

MANY MORROW STUDIOS · FREE LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE

The Bell That Rang at Midnight

A one-evening mystery for 3–5 characters and a Dungeon Master. No combat, no required rolls, and a complete story in under an hour.

At a glance

Level	1	**Players**	3–5 plus a Dungeon Master (DM)
Time	45–60 minutes	**Prep**	About 5 minutes
Setting	Bellmere, a foggy village	**Style**	Mystery, teamwork, light tension

Midnight passes and a bell tower with no rope rings once. Every lamp in Bellmere flickers and the lantern that guides travelers through the fog goes dark. Mira, the lamplighter, asks the party to stop the bell before the fog swallows the road. It is a small problem with a satisfying answer, and one open question that leads to *The Lantern Vault*.

> **Promise to your players.** The danger at the tower is fully solved by the end of this episode. The wider mystery stays open, but nobody needs to buy anything to finish tonight's story.

How to run this adventure

- **Before play (5 minutes):** read the whole adventure once. Print the player map and handouts (last pages) and have three tokens ready: a bell, a rope, a brass star.
- **Rolls are optional.** Where a DC appears, it is a way to speed things up. A failed roll costs a little time or noise, never progress, damage, or a blocked path.
- **Say yes to sensible plans.** Three clues in the bell chamber support many solutions. Reward invention.
- **Content boundaries.** Agree them with your group first. Nothing here is graphic.

Timeline

0–12	Scene 1: The midnight chime
12–25	Scene 2: The tower approach
25–45	Scene 3: The bell chamber
45–60	Scene 4: A promise and a question

What is really happening (DM only)

The Starward Observatory on the hill above Bellmere focuses starlight through a ring of mirrors. One beam feeds the village's guiding lantern; another used to cross the old bell tower, where the bell was once rung by sunlight and a brass striker. Earlier tonight Tavin, Mira's apprentice, went to repair the mirror array. A bumped mirror turned the beam toward the tower. It now crosses a polished glass shard in the bell chamber, and each flash swings the loose striker against the bell. With the beam diverted, the lantern in the square goes dark. Nobody is in danger from the bell itself. The danger is the fog and a missing apprentice.

Scene 1 – The midnight chime (0–12 min)

> *Midnight passes. The abandoned bell tower rings once. Every lamp in Bellmere flickers, and the guiding lantern in the square goes dark. Mira, the lamplighter, steps out of her shop and looks toward the tower. "That bell has had no rope for twenty years."*

Start with the characters in Bellmere Square, drawn out by the sound (a late inn guest, a traveler waiting for the fog to lift, a neighbor, any reason you like). Mira is brisk, kind and worried. She asks them to stop the bell before the fog hides the road, and she can answer questions about the tower and the village.

- **Search the square:** a trace of silvery grit lies beneath the dark lantern. Optional DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) to spot it quickly; if no one rolls, Mira points it out. Under light it glitters like crushed mirror.
- **Ask Mira:** her apprentice Tavin went up to the Starward Observatory this evening to fix a mirror and has not come home.
- **Follow the sound:** the road to the tower is plain to see. **Every approach reveals the tower route.**

> **DM tip.** Let players ask Mira anything. She knows the tower is locked, the lower stair is rotten, and there is a maintenance door at the rear that the old bell-ringer used.

Scene 2 – The tower approach (12–25 min)

Fog has begun creeping up the lanes. The tower stands at the edge of the square (see the map). The main door is jammed. A narrow rear door opens onto a worn stair. The lowest steps are loose.

Plan	What happens
Wedge or force the main door	Works with teamwork. A hurried attempt may be rolled (DC 10 Strength (Athletics)); on a failure it is noisy and takes extra time. No damage.
Use the rear maintenance door	Quiet and quick. Mira mentions it if the party hasn't thought of it.
Stabilize the stair	Rope, planks or careful placing of feet. DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) to hurry; on a failure a loose step clatters and costs a minute, nothing more.

A **brass star** is set into the door frame. When someone touches it, a soft bell note sounds from above. It is not a trap; it is a hint that something up there responds to light and touch.

Scene 3 – The bell chamber (25–45 min)

> *The chamber is cold and clean, the bell dull green in the dark. A narrow shaft of silver light slides through the louvers, touches a shard of polished glass on the floor, and flashes. The loose brass striker swings. The bell rings, and the whole village shivers.*

The ringing is mechanical, not a creature. Give players the three clues in whatever order they find them, and give all three freely if they are stuck:

1. The bell rings only when the light flashes.

2. The glass shard sits on a pivot pin and can be turned.
3. A faded diagram scratched on the beam shows the striker's resting position.

Any sensible fix works: turn the shard, shade the beam, tie off the striker, pad the bell with cloth, or a plan you didn't think of. The chamber goes quiet. **No single failed check stalls the episode.**

> **Optional tension.** Fog reaches the lower steps. Choose whether to secure the door or guide a lost traveler (Old Perrin, a peddler) in from the road. Both choices can succeed through teamwork. Do not add combat to fill time.

Scene 4 – A promise and a question (45–60 min)

With the bell silent, Mira relights the guiding lantern using the recovered brass star as a focus. The glow spreads and the fog thins. She gives the party the brass star as a keepsake and thanks them sincerely.

> *As you turn to leave, the star warms in your hand. Far up the hill, the Starward Observatory answers with three faint chimes. On the back of the token is a tiny engraved map, and a line of text: "Follow the light home." Mira's voice is quiet. "Tavin should have been back hours ago."*

The free episode is complete here. Players who want to continue can begin *The Lantern Vault* with the star token and what they know about Mira and Tavin.

Rewards

- **Brass star token.** A keepsake that warms near the observatory.
- **Village purse.** Mira offers 20 gp shared among the party.
- **Progress.** If you use milestone leveling, this episode and *The Lantern Vault* together lead to level 2.

People

Name	Role and voice
Mira Dunhollow	Lamplighter, middle-aged, practical. Speaks plainly and fast when worried. Loves her apprentice.
Tavin	Mira's apprentice, young, earnest, never met in this episode.
Old Perrin	Peddler lost in the fog, talkative and grateful. Optional.

Pacing and notes for the DM

- **Running fast?** Let players study the shard diagram and question Perrin. **Running slow?** Have Mira give the rear-door hint and all three bell clues at once.
- If a player wants a fight, remind them the problem is mechanical and keep the focus on clever fixes.
- After play, ask the table the five prompts on the feedback sheet. We would love to hear how it went: use the Feedback page on our website.

Handout 1 – Mira's request

To whoever hears this bell:

The lantern in the square has gone dark and the fog is coming up the lanes. Please stop the ringing at the old tower before anyone loses the road. Tavin went up to the observatory and I fear for him. I will be at the lamp shop with a kettle on.

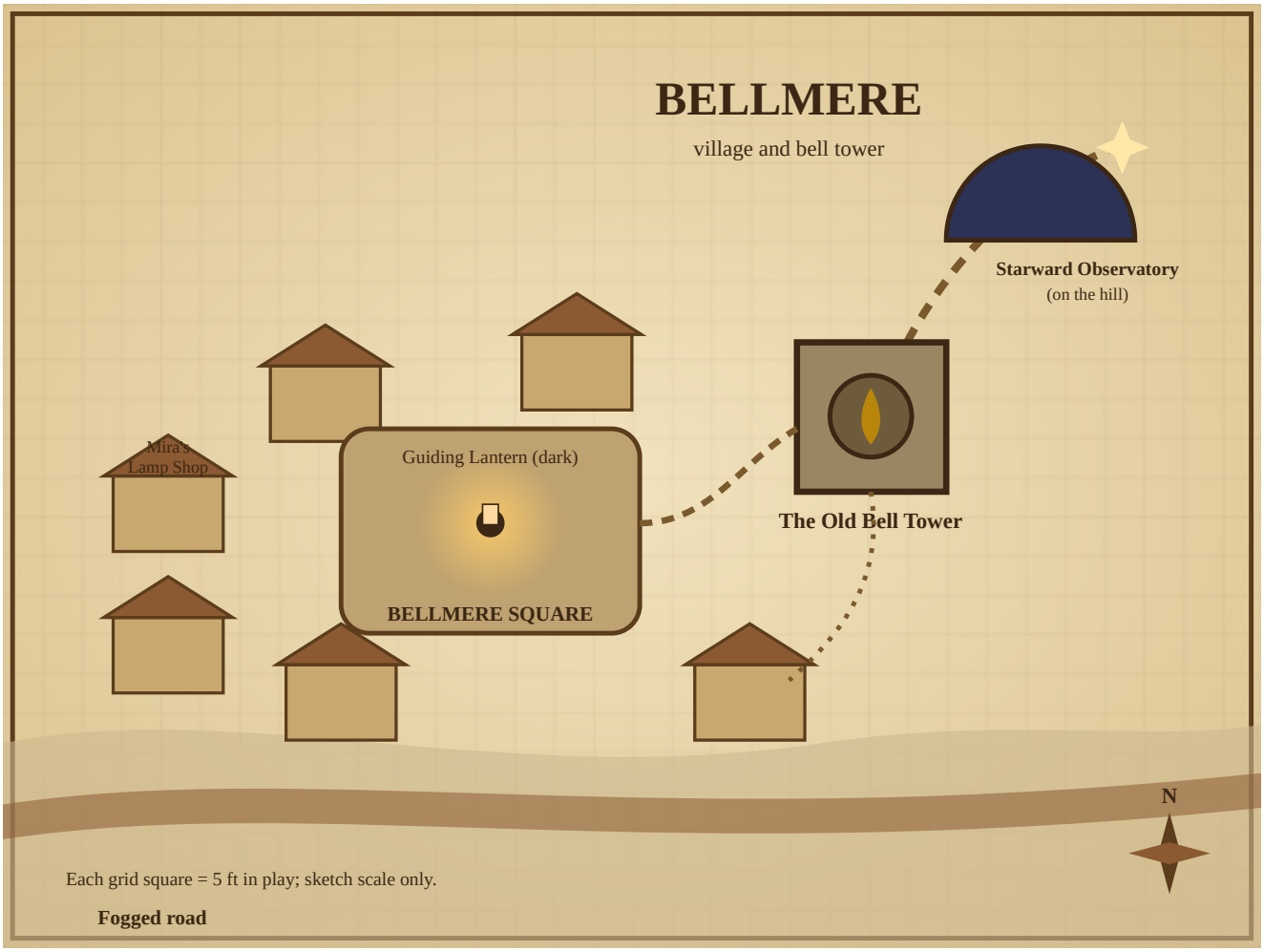
— Mira Dunhollow, Lamplighter of Bellmere

Handout 2 – The brass star

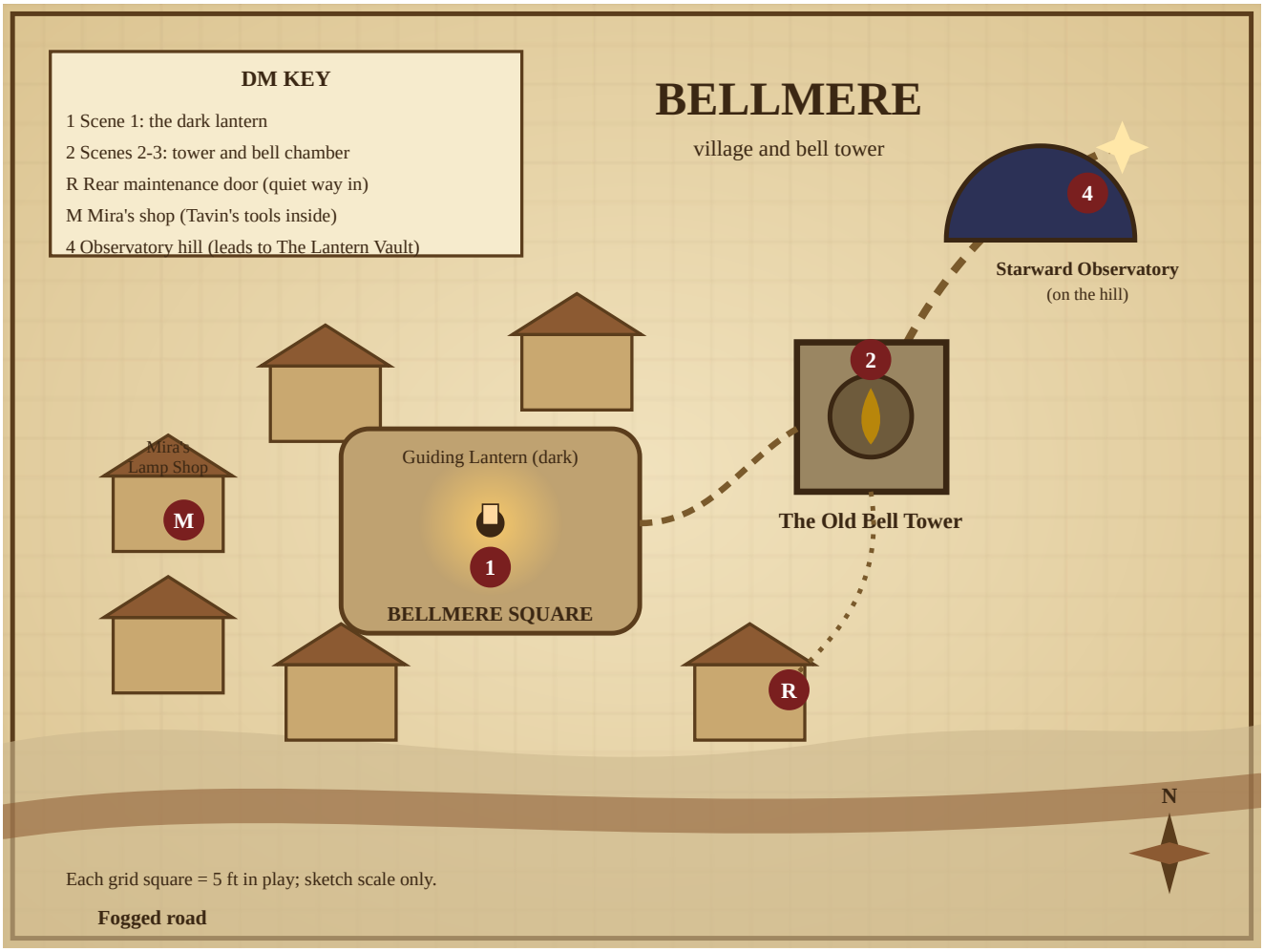
A palm-sized brass star, warm to the touch. On its back is a tiny engraved map of the hill above Bellmere, with a path of dots leading to a domed building.

“Follow the light home.”

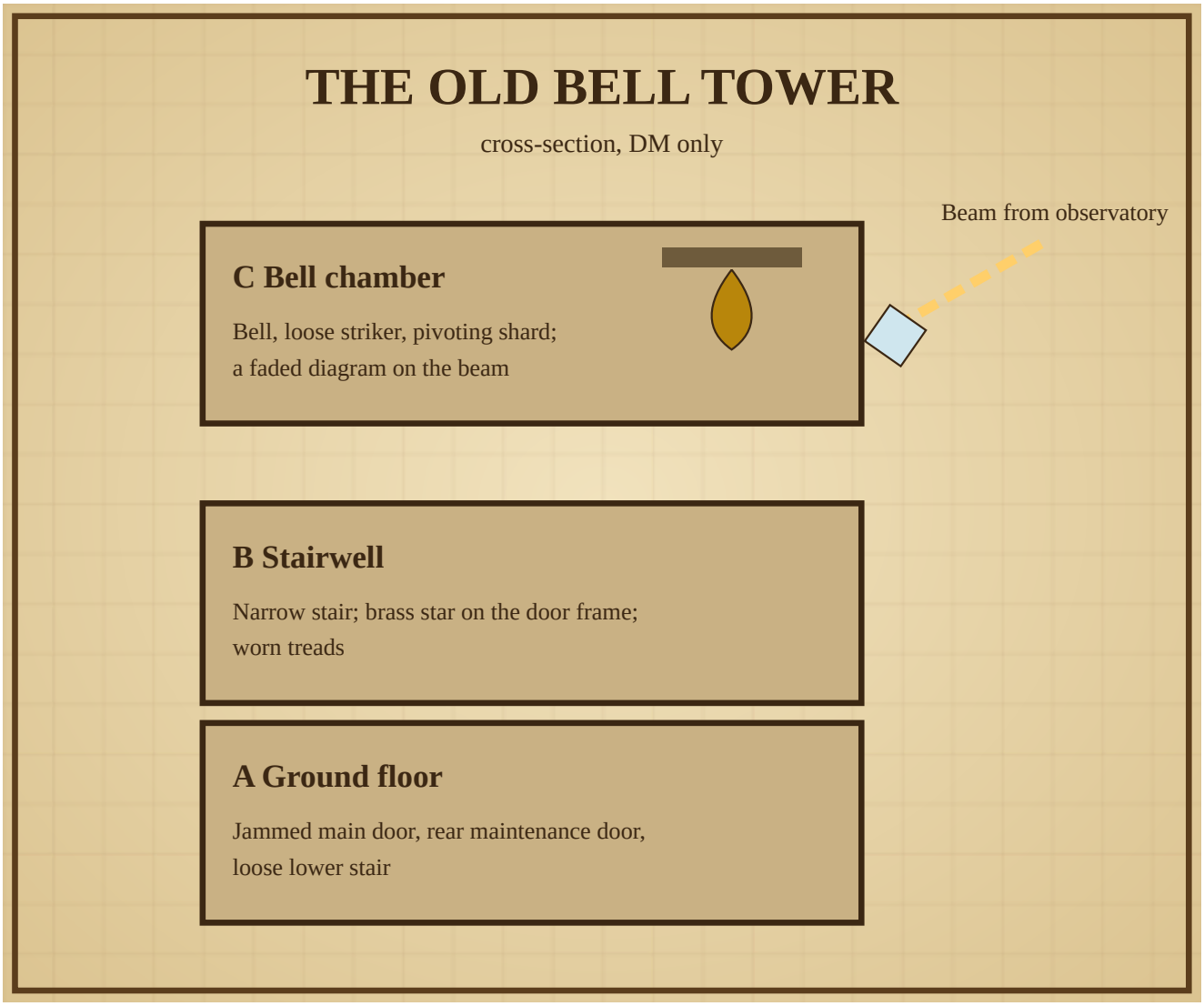
Player map – Bellmere



DM map – Bellmere (keyed)



DM map – The Old Bell Tower



Feedback sheet

Please answer after play at **manymorrowstudios.netlify.app/feedback.html**. Anonymous replies are welcome; share an email only if you want a reply.

1. How long did the session take?
2. Were the three clues in the bell chamber clear?
3. Did your choices matter?
4. Did any single failed roll slow the story?
5. Would you want to continue to *The Lantern Vault*?

All characters, places and events are original fiction. This adventure uses common d20 conventions and can be adapted to your preferred rules. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by Wizards of the Coast.

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