



FAMILIAR / A BEGINNER ADVENTURE

The Bell of Hollow Keep

Start Here

An old bell rings in an empty keep. Its captain still guards soldiers who died forty years ago. Can the heroes bring him the orders that never arrived?

For: four level-4 characters, with full resources; beginning DMs and players, ages 10-12+. **Time:** 90-120 minutes. This is an independent adventure from Monsters of the Lantern Vale.

Bring: character sheets, dice, pencils, tokens and three counters for the captain's release conditions. Use the 2014 fifth-edition rules and the clearly labeled ghost variant in this booklet. Players need their characters' normal abilities.

Prepare in ten minutes: read page 3, the three release conditions on page 9, and the ghost rules on pages 11-12. Put the two messages on page 14 aside until discovered. The map is for the DM; show only places the heroes can see. Page 15 is Tamsin's NPC sheet.

Before play: mention a ghost and brief magical control. Ask whether these are comfortable themes. If possession is unwelcome, agree to omit that ability before the session; use the ghost's ordinary attack instead. Never spring a change in comfort expectations on a player.

Your job: make clues available, answer questions about the surroundings, and follow the players' ideas. Failed rolls leave a peaceful release available. Keep violence non-graphic; allow breaks.

Basic loop: describe what the heroes perceive; ask what they do; roll only for an uncertain consequence; describe the result and repeat. Before the first roll, use page 16 to explain checks, saves, advantage and combat.

DM Introduction

Captain Edrin Vale held Hollow Keep while three soldiers-Anwen, Dorr and Pell-helped thirty-two villagers escape. A courier carrying authorized withdrawal orders died beneath a fallen rack. Vale never learned he could stand down.

Recently, smith Orren Pike stole the bell's clapper. He returned it after the haunting began. The ghost briefly possessed him; that episode is over. Orren is himself now and freely seeks help. His apprentice Tamsin accompanies the heroes. Nobody is on a hidden death timer.

Opening: Orren asks for help at his smithy. He remembers the words "names," "orders" and "stand down." Tamsin holds the road wardens' 80 gp reward for ending the haunting. They lend a lantern, fifty feet of rope, tools and the magical watch sword described on page 13.

Release: show and read the authentic order to Vale; name Anwen, Dorr and Pell and report the thirty-two villagers safe; then sound one long bell. The first two acts can occur in either order; the bell must be last. Each takes an action in combat, no check. Mark completed conditions openly.

Suggested pacing: smithy and approach, 15 minutes; court and captain, 20; dispatch recovery, 20; release or confrontation, 25-45; ending, 10. A direct peaceful solution can finish earlier. Do not add threats to consume time.

Initial state: Vale waits upstairs in H4. The clapper is already restored. The rope works on either floor. The dispatch is in H3; a signed second copy in the desk prevents one damaged or missed prop from ending the adventure.



Adventure Map

- 1: H1 Bridge. Broken crossing above a dry ditch. A southern detour reaches the court.
- 2: H2 Muster court. Memorial names and evacuation record; exits to H3, H4 and H5.
- 3: H3 Records room. Fallen rack and desk. Enter from the court.



Map Key

4: H4 Bell tower. Vale waits upstairs, fifteen feet above the ground floor. Bell rope on both levels.

5: H5 Stores. Plank and tools; southern wall gap provides another entrance or retreat.

DM map. Colored room boundaries represent the walls shown. Page 13 gives authoritative distances, doors and elevation; the painted grid is illustrative. Reveal records when found.

Scene 1: The Returned Clapper

Bridge options

Bridge: fifteen feet long, five wide; ten-foot-deep ditch, eastern ten feet missing. Jump distance equals Strength score in feet after ten feet of run-up, half without; each foot uses movement. Clearing the gap needs no roll. Use H5's plank or safe detour (page 13). Homebrew risky crossing: DC 12 Dexterity save; success reaches the far side, failure falls for 1d6. Climb out without rolling.



An armored spirit holds the ruined bell tower

Read-Aloud

Orren sets down his hammer. "I put it back. But the bell still rings." Tamsin rolls up her tools. "Then we find out why."

DM Guidance: Explain that Orren is no longer possessed. Offer the reward, loans and Tamsin's help. She does not command the expedition.

Choices: Question Orren; inspect the watch sword; take the main bridge or southern route into the keep.

If Things Go Wrong: A suspicious party can leave Orren safely at the smithy. Tamsin still shares his remembered words.

Next: Present the bridge and its visible alternatives before anyone attempts a crossing.

Scene 2: Names in the Courtyard

Read-Aloud

A stone tablet faces an empty parade ground. Three names remain legible beneath the moss. Above, a pale officer asks, "Who relieves us?"

DM Guidance: The tablet names Anwen, Dorr and Pell, records thirty-two villagers evacuated, and says one long bell signals stand-down. Give that handout without a History check. Vale watches from H4's upper window.

Choices: Speak respectfully; ask about his orders; search the records room. A courteous request, a claim to carry orders, or showing an official seal gains access. Vale expects proof, but does not attack merely because the heroes cannot yet provide it.

If Things Go Wrong: An insult earns a warning. Deliberately striking him or ringing prank alarms begins combat. If the tablet is missed, Tamsin points it out; the dispatch also records its essential information.

Next: Investigate H3, or present evidence already found. Players may visit the stores or tower first. Follow their route; discovered clues remain available.

Three counters

ORDER: authentic dispatch shown and read within thirty feet, while Vale can hear and see the presenter.

NAMES: name all three soldiers and report thirty-two villagers safe, within the same hearing and sight conditions.

BELL: one long ring after both other counters are marked.

Each is one action, no roll. Damage does not erase progress. Complete procedure: page 9.

Scene 3: The Unread Orders

Read the room

Only the court door admits solid creatures into H3. The ghost can pass through walls using its trait. The rack is an obstacle, not a monster or timed trap.

A forged order

Present false orders as one action: DC 13 Charisma (Deception) pauses Vale's attacks until your next turn starts. A forgery never completes ORDER. Afterward resume his prior behavior; forgery alone causes no new hostility. Failure leaves genuine evidence available.

Read-Aloud

A wooden rack slants across the records-room floor. Beneath it lies a courier's satchel. A corner of sealed paper protrudes from the torn flap.

DM Guidance: The desk supplies paper and charcoal; writing false orders takes one minute outside combat. The rack weighs two hundred pounds. The satchel contains the genuine withdrawal order. A signed second copy is in the desk drawer; looking there finds it without a roll.

Choices: Use the fifteen-foot plank from H5 as a lever; two people lift safely without a check. An unsupported lift needs DC 12 Strength (Athletics); suitable Help grants advantage. Cut the satchel free carefully, or use Mage Hand to draw out the exposed paper.

If Things Go Wrong: A failed unsupported lift deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage to the lifter and tears the strap. The paper becomes reachable; it is not destroyed. Do not lock the mystery behind another roll.

Next: Give the dispatch handout. Tamsin can read it if asked, leaving the heroes to choose how and when to approach the captain. Vale stays in his current position; no surprise combat begins just because the order was found.

Finale

Read-Aloud

The captain's hand rests on the bell rope.
"My soldiers held these ruined walls. Tell me their watch meant something."

DM Guidance: Read this only when Vale waits beside the rope. If he moved or is hostile, describe his current position and actions. If possessing someone, speak his question through that host; no visible ghost holds the rope. If already gone, use the ending. Mark ORDER when an authentic order is shown and read within thirty feet with hearing and sight. Mark NAMES when the three soldiers and thirty-two safe villagers are reported under those conditions. Each takes one action in combat; either can come first.

Choices: Complete both, then spend an action sounding one long bell from either floor. It is audible throughout the keep. All three conditions release Vale permanently, end possession and fade the spirit, without a check. Alternatively, reduce the ghost to 0 HP for permanent dispersal.

If Things Go Wrong: An early bell is merely premature; repeat it after the first two acts. Combat never resets accepted proof. If Vale is turned beyond the walls, wait for his return to complete unheard words. Silence prevents speech or ringing within its area, but preserves earlier progress.

Next: Apply the ending actually earned. If the party retreats, the accepted conditions remain completed for a later return.

During a fight

Showing and reading a genuine dispatch also pauses Vale's attacks until the start of that presenter's next turn. This pause works once per genuine copy; completing ORDER remains permanent.

One attack per turn: +5 to hit, reach five feet; 3d6+3 necrotic. Ghost AC 11, HP 54. Read resistances before damage. Possession is limited to once per session; pages 11-12 explain it.

Endings and Rewards

Peaceful release: Vale recognizes that his soldiers saved their neighbors. He grants the party the watch sword before fading. The bell falls quiet. Tamsin pays the promised 80 gp to the party, twenty each for four heroes.

Dispersal by combat: reducing Vale to 0 HP ends this haunting permanently. This adventure's variant does not reform tomorrow. Pay the same 80 gp. The wardens continue lending the watch sword for local rescues; it cannot be sold as the party's property.

Retreat: H1's detour and H5's southern gap remain available. Vale voluntarily stops pursuit at the keep boundary and releases a possessed host there. Unfinished business remains, but nobody secretly becomes a new victim offscreen. Completed release conditions stay marked. Payment waits until the haunting ends.

Experience: give each hero a flat 400 XP for ending the haunting by either route. This replaces monster XP; do not add both. For milestone play, record one completed adventure and follow the group's existing advancement agreement.

Loans: return the lantern, rope and tools. Archive papers belong to the keep, not to the party's treasure inventory. The watch sword's ownership depends on the ending above; its actual rules are on page 13.

Describe the consequence: if the spirit is released, Tamsin reads the three names aloud once more before leaving. After combat, she still records them for the wardens. Orren can admit his theft and begin making amends. Do not require forgiving him to collect the reward.

When the haunting ends, read:

Closing Read-Aloud: At the smithy, Orren lowers his hammer. Tamsin sets down the expedition's tools. Hollow Keep's bell is finally quiet. What will you tell the wardens about the soldiers' watch?

The keep may later shelter travelers; no sequel is needed.

Running the Adventure

Possession - bounded homebrew procedure

Vale can attempt possession only once per session, using an action on a humanoid he sees within five feet. The target makes a DC 13 Charisma save. On success nothing happens; the attempt is spent. On failure remove the ghost's token and keep its HP separately.

The host remains aware and chooses its actions, but must move toward or remain at a watch post: H2's tablet, H4's bell rope on either floor, or H5's southern gap. The player chooses a post within thirty feet by a traversable route; if none qualifies, stay put. It cannot attack or cast spells; it can Dodge, Help, speak or use objects. It repeats the save at the end of each turn. An ally within five feet can spend an action calling its name, granting advantage on its next repeat save before that ally's next turn.

The ghost has no separate movement, actions, bonus actions or reactions inside a host. Keep its initiative. At the start of its own turn it may voluntarily end possession, then move and act normally; it never gains an extra turn.

Possession ends after one minute, when the host reaches 0 HP, when Vale is turned, when an effect ends possession, at the keep boundary, or when the oath is resolved. The ghost emerges in the nearest empty space within five feet unless permanently released.

Attacks on a host harm the host, not the ghost. While inside, only Turn Undead or effects that end possession can target the ghost. Protection from Evil and Good prevents possession. A successful Turn Undead ends possession and then applies its ordinary fleeing rules; forced flight may carry Vale beyond the boundary.

A possessed player's decisions still matter. Point out speech, Help, the repeat save and the ally's support action. Tamsin never volunteers as a possession target.

Creature Reference

Captain Edrin Vale - ghost variant

Medium undead. Homebrew variant of the 2014 ghost; no certified challenge rating. AC 11; HP 54; speed 0, fly 40 feet (hover). STR 7 (-2), DEX 13 (+1), CON 10 (+0), INT 12 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 17 (+3). Wisdom saves +4, Perception +4, passive 14; darkvision 60 feet; Common and Dwarvish. Other saves use the ability modifier.

Damage resistances: acid, fire, lightning, thunder, and bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks. Halve damage of those types.

Damage immunities: cold, necrotic and poison. **Condition immunities:** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone and restrained.

Incorporeal Movement: moves through creatures and objects as difficult terrain. Ending a turn inside an object deals 1d10 force damage to him. Do not have him hide inside stone for an untargetable attack cycle. This variant has no Etherealness or Horrifying Visage and causes no aging.

Withering Touch (action): melee weapon attack +5 to hit, reach five feet, one target; 3d6+3 necrotic damage. One attack; no Multiattack, legendary actions or lair actions.

Possession (action): once per session; use page 11 in full. On becoming hostile, he tries it against a nearby unprotected humanoid, then uses Touch on subsequent turns while outside a host. Never attack a fallen character.

Morale: while hostile, fight until released or at 0 HP; stop at the keep boundary (page 10).

Scaling (homebrew): three level-4 heroes: 40 HP and Touch 2d6+3. Five: 70 HP, normal Touch. Keep the same release conditions and single possession attempt. Do not add another ghost.

People and Places

Orren Pike: smith who stole, then returned, the clapper. Ashamed and frightened, now freely himself. He knows "names, orders, stand down." Patient listening also recalls an evacuation. Insight is unnecessary to obtain help. He stays at the smithy; if invited, he waits outside the keep.

Tamsin: adult apprentice with a long braid and tool roll. Wants Orren safe, asks useful practical questions. She points out missed clues without choosing the heroes' plan. Statistics: page 15.

Captain Vale: duty has outlasted memory. Speak in short military questions. Respect gains time to investigate; genuine proof changes his behavior. He wants relief for his soldiers, not another sacrifice.

Watch sword

Magic longsword; no attack or damage bonus, no attunement. Use Strength and normal weapon proficiency: 1d8 slashing one-handed or 1d10 two-handed, plus Strength modifier. Its attacks count as magical against the ghost's resistance. "I keep the road," written on the scabbard, makes it glow; this reveals its magic without an identification roll. The glow provides no mechanical lighting benefit. No charges or other powers. Initial ownership is Orren's trust; final ownership is on page 10.

Keep geography

H1's safe southern detour takes thirty feet of walking plus ten feet of climbing. H2 is a forty-foot-square court. H3 is 25 by 20 feet; H4 is 20 by 20; H5 is 20 by 40. Unlocked doors link each to H2. H4's stair costs thirty feet of movement to its upper floor, fifteen feet high. Its window lever opens a shutter, not a secret passage. H5's southern ten-foot gap offers an alternate exit. The tower rope reaches both floors; ringing it does not require climbing upstairs.

Player Handout

Give the tablet text in the court and the dispatch only after it is found. Cover the second message until then. Both are player-safe once discovered.

Memorial tablet

ANWEN. DORR. PELL.

Their watch held while thirty-two neighbors reached the road.

One long bell for stand-down.

Let their names be spoken when the watch is relieved.

Commander's dispatch

Captain Edrin Vale,

The evacuation is complete. Thirty-two villagers are safe beyond the south road. Your soldiers have fulfilled their duty. You are authorized to withdraw from Hollow Keep and stand down your watch.

Commander Ilyra Senn

Reverse: Anwen, Dorr, Pell. Sound one long bell after the order is acknowledged.

At the table

You may ask the DM to repeat a name, explain what your character notices, or point out a route on the map. Remembering a fictional name is not a test for the player. Write down clues together.

Explain what you hope to change before deciding whether to roll. A respectful conversation, a real document and a completed duty can matter more than a weapon. You can leave the keep and return with a different plan.

Character Sheet

Profile

Tamsin. Adult human apprentice. Friendly NPC; simplified homebrew support statistics. AC 12, HP 9, speed 30 feet. She follows the party's safe plan and retreats to H5 if injured.

Abilities

Ability	Score	Bonus
STR	10	+0
DEX	10	+0
CON	10	+0
INT	10	+0
WIS	10	+0
CHA	10	+0

Initiative +0; saves +0; no additional proficiencies.

Actions

Move and take one action: Dodge, Help with a reachable suitable task, read a document, ring the bell or operate a mechanism. No attacks. She can call a possessed hero's name using the support action on page 11. She never volunteers for possession.

Equipment

Tool roll and the 80 gp reward purse. The lantern, rope and sword are party loans, not duplicate gear carried by Tamsin.

Roleplaying

"Let's read what it actually says." Wants her mentor safe and the mystery settled. Knows Orren returned the clapper. Offers a missed clue or an extra pair of hands; lets the heroes make the final decision.



Quick Reference

Recovery and page finder

At 0 HP: heroes use normal 2014 unconsciousness and death saves. At turn start, 10+ on d20 is a success. Three successes stabilize; three failures kill. Natural 1 counts two failures; natural 20 restores 1 HP. Healing restores consciousness. Damage at 0 causes a failure, two on a critical hit; massive damage can kill outright. Vale does not attack fallen characters.

Find it: bridge, page 6; tablet, 7; order, 8; release, 9; endings, 10; possession, 11; ghost, 12; sword and geography, 13; messages, 14; Tamsin, 15.

Help (action): aid one reachable ally's ability check on a task you could attempt; its next check before your next turn has advantage. Or distract an enemy within five feet; your chosen ally's first attack against it before your next turn has advantage.

Dodge: until your next turn, attacks by enemies you see have disadvantage; your Dexterity saves have advantage. Incapacitation or speed 0 ends it.

Checks and saves: roll d20 plus the appropriate check or saving-throw bonus; meet the difficulty class (DC). Advantage means two d20s, keeping the higher; disadvantage keeps the lower. Do not roll to receive an essential clue when the page says it is freely available.

Combat: roll initiative using d20 plus Dexterity modifier. Take turns in order; move and take one action. Extra actions require a character feature. An attack meets or beats Armor Class (AC), then deals its listed damage. Resistance halves relevant damage; immunity prevents it. The watch sword counts as magical but adds no bonus.

Rules and credits: 2014 fifth edition. Ghost traits and underlying rules derive from the System Reference Document 5.1 by Wizards of the Coast LLC, SRD 5.1, licensed under CC BY 4.0, CC BY 4.0. The bounded ghost, release, sword and support statistics are homebrew. Adapted from *Monsters of the Lantern Vale*. Not an official Wizards of the Coast product.