

The Midnight Bell

A paranormal mystery in three sessions.

Overview

Every night at midnight, the bell of the Old Meeting House in Gale's Landing tolls, even though its iron clapper was stolen months ago. After each tolling, someone in town is found sleepwalking toward the sea. Everyone blames the bell. The truth is the opposite: the bell is what wakes them up.

For the GM's eyes only: what really happened

- **1826.** On the night the silver fog came, bell-ringer Josiah Pell climbed the belfry and rang the bell from dusk until dawn. The townsfolk, kept awake and angry, called him Mad Josiah. They never knew he had saved them. When he died, he was buried in an unmarked corner of the old burying ground, and children still sing a mocking rhyme about him.
- **This July.** Kyle Brandt, the librarian's 19-year-old nephew, needed money for a car repair. He took the bell's heavy iron clapper and sold it for \$200 to Shale's Curiosities, after Gideon Shale mentioned he'd pay well for "old iron from the meeting house." Kyle feels awful about it.
- **Now.** The Gray is stirring, and its whispers are already reaching into town at night, drawing light sleepers toward the sea. Josiah's ghost has returned to his post. Without a clapper, he rings the bell the only way he can: as a ghost-toll everyone hears, to wake the sleepwalkers before they reach the water.

The heroes right two wrongs: recovering the stolen clapper so the bell can truly ring again, and restoring the good name of the man who saved the town.

Josiah's signals

Josiah speaks through the bell. Use a spoon tapped on a glass or a small bell for his tolls.

SIGNAL	MEANING
1 toll	Yes
2 tolls	No
A long, rolling peal	Wake up! Danger!
The bell rope sways on its own	Come up here
Chalk letters appear on a wall	An important message (he was a schoolteacher, too)
Smell of candle smoke and pipe tobacco	He's near, and calm

Cast

CHARACTER	WHO THEY ARE	HOW TO PLAY THEM
Josiah Pell	The ghost bell-ringer, died 1851	Stern but kind, proud, a little lonely; a retired schoolteacher
Mabel Crane	Town clerk, keeps the meeting house keys	Bossy, practical, secretly frightened
Ozzie Brandt	Town librarian, Kyle's uncle	Grumpy, soft-hearted, a sleepwalker in Session 2
Kyle Brandt	19, works at the library, sold the clapper	Jumpy, guilty, wants to fix it but is scared of trouble
Pearl Okafor	Owner of the Harbor Inn	Chatty, warm; one of her guests sleepwalked
Gideon Shale	Antique dealer	Gracious and apologetic; returns the clapper without a fuss

Places

- **The Old Meeting House:** a white clapboard building from the 1730s with a tall square belfry. A narrow ladder leads to the bell. Inside are old pews, a pot-bellied stove, and dust.
- **The old burying ground:** slate headstones behind the meeting house, leaning every which way. In the far corner, under wild roses, is a small fieldstone scratched "J.P."
- **The library:** where Ozzie keeps the town records, and Kyle works the front desk.

- **Shale's Curiosities:** a cluttered antique shop on Water Street.

GM tools: midnight happenings

Roll a die when things are quiet near the meeting house at night:

1. The bell rope creaks and sways, though the air is still.
2. A child's voice down the street sings the old rhyme about Mad Josiah, then stops mid-word.
3. Candle smoke drifts from the belfry. No candle is lit.
4. Thin mist slides in from the harbor and pools around the heroes' ankles.
5. A single toll, so quiet it might be imagined.
6. On a dusty pew, a fingertip writes one word: "WATCH."

Session 1: The Bell Rings

The heroes learn the bell has no clapper yet still tolls, hear rumors that it causes sleepwalking, and stake out the belfry at midnight.

Scene 1: The case file (15 minutes)

READ ALOUD

Ada slides a folder across the table. Inside is a newspaper clipping: "PHANTOM BELL KEEPS TOWN AWAKE." Under it, in Ada's tidy handwriting: "Bell has no clapper since July. Rings every midnight anyway. Four sleepwalkers so far. Mabel is beside herself."

If this is the heroes' first mystery, use this scene to introduce Ada and the case board.

Scene 2: The Old Meeting House by day (30 minutes)

Mabel Crane meets them on the steps, jingling an enormous ring of keys.

READ ALOUD

"I don't believe in ghosts," Mabel says firmly, unlocking the door. "I believe in vandals. Find whoever's ringing that bell, and I'll see they're punished."

- **The belfry ladder:** climbing up takes a Bold card or Brave roll. On “Yes, but,” a rung snaps and someone takes 1 Fright. Pigeons explode out of the rafters either way.
- **The bell:** big, green with age, and silent. Its clapper is gone. With Look or a Clever roll, a hero sees fresh scratches where it was unbolted, and a boot print in the dust, too small to be a grown man’s work boot.
- **The inscription:** cleaning the green crust off the bell’s rim (Fix) reveals words cast into the bronze: “THE SECOND WATCH. RING OUT THE GRAY. 1726,” beside a star inside a circle. **Campaign clue: The Second Watch.**
- Mabel insists the clapper was there in June. She’s told the council, who want to sell the bell to pay for a new roof.

Scene 3: Around town (45–60 minutes)

Lay out option cards for these places. Each holds at least one clue.

The library. Ozzie Brandt grumbles but helps anyone who asks politely (Talk or Kind roll). Kyle Brandt works the front desk and goes pale at any mention of the bell.

- With Look or a Clever roll in the town records, the heroes find an 1826 entry: “Josiah Pell, bell-ringer, did ring the meeting house bell without cease from dusk until dawn on the 19th of October, disturbing all. A dense fog lay upon the town.” The same week, the schooner *Constance* was lost at sea.
- Ozzie can teach them the old rhyme kids still chant: “Mad Josiah, up the tower, rang all night at every hour.”
- With Look, a hero notices Kyle’s hands are covered in old rust stains, though he works at a library.

The Harbor Inn. Pearl Okafor pours tea and lowers her voice.

- A guest of hers, a retired teacher named Mrs. Lund, was found standing in the surf at 12:15 last Tuesday, in her nightgown, eyes open.
- Talking with Mrs. Lund (Talk or Kind) reveals what she remembers: “A voice in the fog, calling me. It sounded like my sister. Then the bell rang, and I woke up cold and wet.” This is the first hint that the bell wakes people.

The old burying ground. Leaning slate stones and long grass. Just inside the gate stands the oldest stone of all, worn nearly smooth: “Hannah Gale, 1680–1761. She kept us.” If the heroes ask, Ozzie or Ada explains that the town is named after her. She was the healer who led the first settlers here.

- With Look, in the far corner under wild roses, the heroes find a small fieldstone with “J.P.” scratched into it. The air here is warm, and it smells faintly of pipe tobacco.
- A Listener’s Heart Sense or a Kind roll: the heroes feel pride, loneliness, and a deep tiredness.

Scene 4: Midnight in the belfry (30–45 minutes)

The heroes stake out the meeting house. Turn the lights low and use your glass and spoon for tolls.

READ ALOUD

The meeting house is dark and cold. Moonlight falls through the tall windows in silver stripes across the pews. Somewhere far off, a dog barks once and stops. At one minute to midnight, the bell rope begins, very slowly, to sway.

At midnight, the bell tolls twelve times. It has no clapper. The sound fills the whole building and shakes dust from the beams.

- Anyone who looks up into the belfry sees a soft glow like candlelight, and for an instant, the shape of a tall old man in a long coat, hauling on a rope that isn't there. (1 Fright, unless the hero plays Wait or Talk.)
- When the tolling stops, the heroes find chalk writing on the belfry wall, in old-fashioned looping letters: "100 YEARS. IT COMES AGAIN." **Campaign clue: Josiah's Warning.**
- If a hero tries to communicate, Josiah answers with tolls: 1 for yes, 2 for no. He's cautious with strangers and answers only one or two questions tonight.

READ ALOUD

Through the belfry window, you see a thin white mist creeping up Water Street from the harbor. And walking through it, slowly, in a plaid bathrobe and slippers, is a man you recognize.

It's Ozzie Brandt, sleepwalking toward the sea. End the session here.

Session 2: The Sleepwalkers

The heroes follow a sleepwalker into the fog and discover the bell is protecting the town, then track down the stolen clapper and earn Josiah's trust.

Scene 1: Following Ozzie (30 minutes)

READ ALOUD

Ozzie shuffles down the middle of Water Street, past dark shop windows, eyes wide open and empty. The mist is thicker around him than anywhere else, as if it's leading him by the hand. He's murmuring something.

- Catching up to him takes a Bold card or Brave roll on the slippery cobblestones.
- Waking a sleepwalker suddenly is a bad idea. Steering him gently away from the water takes a Talk card or Kind roll. A hero can also simply take his hand and walk with him.
- Up close, the heroes hear what he's murmuring, over and over: "Tommy. Tommy, wait." Ozzie has no one named Tommy. **Campaign clue: The Sleepwalkers' Word.**
- At the harbor wall, the mist around Ozzie seems to whisper. Each hero within reach rolls Brave or Kind. On a low roll, they take 1 Fright and hear someone they love calling them from out in the fog.
- Then the bell tolls again, a long rolling peal, though it's long past midnight. Ozzie blinks, shivers, and wakes. The mist slides back into the sea.

READ ALOUD

"What on earth..." Ozzie looks down at his slippers, soaked through. "I was dreaming. Someone was calling. And then that blasted bell." He frowns. "That blasted, wonderful bell."

The heroes now know the truth: the bell isn't causing the sleepwalking. It's stopping it.

Scene 2: A frightened town (45 minutes)

By morning the story is everywhere. Mabel calls an emergency meeting and announces she'll have the belfry boarded up tonight, "to stop the ringing once and for all."

The heroes have one day. Lay out option cards:

- **Convince Mabel.** A Talk card or Kind roll, helped by Ozzie or Mrs. Lund telling what happened. On a 6, Mabel becomes a fierce ally. Otherwise, she agrees to wait one more night.
- **Find the clapper.** See below.
- **Learn about Josiah.** Ozzie digs out more records: Josiah was the town schoolteacher for 40 years, never missed a day, and was laughed at for the rest of his life after the night he rang the bell. With a 6, they find his old school register, with a note in the margin: "The fog speaks. The bell answers. Someone must remember."

Finding the clapper

There are two paths, and either works.

- **Kyle.** Back at the library, Kyle is a nervous wreck. If a hero plays Talk or makes a Kind roll, or simply sits near him and waits (Wait card), he confesses: he took the clapper and sold it to the antique shop. He begs them not to tell his uncle. The heroes decide whether to keep his secret; either way, he'll help put it right.

- **Shale's Curiosities.** With Look or a Clever roll anywhere on Water Street, a hero spots a huge iron clapper in the window of the antique shop, tagged "Colonial ironwork, \$1,200."

READ ALOUD

The shop is crowded with clocks, ship models, and glass floats. A thin man in a long gray coat looks up from polishing a brass sextant. "Oh," Gideon Shale says softly, when they point out the clapper. "Oh dear. I bought it in good faith, you understand. A young man brought it in." He lifts it down himself, with some effort. "Please, take it. Things like this belong where they're needed."

- Gideon asks nothing in return. With Look or a Clever roll, a hero notices that an old iron band, marked with a star in a circle, has been pried off the top of the clapper. Asked about it, Gideon says it was already missing. (It was not.)
- If the heroes are suspicious and roll a 6 on Look, they glimpse a charcoal rubbing of the same symbol pinned to a corkboard behind his counter, before he steps in front of it.

Scene 3: Josiah at dusk (30 minutes)

The heroes bring the clapper to the meeting house. Josiah's ghost is waiting.

READ ALOUD

The candle smell is strong in the belfry. The bell rope sways once, invitingly. And then he's there: a tall old man in a long black coat, stiff collar, spectacles on his nose, looking at the clapper in your arms. For a long moment, he doesn't move. Then he bows, slowly and formally, the way a teacher might to a class that has finally done its homework.

Josiah communicates through tolls and chalk. Lay out question cards the players can tap:

- "Are you Josiah Pell?" (1 toll)
- "Is the bell making people sleepwalk?" (2 tolls, sharp and indignant)
- "Is the bell waking them up?" (1 toll)
- "Is something in the fog?" (A long rolling peal. Then chalk: "THE GRAY.")
- "Can we help you?" (Chalk: "RING IT TRUE.")

A Listener's Heart Sense shows what he's feeling: "So tired. Two hundred years of being laughed at. But I will not leave my post."

The clapper is too heavy to hang tonight, and the leather strap that held it has rotted away. End the session with Josiah fading out, the heroes holding the clapper, and Mabel at the door with her hammer and boards, waiting to hear what they've decided.

Session 3: Ringing It True

The heroes rehang the clapper on a foggy night, ring the bell together with Josiah, and give him the honor he never had.

Scene 1: Getting ready (30 minutes)

If Mabel wasn't convinced last session, a quick Talk card or Kind roll persuades her now, especially once she sees the clapper. Then the heroes need two things. Lay out option cards:

- **A new strap.** The clapper hangs from a thick leather strap. Pearl's late husband was a saddle-maker, and his workshop is still in the inn's barn. A Fix roll makes a strap; a Tinkerer can Rig It instead.
- **A way to lift it.** The clapper weighs 80 pounds. Options: rope and a pulley (Fix), a team carry up the ladder (Brave, with Help from everyone), or an ally like Dunk or Tibbs, if the heroes have met them.
- **Kyle's help.** If Kyle confessed, he shows up with tools and an apology. He's strong and helps with any roll to lift or hang the clapper.

Scene 2: Fog in the belfry (45 minutes)

They work as the sun sets, and the fog comes early.

READ ALOUD

Halfway through bolting the clapper in place, the light goes strange. The windows have gone white. Fog is pouring up Water Street like milk, thicker than any you've seen, and it's very, very quiet.

- Hanging the clapper takes a Fix card or Clever roll, plus Brave rolls to hold it steady. Each "Not yet" lets the fog creep higher: up the meeting house steps, under the door, curling up the ladder.
- **The whisper.** From below, a voice calls up the ladder, sounding exactly like Ada: "Come down, dears. It's cold up there. Come down and rest." Ada is at home. Each hero rolls Brave or Kind; on a low roll they take 1 Fright and feel a strong pull to climb down. A teammate's Help card snaps them out of it.

- Josiah's candle glow appears beside whoever is most frightened. Any hero who looks at him regains 1 Nerve.

Scene 3: Ringing it true (20 minutes)

With the clapper hung, the heroes grab the bell rope. Ringing the bell properly takes one big Brave roll, with every hero and ally adding a die.

READ ALOUD

You pull. The rope fights you, stiff with two centuries of cold. You pull again, and then you feel it: another pair of hands on the rope above yours, old and strong and sure. The bell swings. And for the first time in months, it rings with a real iron voice, so loud it rattles your teeth.

- Each toll pushes the fog back. With each one, describe it rolling away: off the steps, down Water Street, past the harbor wall, out to sea.
- All over town, lights come on in windows. People wake up and look outside.
- On “Not yet,” the fog doesn’t retreat until the second try, and each hero takes 1 Fright first. The bell always rings in the end.

Scene 4: Josiah's honor (20 minutes)

The next day, the heroes can make things right for Josiah. Lay out option cards; they can do any or all:

- **A proper stone.** Ada and Mabel arrange a real headstone for the corner of the burying ground. The heroes choose the words (writing them on a card is perfect): something like “Josiah Pell, Teacher and Bell-Ringer. He rang all night, and the town slept safe.”
- **A new rhyme.** The heroes write a new verse to replace the mocking one, and Jess (or Ozzie) teaches it to the town's kids.
- **Kyle's choice.** Kyle asks Mabel if he can learn to ring the bell properly. Mabel, after a long sniff, says yes.

READ ALOUD

That night at midnight, the bell rings once, softly, and the smell of pipe tobacco drifts through the open windows of Water Street. Then it's quiet, and stays quiet. Up in the belfry, a last line of chalk has appeared: “THANK YOU. KEEP WATCH.”

Josiah is at rest, but he hasn't fully left his post. On foggy nights, the bell rope sometimes sways, just slightly, as if someone is checking that it's still there. (In the campaign finale, he returns to ring alongside the heroes.)

Campaign clues in this mystery

- ☐ **The Second Watch:** the bell's inscription (Session 1, Scene 2)
- ☐ **Josiah's Warning:** the chalk message (Session 1, Scene 4)
- ☐ **The Sleepwalkers' Word:** "Tommy" (Session 2, Scene 1)

The missing iron band and the rubbing in Gideon's shop are bonus hints, not required clues.

Keepsake moments

- **Compass:** spins wildly whenever the fog is near, settling only when the bell rings.
- **Pocketknife:** the perfect tool to cut and punch the new leather strap.
- **Sketchbook:** a hero's drawing of the belfry shows a tall figure that wasn't there when they drew it.
- **Lucky stone:** through the hole, the fog looks like reaching hands.
- **Film camera:** a photo of the bell shows the old iron band still on the clapper, back in July.
- **Silver whistle:** Josiah answers it with a single soft toll.

Spotlight Checklist

Glance at this between sessions to make sure each hero gets a moment to shine, whatever their role.

STAT OR ROLE	MOMENTS IN THIS MYSTERY
Brave	Climbing the belfry ladder; following Ozzie into the fog; hauling on the frozen bell rope
Clever	Spotting the scratches and Kyle's rusty hands; tracking the clapper to Shale's; hanging the clapper
Kind	Hearing Mrs. Lund's story; Kyle's confession; earning Josiah's trust
Seeker	Sharp Eyes spots the missing iron band on the clapper
Defender	Stand Firm when the fog whispers in Ada's voice, or steps between Ozzie and the water
Listener	Heart Sense on Josiah, or on Ozzie's dream as he sleepwalks
Tinkerer	Rig It for the new leather strap, or a pulley to lift the clapper
Wanderer	Lucky Break on the big team roll to ring the bell