

THE DEMON'S HEART

by Masha Lepire

CREATURE: *Succubus* | **LEVEL(S):** 3-5

SYNOPSIS

A group of adventurers find themselves drawn to Axeholme, a small, desolate village with a rash of disappearances. An ancient burial mound nearby has been opened, its stone door found shattered, and, if the villagers are to be believed, the disappearances are the work of a wizard's curse. But things are not always what they seem. *The Demon's Heart* is an adventure for 3-5 characters of 4th level. It uses the milestone system and characters that complete this adventure may advance to 5th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventurers are summoned to Axeholme by a local lord to investigate a string of missing peasants. The lord tells them a woman came to him the night before begging for his aid to find her lost son. The adventurers learn that an ancient barrow, said to hold the remains of a powerful wizard, has been unearthed. Locals say the place is cursed, and blame the disappearances on the barrow's recent disruption. Their proof of the curse lies in the nightmares that have plagued Axeholme ever since a stableboy reported the barrow's stone door smashed. Dark omens and demonic visions visit themselves upon the sleeping each and every night. A character blessed by divinity (such as a cleric or paladin) might receive a cryptic vision from their god, showing demonic omens and guiding them to the barrow as the source of the town's recent misfortunes. Unbeknownst to the townsfolk and the adventurers, these visions have been conjured by a succubus posing as a local woman in order to lure adventures to the barrow.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventurers arrive at a small village next to an ancient barrow. They think they have arrived in order to investigate a string of disappearances, but really they have been lured by a succubus, Katherine, who seeks to use them for her own purposes. She is seeking an ancient demonic artifact, The Demon's Heart, locked in the hallowed tomb of a long dead warlock. The barrow is warded with an old spell so that demons cannot enter. Katherine seeks to use the adventurers to retrieve the artifact for her — and deal with her competition.

Elias, her **cambion** son, is competing with her to obtain the artifact, for it can set one of them free from their contract with a hellish pit lord.

The adventurers eventually discover that the cambion has been charming townsfolk from Axeholme in an attempt to retrieve the artifact for him. Seeing his plans, the succubus lures the players into the village with the hope she can manipulate them into killing the cambion, entering the barrow, and retrieving the Demon's Heart for her. The cambion is the true villain, while the succubus, though manipulative, is painted in a more neutral light.

CHAPTER 1 — THE VILLAGE

The characters are summoned to Axeholme, a desolate village located near an old barrow in a nearby grassy knoll. The village borders a vast marsh and is little more than cluster of sod huts around a stacked stone well.

THE VILLAGE SQUARE

Several dirty peasants squat around a greasy peat fire in the village's center. If the characters speak with the villagers they discover the following information:

The ancient barrow at the edge of the marsh has been recently opened. A stable boy, Peter, discovered the large stone blocking its door had been shattered a fortnight past. Ever since the barrow opened, people have been disappearing. The last to go missing was Lysa, the daughter of Beatrice, the innkeeper.

People have been behaving strangely. For instance, the blacksmith, Yohan, has shuttered his shop. Townsfolk believe an ancient curse is to blame and say the barrow is the tomb of a powerful wizard. The village elder, Toland, has warned everyone to stay away from the barrow.

THE VILLAGERS

- **YOHAN:** The Blacksmith is a stout dwarf with a long black beard. His forge, a clay chimney under a small thatch overhang abutting his stacked stone hut, is cold and appears to have not been operational for several days. He is home, but tells the adventurers to go away and echoes the superstitions of the villagers. In reality, Yohan is dead. Elias has taken his place while he uses villagers to explore the barrow.
- **PETER:** The teenage stableboy solemnly recounts for the adventurers the events leading up to his discovering the barrow's opening. He mentions that he sometimes sees lights at night near the barrow and believes traveling bandits might be behind the break-in.
- **TOLAND:** The elderly gray-bearded village elder tells the adventurers the barrow is the tomb of a wizard and older than the village itself. He desperately pleads with the characters to help save his village.

THE TAVERN

The dimly lit tavern is deserted save for the innkeeper, Beatrice, and her two **mastiffs** by the fireplace. The large mean looking hounds seem on edge, pacing the flagstones, and snapping at each other over an old bone. Another woman sits at a table in a corner of the tavern farthest from the light and warmth of the dwindling fire.

Beatrice is initially friendly toward the characters, though clearly distraught over her missing daughter, Lysa. She offers them lodging and a hot meal, sharing what little she has as thanks for their help finding her daughter.

Unknown to the players, Beatrice is charmed by the woman in the corner, a succubus named Katherine. Katherine is using Beatrice to earn the adventurers' trust by having her attempt to kill them, thwarting the attempt herself, and then pinning it on her son, the cambion, Elias.

When Beatrice brings the group drinks and food, Katherine knocks the drinks from their hands, warning them of the poison waiting within. Beatrice, a **commoner**, draws a knife and attacks, her agitated hounds by her side. Should Beatrice survive the encounter, she will regain her senses, and remember being charmed by a dark figure in the night.

Katherine introduces herself as a fellow adventurer and suggests they share a common enemy. She reveals that a sorcerer named Elias is behind the disappearances in the village and she has been tracking him for some time. If asked how she knows this, Katherine discloses her parentage of Elias.

If questioned further, Katherine claims Elias is seeking a powerful relic contained within the barrow mound.

If the adventurers question her motives, Katherine points out she did just save their lives and remind them that the enemy of her enemy is her friend. She adds that Elias is stronger than both of them and they will need her help if they are to defeat him. She adds that he is cunning, and they may already be manipulated by him, as it's likely he lured them to Axeholme in order to kill her. She adds that she saw Elias enter the barrow right before she came to the inn.

ROLE-PLAYING KATHERINE

Kathrine is a **succubus**, and, as such, manipulates others to further her ends. She genuinely wants to see her son slain as he is a threat to her. Above all else, she covets the artifact in the barrow in order to free herself from her masters' bondage. She is cunning, and will play to the heroes' sympathies.

CHAPTER 2 — THE BARROW

The inside of the barrow is a large, round burial chamber. In the center rests a stone sarcophagus with the relief of a man carved on its lid. In his hands is nestled the Demon's Heart, a polished obsidian sphere. The walls of the barrow are carved with worn runes, glowing faintly like embers in a dying fire. A character might recognize the runes as Infernal, describing the nefarious deeds of a powerful warlock. Pictograms also show a warlock wielding a black sphere subjugating demons.

THE TOMB

On the ground around the sarcophagus are withered corpses, the bodies of villagers drained of life. Among them is the body of Yohan, the blacksmith. There is no sign of Lysa.

An adventurer who can read Infernal or who who passes an Investigation (Intelligence) check DC 13 can decipher the story on the walls: A warlock, pledged in service to a powerful demon lord conquers his enemies and subjugates demons, but he is unable to produce an heir. Frustrated he tricks a lesser demon into bearing his child, promising freedom from her master, the demon lord he too serves in exchange. The rest of the wall seems damaged by a long ago collapse, and is unreadable. Upon disturbing the chamber, the **ghost** of the warlock will rise from the tomb and attack the adventurers.

Once the adventurers pick up the Demon's Heart, the hallow spell on the barrow will fall, the runes lining the walls darkening, and Elias will enter to confront them, shedding the form of the dwarven smith for his true demonic visage.

First, he thanks the adventurers for their unexpected aid, saying he could not enter the crypt or even so much as lift the orb from its resting place without them.

While fighting, Elias taunts the group, "What lies has she told you?" If they tell him Katherine said he lured them, he replies, "Why would I bring you here? You are interfering with my plans!"

A successful DC 13 Arcana (Intelligence) or Religion (Intelligence) check reveals that a cambion is a child born of a succubus and a human.

CONCLUSION

You hear the soft slow clapping of delicate hands. Katherine stands in the doorway of the chamber.

Once Elias has been dealt with, Katherine enters the barrow in her human guise to claim the Demon's Heart. She reveals she can use it to break her master's hold over her. If the characters have not already pieced together the story, she explains how she was forced to bear her son against her will, and how the warlock buried here was his father. According to her, the warlock died before he could fulfill his bargain, killed by Elias. His followers buried him here.

If the characters refuse to give her the Heart she begs and pleads with them. As a last resort, she confesses that Lysa, the innkeeper's daughter, is still alive, and they might be able to save her, if they act quickly and hand over the orb.

If they comply, Katherine informs them that Lysa is in the marsh by a ring of standing stones, a location they can easily find. They discover her bound hand and foot, but unharmed, in the mud between the mossy stones.

If the characters attempt to kill Katherine, she assumes her true demonic form as a **succubus** and fights back, attempting to turn them against one another with both words and magic. She tries to grab the orb and flee the barrow.

The characters can replace the artifact, restoring the hallow spell and trapping the succubus inside the barrow.

The characters may also choose to let Katherine go, with or without the Demon's Heart.

THE DEMON'S HEART

Wonderous Item, rare

This cold, smoothly polished black orb is crafted from obsidian, mined from the hardened magma of the nine hells. While holding the orb you can use your action cast the command (fends only) spell.

REWARDS

- The eyes of the figure carved into the stone of the sarcophagus lid are black gems that glint like beetles in the torchlight. The can be pried loose as two *onyx gems*, each worth 150 gp.
- The village elder, Toland rewards the adventures with 100 gp, donated from the villagers.
- If Lysa is saved, Beatrice gives the characters a golden brooch in the shape of a racoon, a family heirloom worth 25 gp.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The purpose of this adventure is to paint a new perspective on the traditionally overtly sexualized succubus. I turned the succubus into a mother in order to develop her into a more unique fiendish creature. This one-shot is dedicated to my loving partner and talented game designer, Eugene Fasano, who helped inspire and edit this adventure. I also wouldn't have been able to stay determined during my writing process without the overwhelming support of my dear friends.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Masha Lepire is a Seattle-based composer, sound designer, and writer. Scandinavian folklore and her adventures in Polish castles and Norwegian forests inspire her creative projects. She currently creates content for the Ancient Greece-inspired tabletop setting *Arkadia*.