand: *light kept. nobody came.* Until tonight, somebody did.

## THE CAST

SRD 5.1 baselines, reflavored. Original content.



### TOBIN CARROW, KEEPER OF HALCYON LIGHT

*Medium humanoid (deathless) · a confession, not an encounter*

STR 10 (+0)

DEX 10 (+0)

CON 10 (+0)

INT 11 (+0)

WIS 13 (+1)

CHA 12 (+1)

#### DEFENSES

**AC** 10 · **HP** 4 (SRD *commoner* for stats — he is not a fighter and will not become one) · **Speed** 30 ft (but he cannot leave the island). He cannot die while the watch is his; treat any “killing blow” as a wound that simply doesn’t take.

#### SKILLS

Insight +4 (sixty-three years of reading the sea and the people who come to it).

#### THE WOUND

One dark night, sixty-three years ago, and ninety souls he heard and couldn’t see.

#### THE WANT

To die. To hand off the watch and drown with the ship he failed.

#### THE LINE HE'LL CROSS

He keeps the light on, knowing it pulls ships to the rocks, every single night.

#### THE LINE HE WON'T

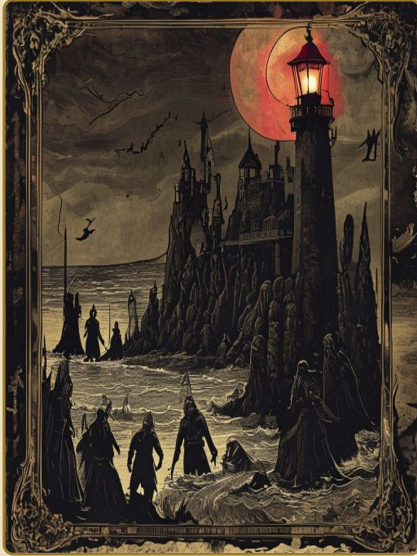
He will not lie to the party about what the light does, and he will not force the watch on anyone. The choice has to be freely taken or it doesn’t pass.

#### HOW HE LOSES

He doesn’t, really. The light turns or it doesn’t. Either way he’s still up the stair when the sun comes up — unless someone finally takes the cradle, or breaks the stone.

#### RUN HIM AS A CONFESSION, NOT A FIGHT

*Mannerism: he talks to the lamp out of habit, and catches himself, and doesn’t always stop. Series hook: the captain’s ledger from the Mareschal on the jetty lists a passenger who isn’t among the dead — someone walked off Gull’s Tooth alive three weeks ago.*



## THE STANDING TIDE

*Medium undead · the drowned ninety, risen*

STR 13 (+1)

DEX 6 (-2)

CON 16 (+3)

INT 3 (-4)

WIS 6 (-2)

CHA 5 (-3)

### DEFENSES

**AC 8 · HP 22 (3d8+9) · Speed 20 ft (climbing, relentless) · Damage Resistances bludgeoning (already broken bodies) · SRD *zombie*, reflavored as risen, waterlogged sailors of the Halcyon and the ships fed to the rock since.**

### NOT A SLAUGHTER

They don't seek to kill. Their goal is the cradle and the stone. A creature between them and the light is attacked; a creature that steps aside is walked past.

### THEY RISE AND THEY SINK

They rise only when the light fails, and they sink the instant it is restored. Scale the count to the party — they come in a rising tide, not a wall.

### SLAM

*Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) bludgeoning.

## THE THING BENEATH GULL'S TOOTH

*Gargantuan aberration (unique) · never statted, never fully seen*

STR —

DEX —

CON —

INT —

WIS —

CHA —

### USE IT AS WEATHER, NOT A MONSTER

*Never statted, never fully seen.*

#### WHAT IT IS

An old, vast hunger on the harbor floor that trades a sleeping coast for two or three ships a year, with Tobin's death as its collateral. Original entity; no SRD analog and none needed.

#### ITS REACH

The only part that ever touches the lamp room (the 5th-level option) is a tendril of black water — use the SRD *giant constrictor snake*, reflavored, surfacing for one round then withdrawing.

#### WHAT IT WANTS

To keep eating, and to keep the leash on Tobin. Destroy the relic and the leash breaks: it stirs toward the coast over the following weeks — the campaign-sized problem the one-shot leaves on the table.

### SALTMARROW VILLAGE

SRD *commoner*. Wary, not wicked. They will warn, withhold, and pity; they will not row out and they will not stop the party from doing what they came to do. They have made their own version of Tobin's trade — leave the light alone, lose a few ships, keep the houses on the beach.



## BATTLE MAP — GULL'S TOOTH

*1 square = 5 ft · with an inset of the lamp room for the Scene 4 climb.*



*Gull's Tooth — the black rock, the jetty and tied dory, the lighthouse tower, the standing drowned in the calm water, and an inset of the lamp room. The climb in Scene 4 runs from the water's edge up the rock to the tower base, then up the stair into the lamp-room inset — the Tide is always headed for the cradle at center.*



## SCALING NOTES

*Levels 1–10, parties of 3–6.*

The pressure here is the clock and the choice, not raw CR, so this one-shot holds across a wide band on a few dials. Pick the row for your table.

TIER	THE STANDING TIDE	THE RELIC (TO DESTROY)	THE THING BELOW	NOTE
Levels 1–2	caps at 4 risen, +1/dark round	AC 13, 20 HP	no tendrils	Pure dread + the cradle clock. One good hit should matter.
Levels 3–5 (as written)	2–4/round, up to ~8	AC 15, 40 HP	tendrils once (5th)	The baseline.
Levels 6–8	4–6/round, no cap; risen resist non-magical	AC 16, 70 HP	tendrils every round	Tobin offers a “test”: let one PC briefly hold the watch, feel the pull, then give it back — raising the stakes of the real choice.
Levels 9–10	unbounded, led by a <b>drowned captain</b> (reflavored SRD <i>wight</i> ) who coordinates them	AC 17, 100 HP, immune to nonmagical	two tendrils	The party can probably win the fight — so make winning the trap. Kill everything and the leash breaks, freeing the thing below. The lesson scales up, not away.

### BY PARTY SIZE

- **Party of 3:** drop Tide counts by about a third and give Tobin one mercy — a warning that buys the party a round.
- **Party of 5–6:** add 50% to the Tide and let the tendrils grab two at once.
- **At every size and level:** never make Tobin a combatant. The one-shot breaks the moment the keeper becomes a boss instead of a confession.



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