

BLADES IN THE SHADOWMARKET



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

- **Theme/Genre:** Mystery, Espionage with a dash of Fantasy Noir.
- **Tone:** Dark and Suspenseful, with moments of wit and intrigue.
- **Target Level:** Level 5.
- **Expected Duration:** 2 hours.
- **Player Focus Preferences:**
 - **Combat:** Medium
 - **Roleplay:** High
 - **Exploration:** Medium

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

In the sprawling metropolis of **Duskmere**, the **Shadowmarket** is a dangerous, underworld bazaar shrouded in secrecy. Hidden deep within winding alleyways and layers of illusionary spells, it serves as a neutral ground where mercenaries, thieves, smugglers, and shady nobles gather to trade forbidden goods and secrets.

Recently, whispers have passed among Duskmere's underbelly of a **legendary artifact**—the **Obsidian Blade**, said to grant its wielder the ability to sever the threads of fate itself. The artifact was being sold in the Shadowmarket, but the deal reportedly went awry, leaving its seller dead and the artifact missing. Tensions now simmer between two powerful factions in the market, threatening to remove its neutral status entirely.

IMPORTANT NPCs

1. Jareth "The Fence" Myros

- **Role:** Black-market middleman and information broker.
- **Motivation:** Wants the party to secure the Obsidian Blade before the factions destroy the Shadowmarket.

2. Marla Duskweaver

- **Role:** Leader of the **Duskwraith Thieves' Guild**.
- **Motivation:** Believes the rival faction stole the Obsidian Blade and will stop at nothing to claim it for herself.

3. Kasien Vorth

- **Role:** Mercenary captain of the **Ashfang Syndicate**, a ruthless gang of hired killers.
- **Motivation:** Doesn't have the blade (claiming innocence) but sees this chaos as a chance to settle old scores with Marla.

4. Elivra Veilsong

- **Role:** A mysterious "neutral" shopkeeper in the Shadowmarket who deals in illusory magic and forbidden knowledge.
- **Motivation:** Knows more about the Obsidian Blade's true nature and may steer the party toward resolving the danger... or stoking it.

PLOT HOOK

Opening Scene:

The players are summoned to an anonymous meeting in a smoky speakeasy beneath a crooked clocktower—the **Bloodied Hourglass Tavern**. Inside, Jareth “The Fence” offers them a lucrative contract:

“Recover the Obsidian Blade and return it to me. Discretion is key. If you don’t, the Shadowmarket will burn, and with it, any chance of keeping those factions from dragging the whole city into chaos.”

To sweeten the deal, Jareth tosses a hefty pouch of gold upfront and a cryptic map to a location within the Shadowmarket where the blade *might* be hidden. But even as Jareth speaks, a gang of Ashfang mercenaries bursts into the tavern, demanding answers about the blade and accusing the thieves of foul play.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Unravel the mystery of the Obsidian Blade’s disappearance and recover it before the Duskwraiths and Ashfang Syndicate go to war.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: THE BLOODIED HOURGLASS TAVERN (STARTING AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** Dimly lit, with the scent of musty smoke and the clinking of illicit dealings in the background. The dusty air vibrates with the low hum of tension.
- **NPCs:**
 - Jareth “The Fence,” confident and nervously watching his back.
 - A shadowy bartender who claims “neutrality” but will pass secrets to the highest bidder.
- **Encounters:**
 - **Combat:** A skirmish with **5 Ashfang Syndicate Thugs** (basic bandit stats, boosted HP).
 - **Roleplay Opportunity:** Players can choose to fight, interrogate, or make a deal with the gang leader to gain insight into the brewing faction dynamics.

ASHFANG SYNDICATE THUG STATS

- **HP:** 24
- **AC:** 14
- **Abilities:** Multi-Attack with scimitars (+5 to hit, 1d6+3 slashing damage).

LOCATION 2: VEILSONG’S CURIOSITIES (INTERMEDIATE AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** An eerie, kaleidoscope-like shop crammed with magical oddities, glowing jars, and constantly shifting shelves. Illusions distort reality around the players.
- **NPCs:**
 - Elivra Veilsong, who alternates between being charming and unsettling. She may give cryptic clues about the Obsidian Blade but demands payment—gold, a favor, or a cherished memory.
- **Puzzle/Trap:**
 - **The Shifting Shelves Puzzle:**

To find a crucial clue about the blade’s location, players must decipher a puzzle that involves aligning glowing runes on floating shelves. Each time they fail or take too long, the shop briefly shifts into another dimension populated by brief elemental hazards (fire bursts, lightning arcs, etc.).
- **Clue Reward:** A riddle hinting that the blade is hidden in the market’s sewers and a warning of its corrupting power.

THE SHIFTING SHELVES PUZZLE MECHANICS

- **Skills:** Intelligence (Investigation) and Dexterity (Sleight of Hand).
- **Checks:** Players must succeed on three consecutive DC 15 checks of either skill to align the runes correctly.
- **Consequences:** Failure results in elemental bursts: 1d6 fire or lightning damage.

LOCATION 3: THE SHADOWMARKET SEWERS (FINAL AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** Damp, cramped tunnels filled with slippery stone walkways, dripping water, and eerie glowing fungus. Murmurs echo in the distance, suggesting the presence of more than rats.
- **Environmental Challenge:**
 - The tunnels are rigged with pressure plates connected to **poison dart traps** (DC 14 Perception to detect, DC 14 Dexterity to disarm).
- **Combat Encounter:**
 - Players encounter a splinter faction of Duskwraith Thieves and Ashfang Syndicate mercenaries already fighting for control of the blade. Chaos unfolds when a **Carrion Crawler** drawn in by the violence emerges to attack both groups.
- **The Obsidian Blade's Guardian:** The blade rests in the clutches of a **Shadowmire Golem** (homebrewed creature). If it is damaged below half HP, it begins corrupting its surroundings, creating shadowy tendrils that attack adventurers in addition to its melee strikes.

SHADOWMIRE GOLEM STATS

- **HP:** 85
- **AC:** 16
- **Resistance:** Non-magical weapons
- **Abilities:**
 - **Shadow Pulse:** AoE attack, DC 15 Constitution save or take 2d8 necrotic damage.
 - **Shadowy Tendrils:** Melee attack, +6 to hit, 1d10+4 bludgeoning plus 1d6 necrotic damage.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

1. Combat:

- **Ashfang Thug Stats:** HP 24, AC 14, Multi-Attack with scimitars.
- **Shadowmire Golem:** Shadow-infused stone golem with resistance to non-magical weapons and an AoE shadow pulse attack.

2. Roleplay:

- Navigating the tense politics between Marla and Kasien through bluffing, intimidation, or persuasion.

3. Puzzle:

- The Shifting Shelves in Veilsong's Curiosities.

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

The party must decide what to do with the Obsidian Blade:

1. **Return it to Jareth:** Jareth hides it in a safe, distant place, ending the conflict (for now).
2. **Give it to Marla or Kasien:** This strengthens one faction, potentially leading to Duskmire upheaval.
3. **Destroy the Blade:** This requires a ritual, which involves great personal risk to the players.
4. **Keep the Blade:** Its corrupting influence spawns future personal/political consequences.

REWARDS

1. Loot:

- A bag of gold (150g).
- A minor magical item: **Ring of Shadowy Escape** (allows the wearer to teleport 30 feet as a bonus action, 2x/day).

2. **Story Rewards:** Favors from Jareth, Marla, or Kasien depending on outcomes.

3. **Experience Points:** Combat XP, plus bonus XP for resolving faction tensions peacefully or cleverly.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

1. Stat Blocks:

- Shadowmire Golem (HP 85, AC 16; Shadow Pulse: DC 15 Con save or take 2d8 necrotic damage).

2. Simple Maps:

- Tavern layout with destructible furniture and hidden exits.
- Veilsong's shop, arranged as an unsettling labyrinth of floating, glowing shelves.
- Sewer map featuring narrow paths, branching tunnels, and hidden traps.

3. Player Handouts:

- A riddle on parchment in Veilsong's shop.
- A "contract" from Jareth for intrigue.

4. Atmospheric Music:

- Tavern: Low rumbling ambiance, faint lute in background.
- Veilsong's shop: Haunting, magical chimes.
- Sewers: Dripping water, distant wails.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

1. If players ally with NPC factions, adjust final encounters accordingly (e.g., fighting the opposing faction instead of the golem).
2. If they refuse to follow Jareth's request, improvise side consequences (the factions target them directly).

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

1. Debrief Questions:

- Did you enjoy the balance between combat, roleplay, and exploration?
- What was your favorite part of the mystery?
- Would you be interested in continuing your story in Duskmire?

2. Future Hooks:

- Continued conflict over the Obsidian Blade's influence.
- New mysteries and power plays in Duskmire.

This comprehensive one-shot adventure should provide an immersive and engaging session for players, complete with intricate plot elements, vivid settings, and a cast of intriguing characters. Enjoy the mysteries of the Shadowmarket!