

Title and Hook



SCÉNARIO FLASH SHADOWDARK

The Market of Dead Lanterns

shadowdark · Level 1-3 · 2-3 hours · English

Where night is bought with pieces of yourself.

For two nights now, folk in Coldstump have awakened without their shadows. Their dogs refuse to follow them, and the children swear they hear a bell deep in Hollowood after sundown. An old charcoal-burners' track now leads to a market that appears on no map.

The Market of Dead Lanterns opens when the fog chokes the roads. The stalls sell memories, oaths, and captive shadows. The Black Crier wants to buy the darkness belonging to the entire hamlet in exchange for one season of perfect harvests. If no one stops him before closing, Coldstump will become a pale, obedient village.

- Recommended level: 1-3
- Players: 3-5
- Estimated time: 2-3 hours
- Tone: dead forest, cursed trade, old-school tension, stark black and white
- Play promise: social and hostile mini-dungeon, real bargaining, a brutal or cunning resolution

Immediate hooks

Choose or roll 1d4.

1. The miller offers 80 gp if the PCs bring back her son's shadow before dawn.
2. A PC wakes to find a black-iron token in their boot, engraved with their own name shortened.
3. The reeve wants to accept the market's pact; someone close to him begs the PCs to stop it.
4. A local thief vanished near Hollowood after swearing she would go "buy a second chance."

Closing clock

For every 30 minutes of delay, rest, or after each failed bargain, advance the clock by one step.

- Step 1: the black bells ring; all merchants begin one step more hostile in their reactions.
- Step 2: 1d2 tallow hounds enter area 3 or 4.
- Step 3: one captive shadow is sold; the matching victim suffers disadvantage on their next STR or DEX check until it is recovered.
- Step 4: the Black Crier tries to carry off the Great Lantern. Closing the market without a fight becomes very difficult.

The Dungeon Site

Read aloud

The trail narrows between gray trunks. Ahead, a light, almost cheerful ringing repeats in the fog. Then the trees open onto a clearing that is too neat: a fairground gate eaten by soot, lanterns hanging without flame, silent stalls, and still figures behind black cloth. Nothing smells alive. Even the smoke seems to have been sold.

Truth of the place

Before the War of Ashes, this clearing served as a market for the charcoal-burners. When a tax collector had debtors hanged there, the survivors burned the fair down with him still inside. Since then, a nighttime copy of the old market returns on certain foggy evenings, fed by regret and debt. The Black Crier is neither an ordinary ghost nor a learned demon; he is the habit of barter made predatory.

Map of the market

- 1. Gate of the Black Bells: an arch of scorched beams, ash pennants, first toll.
- 2. Stalls of Stitched Faces: rows of counters where names, secrets, and stolen features are sold.
- 3. Token Well: the market's trading heart, with the common cash box, captive shadows, and animal guards.
- 4. Inn of the Last Flame: a resting hall that seems safe, possible allies, crucial information.
- 5. Hall of the Black Crier: auction platform, Great Lantern, final scene.

1. Gate of the Black Bells

Iron bells hang from the crossbeams. Anyone who passes without hanging a token, a coin, or a personal item on the gate sets the whole thing ringing.

- Toll: pay 1 gp, offer a minor item, or tell a shameful memory aloud to enter without alarm.
- Forcing your way through draws 1d4 shadow porters from the trees.
- Search: beneath the mud lie 9 gp, a charcoal-burner's knife, and a black-iron token marked "two passages."

2. Stalls of Stitched Faces

Cloth masks, blackened portraits, teeth in shallow dishes. The merchants have no visible faces; only their hands move.

- Buying information costs 1 black-iron token or one true personal detail.
- The merchants know the Great Lantern keeps the market open, and that returning three tokens to the Well can undo a sale already underway.
- Visible loot: 24 gp in loose coin, three vials of night ink worth 10 gp each, but stealing here turns all prices hostile.

3. Token Well

A stone-lined well, raised grate, wet chain. At the bottom float shadows rolled up like soaked cloth. Two tallow hounds prowl among payment chests.

- Falling into the well deals 1d6 damage and snuffs all unprotected light.

- The chain can haul up one bundle of captive shadow if someone works the crank for 1 full round.
- Common cash box: 37 gp, 11 black-iron tokens, a cold brass key.

4. Inn of the Last Flame

Tables set for absent customers, bowls of black soup, hearth covered by a copper bell hood. Here stays Ash Mother, the only figure in the market still capable of pity.

- If the PCs speak without arrogance, Ash Mother explains how to close the place: return three tokens to the Well, silence the Crier's bell, then light the Great Lantern with a living flame.
- The cold-brass key opens her cupboard: 18 gp, a flask of holy oil, and the Lantern of Lost Steps.
- A short rest is possible here; at step 3 or higher, Ash Mother demands a future service or 1 gp per PC.

5. Hall of the Black Crier

Platform of dry wood, tiers of stumps, hanging bell rope, and above it all a vast empty lantern where the shadows already sold spin in circles.

- Any bargain sealed here is difficult to break as long as the bell rings.
- Cutting the Great Lantern's rope makes it crash down; any nearby creature suffers 1d8 damage and the market reels for 1 round.

NPCs, Monsters, and Treasure

Factions and encounters

- Shadow porters: gaunt servants who carry purchases away and hunt thieves. They fear bright light.
- Ash Mother: former innkeeper who died in the fire. Motivation: to finally see the market close for good.
- Lina Varec: thief hiding in the inn or locked in the Hall depending on the clock. She stole three tokens and can lead the PCs to the Well.
- Faceless customers: peasants and sergeants who came to trade too dearly. They flee if the market collapses.

Shadowdark creatures

- Shadow porter: AC 12, HP 6, MV near, ATK soot sickle +2 (1d4). Morale 7. Lantern bearer: on a successful attack, the target must pass a DC 11 DEX check or drop the light source they are carrying.
- Tallow hound: AC 13, HP 8, MV near, ATK bite +3 (1d6). Morale 8. Dark tracker: has advantage against any target carrying a dim, covered, or flickering light.
- Faceless merchant: AC 11, HP 5, MV near, ATK counter dagger +1 (1d4). Morale 6. Biting contract: if attacked after someone accepted a bargain with it, it deals +1d4 damage on its first hit.
- The Black Crier: AC 14, HP 20, MV near, ATK lamplighter's hook +4 (1d6) or cracked bell +4. Morale 10. Cracked bell: instead of dealing damage, one nearby creature must pass a DC 13 WIS check or falter until the end of its next turn, unable to move toward the Crier. Master of sales: as long as the Great Lantern remains hanging, the Crier gains +2 damage.

Old-school obstacles

- Bargaining always costs something: a humiliating truth, a precise memory, or a cherished object is often worth more than a fistful of copper.
- The bells report everything: cloth, wax, mud, or simple patience can muffle them. Cutting them makes them ring once, then fall silent.
- Captive shadows are fragile: violent fire, spilled oil, or a fall into the well can destroy a shadow bundle forever.

Useful treasure

- Lantern of Lost Steps: once per day, it lights invisible tracks, hidden creatures, and secret doors within near range for 3 rounds. If kept for an entire night, its bearer dreams of the market and starts the next day with 1 fewer HP.
- Black-iron tokens: each token is worth 5 gp to an occultist, or can pay for a service if the market opens elsewhere again.
- Broken pact: if the PCs return a shadow to its owner, that person often offers 20 to 50 gp, safe shelter, or a useful future contact.

Climax, Endings, and Hook

Running the final scene

When the PCs reach the Hall, the Black Crier presents his finest sale: the shadow of someone from Coldstump, someone close to the PCs, or Lina, ready to be locked inside the Great Lantern. He speaks in a polite voice and would rather turn the PCs into customers than corpses.

To close the market cleanly, the PCs must perform three acts, in any order:

- return at least 3 black-iron tokens to the Token Well;
- silence the Crier's bell by cutting its rope, wedging its clapper, or carrying it away;
- light the Great Lantern with a true living flame, not with cold magical light or fire taken from the market.

If even one act is missing, the market scatters only for a few weeks. If all three are completed, the clearing becomes a burned ruin again and the shadows tumble to the ground to find their owners.

Possible endings

- Clean closing: the shadows return, Ash Mother fades in peace, and Coldstump escapes the pact. The PCs earn the hamlet's gratitude.
- Good bargain, bad terms: the PCs save the victims but accept a contract from the Crier. Each gains a favor, then later must pay with a name, a memory, or a service.
- Dirty victory: the Crier is destroyed by force while the Great Lantern falls. The market collapses, but 1d4 shadows are lost or returned to the wrong bodies.
- Failed escape: at dawn, the market sinks deeper into Hollowood with its prizes. The PCs will have to follow its trail to another dead fair.

1d6 table - What a merchant offers a PC

1. To forget a debt in exchange for a lock of hair from someone close.
2. The name of a secret passage in exchange for the memory of a first love.
3. A docile foreign shadow in exchange for the PC's own silhouette for one night.
4. A pouch of 40 gp in exchange for an oath carved with a knife into the counter.
5. A truth about an enemy in exchange for the loss of a laugh, a song, or a prayer.
6. Immediate passage out of the market in exchange for the promise to bring someone back one day.

Sequel hook

- One of the Crier's tokens bears on its reverse the image of a boat loaded with coffins, a sign that another dead fair drifts along the black river to the south.

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- Compatible with Shadowdark.
- Independent third-party product designed for Shadowdark RPG, with no official affiliation with The Arcane Library.
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Credits

- Design and text: MythCore
- Editorial line: Flash Shadowdark Scenarios

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