

Hook and context



SCÉNARIO FLASH SHADOWDARK

The Well of Dead Voices

Shadowdark RPG · Level 1-3 · 2-3 hours · English

The dead tell the truth. What imitates them wants more.

Valbreche is a stone village at the end of a road with no trade, between cold peat and sickly orchards. At the center of the Carroi, an old well sealed for nineteen years has begun to speak again. Not with vague moans, but with the exact voices of the village dead. People recognize the old miller, the drowned guard, the child who fell from the cliff. They all murmur low, precise, shameful things.

For three nights now, no one sleeps with the door open. Dogs back away from the Carroi. At dusk, the families of the dead gather around the curb, hoping for an apology, a name, one final truth. The mayor wants it stopped before the village tears itself apart. The old keeper of the well wants someone to finally go down. Something at the bottom would rather everyone keep listening.

- Recommended level: 1-3
- Players: 3-5
- Estimated time: 2-3 hours
- Tone: familiar ghosts, local guilt, black water, intimate horror
- Play promise: closed-village investigation, short dangerous descent, truths that cost something, morally filthy ending

What the villagers say

- Tomas's dead voice said in public: "Mayor, your father tied my hands before the fall."
- Dead Elvine calls Bastien the potter by his pet name every night, first tenderly, then in anger.
- The well first spoke at the exact hour its mouth had been sealed nineteen years earlier.
- Every secret confessed at the curb makes the whispers clearer for one hour.

Immediate hooks

Choose or roll 1d4.

1. Mayor Odran Veys promises the PCs 80 gp if they silence the well before dawn and avoid any scandal.
2. Yselle the keeper slips the PCs a pouch of gray salt and whispers: "Do not trust the first voice that calls you by name."
3. Bastien Craye the potter asks to be tied up before nightfall; his mouth speaks with his dead wife's voice whenever he hears running water.
4. One PC recognizes an impossible voice: that of a dead person not from Valbreche, yet speaking to them from the well all the same.

The well and its mechanics

Truth of the place

Nineteen years ago, during a season of hunger, the healer Meriane of the Reeds accused the mayor's father and two notables of letting Tomas the guard die to hide a grain smuggling scheme. The village, already close to a riot, called her a witch. They bound her wrists and threw her body to the bottom of the well along with the bones of several poor dead they did not want buried in consecrated ground. Yselle witnessed it and later helped seal the well, convinced it held above all the shame of the living.

Meriane is truly there, but she is not alone. The black water, nameless bones, final words, and piled-up lies have formed the Listener Below, a presence that borrows the voices of the dead to draw out more confessions. The more true things the village says beside the well, the more the creature learns how to think like a human.

Psychological pressure rule

Each time a PC spends a full round at the lip of the well, descends into the shaft, or willingly listens to a personal whisper, they must pass a DC 11 WIS check.

- Success: they keep their clarity and may ask one short question of the nearest voice.
- Failure: they gain 1 echo mark.
- At 2 echo marks: the PC blurts out an embarrassing truth during the first tense conversation they have with an NPC.
- At 3 echo marks: during the next night, their voice sleeps somewhere other than their mouth; loved ones hear them answering someone invisible.
- Freely confessing a sincere truth at the lip of the well removes 1 echo mark, but still feeds the Listener.

Descending into the well

The stone cover is already ajar. A fresh rope does not hold long; the damp makes it slick within minutes.

- Careful descent: DC 12 DEX check if the PCs use a rope or the old handholds. On a failure, they fall for 1d6 damage and make a great noise.
- Lamp and torch: any handheld light below first attracts one precise voice from the past, then the Listener if the PCs linger.
- Gray salt, holy water, or a sincere prayer: a timely use grants advantage on the next DC 11 WIS check against the whispers.

Areas of the well

1. Carroi curb

Cold stone, black moss, a broken bucket hanging halfway up as if someone had left it mid-motion. Inside lie a human tooth and a rotten ribbon.

- Studying the stones reveals grooves where iron nails were ripped out recently.
- The mayor's official seal is carved into one of the sealing slabs.
- A gentle voice may lure a PC to lean too far; DC 11 DEX check or they drop whatever they were holding.

2. Shaft of rotted ropes

The shaft sinks into cellar-damp air. Funerary niches cut into the stone hold bone fragments, bucket rings, and old bound cloth.

- Careful search: 18 gp, a copper rosary, and Meriane's bound wrist bones in a low niche.

- If someone takes the bones without naming them aloud, a rumble stirs the water below and everyone must immediately attempt a DC 11 WIS check.

- A loose stone hides the register of omitted dead: Tomas, Meriane, three nameless infants, and two elders buried without a bell.

3. Basin of drowned names

The bottom widens into a round chamber, black water up to the knees, walls covered in gouges where names have been repeated until the stone is scarred. At the center floats a mass of hair, algae, and half-formed faces: the Listener Below. Behind it, Meriane's outline remains trapped between two roots of collapsed masonry.

- Speaking to Meriane first reveals the full truth: she only wants her bones raised, named, and buried outside the well.
- Fighting in the water forces a DC 10 DEX check after each melee attack; failure: fall, soaked torch, or weapon lost until next round.
- To calm the place without battle, 3 acts are needed: name Meriane, remove her bones from the shaft, and force the mayor or another guilty party to confess in public.

NPCs, creatures, and items

Key NPCs

- Odran Veys, mayor of Valbreche: well dressed, exhausted, authoritative only while the crowd is watching. Motivation: smother the scandal before the village turns on his family. Secret: he found the old iron nails three days ago and tried to strengthen the seal alone, which woke the well.
- Yselle the keeper of the well: thin old woman, almost deaf in one ear, fingers blackened by iron. Motivation: finally give proper names to the forgotten dead. Secret: she kept the old register and knows Meriane was not innocent of all magic, just not of the murder blamed on her.
- Bastien Craye, possessed villager: broad-shouldered potter, hands split by clay, vacant stare at dusk. Motivation: protect his daughter and hear his wife Elvine one last time. Secret: he has already promised the voice in the well to "open the way" if it gave him a true farewell.
- Meriane of the Reeds, spectral presence: drowned woman's shape, wrists bound, calm voice when called by name. Motivation: obtain burial and truth. Secret: if the PCs lie to protect the mayor, she falls silent and lets the Listener bargain in her place.

Shadowdark creatures

- Bastien Craye, possessed mouthpiece: AC 12, HP 10, MV near, STR 14, DEX 10, CON 13, INT 8, WIS 9, CHA 7, ATK potter's hammer +3 (1d6), Morale 7. Borrowed voice: in round 1, one nearby creature must pass a DC 11 WIS check or hesitate until the end of its next turn, unable to attack Bastien. Striking him with nonlethal damage or showing him a memory of Elvine immediately grants him another DC 11 WIS check to regain control.
- The Listener Below: AC 14, HP 22, MV near, swim near, STR 13, DEX 14, CON 16, INT 11, WIS 15, CHA 16, ATK weed-hands +4 (1d6) or voice siphon +4 (1d8), Morale 10. Voice siphon: on a hit, the target must pass a DC 12 WIS check or gain 1 extra echo mark. Stolen choir: once per round, the Listener can speak with the voice of a beloved dead; one nearby creature must pass a DC 13 WIS check or be unable to attack it this round. Fed by truths: each sincere confession made in its presence restores 3 HP to it, up to its maximum.

Magic items

- Bucket of the Last Names: an old bucket banded in copper, dry outside, always wet within. Once per day, lowered into a well, grave, or funerary cistern, it lets the user hear one dead person's answer to a single question. At the next sunrise, its bearer must pass a DC 11 WIS check or reveal aloud a secret they had kept.
- Yselle's Vigil Nail: a large blackened iron nail. Driven into a threshold, coffin plank, or the curb of a well, it prevents a spirit, possession, or supernatural voice from crossing that boundary until the next sunset. When pulled free, its bearer hears for 1 round the last word of the nearest corpse.

Treasure and reward

- The mayor pays the promised 80 gp only if the well stops speaking or if someone is officially named as responsible.
- The register of omitted dead is worth little in coin, but much in influence: any relative of the six forgotten names owes the PCs a grave favor if given the page.

Climax, endings, and atmosphere table

Running the final scene

The best ending does not only require defeating the Listener. The PCs must choose what price the village is willing to pay for truth.

If the PCs fight first, the Listener tries to separate them by using intimate voices. It would rather corrupt one living listener to keep watch in its place than kill quickly.

If the PCs negotiate, it always offers the same bargain: one name for another, one secret for silence, one presence below for peace above.

Possible endings

- Liberation: the PCs raise Meriane's bones, name them before the village, and force Odran or another guilty person to confess. Meriane finally fades. The Listener collapses into foul water and dead hair. Valbreche remains marked, but the well falls silent.
- Corruption: the PCs offer the Listener a new pact. In exchange for a weighty secret, an innocent victim, or the register itself, the creature ends its whispers for a few months. One PC may gain the Bucket of the Last Names without a fight, but their own voice will now sometimes mingle with those of the well.
- Sacrifice: Bastien, Odran, Yselle, or even a PC agrees to remain as "keeper below," chain on wrist or nail driven into the stone, to contain the Listener through endless vigil. The village is saved at once, but the mouth of the well never truly heals.
- Dirty escape: the PCs kill Bastien, lie to the crowd, or flee with the items without dealing with Meriane. The well falls silent for one night only, then begins again with a new voice: that of someone in the village who is still alive.

1d6 table - Whispers at the lip of the well

1. "I did not fall. They held me under."
2. "The mayor already knows your name."
3. "Speak the truth and I will return mine."
4. "She is still there, wrists bound, beneath your boots."
5. "Do not look at the water when it recognizes you."
6. "That is not your dead one speaking to you. Not yet."

GM aid

- Do not play the village as a mad mob, but as a tired community that prefers a stable lie to a truth that breaks houses.
- Let the voices speak true things; the doubt should come from the speaker's intent, not from the raw content.
- If the group is cautious or weak, let Meriane give one extra clue before the Listener attacks.
- If the PCs want to bury the whole affair, show the moral cost clearly: the well keeps memory even when the living stay silent.

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- Compatible with Shadowdark.
- Independent third-party product designed for Shadowdark RPG, with no official affiliation with The Arcane Library.
- MythCore publication, monthly FREE scenario in an ORC-compatible line.

Credits

- Design and text: MythCore

- Editorial line: Flash Shadowdark Scenarios

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