The Channel Lights

Every October the Finnertys drape eleven photographs in black. This year a twelfth frame came in the post to a retired harbour pilot. It is empty.

Setting: Other Tone: Gritty ~3hrs
Party: 4 players Level 3

dungeonmaster.website

Introduction

The Hook

Every October the Finnertys drape eleven photographs in black. This year a twelfth frame arrived by post at a cottage on the bluff above Gull Point: empty, draped, addressed to Captain Amos Thackeray, harbour pilot, retired 1927. He is eighty-one. His daughter has eighty dollars and four days until the twenty-fourth, and she wants somebody at the door who is not a policeman.

How to use this adventure

This one-shot is designed for a single session with the AI Dungeon Master at dungeonmaster.website. Read the plot summary and NPC secrets before play. Players should not read beyond the hook.

Estimated duration: ~3hrs
Recommended party: 4 at level 3

The Adventure

Thackeray moved the lights. He was paid twenty thousand dollars through a clerk at the Harbor Commission, and was told the Finnerty boats would go aground and be taken. Nobody mentioned machine guns. He has kept the marked chart and the clerks note for twenty-one years, and would have told it to anyone who asked him properly. Chief Pilot Rudd has known since 1928, and has brought him his tobacco every Sunday.

Red Finnerty has had the name for three weeks. It came in an unsigned letter with a photostat from the Commissions closed lease register, showing a payment in October 1927 to A.T., pilotage, special. The sender was Silk Castellane.

Silks reasoning is tidy. If Red kills an old man in his bed a fortnight before the election, the Finnertys are finished with the public, their candidate in Local 9 is finished with the membership, the Truck War ends on the familys terms without Nick firing a shot, and the one living witness to his fathers oldest crime is dead by somebody elses hand.

Red will come himself, by launch, in the fog, on the night of the twenty-fourth, with two men. He is not coming to talk. He can be made to, by someone holding the chart, the note and the answer to a question he has not thought to ask: who wanted him to know, and why now.

The sign: a launch without lights standing off the point two nights running. Rudd telling the investigators, flatly, to go home. The fog horn, which covers one shot in three.

Solution - culprit: Silk Castellane, who sent Red the name. Motive: to have Red kill the only witness to the Long Boats, in public, before the votes. Means: a photostat from the Commissions closed lease register. Opportunity: the register was signed out on 27 September by a member of the advisory board, in his own hand.

Captain Amos Thackeray

Role

Harbour pilot, retired

Personality

Eighty-one, clear-headed, entirely unafraid.

DM Only - Secret

He has been waiting for the boy who walked out to the point in 1929. He wants to hand him the chart himself and does not much mind what happens after.

Suggested mannerism: lean into personality cues when this NPC speaks - give them a distinct voice.

Miss Edith Thackeray

Role

His daughter, the client

Personality

Fifty, a schoolteacher, has never been told and has always known.

DM Only - Secret

She found the chart years ago, behind the barometer. She has not decided whether she is hiring the investigators to protect her father or to make him say it.

Suggested mannerism: lean into personality cues when this NPC speaks - give them a distinct voice.

Chief Pilot Ansel Rudd

Role

Chief of the pilot station

Personality

Weathered, exact, gives nothing away.

DM Only - Secret

The station log for October 1927 has a page in Thackerays hand recording nine lights shifted for dredging. There was no dredging. Rudd has kept that volume in his own locker for twenty years.

Suggested mannerism: lean into personality cues when this NPC speaks - give them a distinct voice.

Red Finnerty

Role
Head of the Finnerty Boys

Personality
Cheerful, freckled, twelve years old on the night in question.

DM Only - Secret
He has wondered for three weeks why the letter came now. He would rather have the man who paid than the man who was paid, and he has never been offered the choice.

Suggested mannerism: lean into personality cues when this NPC speaks - give them a distinct voice.

The Cottage on the Bluff

Description

A small white house above the point, far better than a pilots pension, with a barometer in the hall.

What happens here

An empty frame on the mantel, an old man who will not leave, and a chart behind the barometer.

The Pilots House

Description

A stove, eight bunks and a shelf of bound logs going back to 1889.

What happens here

A gap on the shelf where the autumn of 1927 should be, and a chief pilot who has decided the visitors are not to be left alone.

Gull Point

Description

Bare rock at the harbour mouth, a horn every forty seconds, and nine lights on a clear night.

What happens here

The night of the twenty-fourth: fog, a launch with its engine cut, and three men coming up from the water.

Encounter 1: social

Difficulty: easy
Type: social

The cottage. Thackeray will answer any question put to him straight. His daughter would rather some were not asked, and says so.

Monsters / threats

None listed - improvise from description.

Encounter 2: exploration

Difficulty: hard
Type: exploration

The Harbor Commissions lease register, which is closed to the public. Find who signed it out in September, without anyone learning that it was looked for.

Monsters / threats

Corrupt Official, Dock Watchman

Encounter 3: social

Difficulty: hard
Type: social

The Anchor Light, three nights before. Red will see the investigators. He will hear them out, and tell them pleasantly that he will be at the point on the twenty-fourth regardless.

Monsters / threats

Street Tough

Encounter 4: combat

Difficulty: deadly
Type: combat

Gull Point in fog. Red and two men on the rocks, a second launch behind them that is not theirs, and an old man walking down to the water with a rolled chart.

Monsters / threats

Triggerman, Triggerman, Button Man

Resolution Paths

Path 1

Stand aside. Red has his third name, the Clarion has a murdered pensioner on its front page, and everything goes as Silk Castellane intended.

Path 2

Give Red the chart and the register slip. He spares the old man, and the following morning walks alone on to Pier 19 to show the Old Man what his elder son has been posting.

Path 3

Have Thackeray swear a statement before a notary and send it to the Clarion. Twenty-one years late, the Night of the Long Boats is in print: eleven murders, and who paid.

Play at dungeonmaster.website

Enjoyed this adventure? Play it directly at dungeonmaster.website - the AI Dungeon Master runs it for your group, no prep required.

https://chalkline.rest/one-shots/e263d246-600c-4ff6-83da-d68e8b5964c4

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