

DEAD OF WINTER

AN ADVENTURE BY
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A 1st to 2nd level adventure
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Dead of Winter is a short side quest made for 4 to 6 players of 1st to 2nd level. The difficulty can be easily scaled by substituting the mane demons with higher CR demons and adding levels to the warlock as needed. The adventure takes place in a snowy region or during a cold snowy winter. It can be set in any small roadside village that the players may pass by in their travels.

SUMMARY

As the adventurers are traveling the lengthy road between destinations, a bitter winter storm blows in. Lucky for them, there is a small roadside hamlet just ahead, where the party can take refuge from the harsh elements. The mood in the local tavern is grave, as this is a sad night for the villagers. It is the first anniversary of the murder of a town hero. A murder that was never resolved.

Strange events begin as soon as the adventurers arrive and will lead them to clues which just may solve a year old murder and lay an anguished soul to rest.

BACKGROUND

A year ago Albert Fielder, a brave and honored war hero from the village, returned home after retiring from his service in the crown's army. The night was supposed to be a night of reunion and celebration, however things did not go as planned. Albert left the party with his fiancé, Sherlyn and never returned. Albert was found dead the next day, alone in a snowy field. He had been stabbed in the back. His fiancé was also found dead. She was in her bed with no signs of injury. Some said she died of a broken heart. Others think she poisoned herself.

The truth is that Sherlyn had been having an affair with a local farm boy while Albert was serving the king. Thomas, the young farm boy, did not attend the reunion at the tavern that night. Instead, he drank heavily while waiting in a barn across from the tavern. Seeing the engaged couple leave together, Thomas followed them to Sherlyn's house and in a fit of jealous



rage, stabbed Albert in the back then smothered Sherlyn with her own dress.

Unknown to Thomas, Albert did not die from the stab wound, it only paralyzed him. Unable to speak or move Albert could do nothing but watch as Thomas killed his love.

After the murders, Thomas placed Sherlyn in her bed then drug Albert into a nearby field leaving him for dead.

Albert did die that night from exposure. But before death claimed him, Albert swore a curse of vengeance, to have Thomas' crimes unveiled and for justice to be served.

In the year since the murder, Thomas has made a pact with a powerful demon and become a warlock. He is currently 2nd level.

On this night, which the party is forced to take shelter from the storm, Albert's spirit is granted manifestation in physical form and he manipulates the adventurers into bringing Thomas to justice.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs should be on a deserted road during a snow storm, far from their destination. It is very late and they should be tired and concerned of the dangers of exposure. It should be clarified exactly how miserable the journey is. Read or paraphrase the following box text.

It is a bitterly cold night as you travel the snow-covered road. Your destination is still far away and you long to rest and find shelter from the bone-biting wind that stings any exposed skin. It is late and you are wary. The winds rise and sleet begins to pelt down. All hope seems exhausted to you when suddenly, something white flutters by in front of your path. It is a white dove. It flies ahead, down the path, then turns to the right. You notice a light ahead. A small beacon that there is fire and warmth close by.

The light is coming from a tavern's common room in a small hamlet less than a hundred yards ahead. If the players follow the dove, it flutters up to the tavern door. As the party approaches, the dove flies off into the night, but the PCs noticed the wind has blown the door open as if to welcome them inside. The sign above the door reads; Inn of the Lost Badger. There is only one patron inside. He has a pipe lit up and is wrapped in a warm fur cloak. He is leaned comfortably back in a chair by the fire.

This is Albert's spirit manifested in a physical form. If asked, he introduces himself as Al, otherwise he just won't say his name until asked. It is important not to let the Players know he is a "ghost" until the end of the story, where it will have more impact on them.

Al offers for everyone in the party to come join him by the fire and warm themselves. Empty mugs and bits of trash litter the floor. It appears the adventurers have just missed some big celebration.

If asked, the lone patron explains that there was a sort of celebration earlier in the evening, but it was bittersweet. It was the anniversary of the return of a war hero. One year to the day, the hero returned home and was murdered the very same night.

If the players are gathered by the fire, Al asks if they would listen to his tale. If they are still hesitant or untrusting, make them feel comfortable and welcome. Let them know that the man does not pose a threat and seems genuinely friendly. Once the PCs (or at least most of them) are settled in and comfortable, the man starts his tale.



AL's TALE

"The warrior came home to a hero's welcome. The entire village was waiting and anticipating his return. As he strolled up to this very tavern, the townsfolk ran out to greet him with wine and gifts. The warrior was grateful for such a reunion, but he seemed preoccupied. He scanned through the crowd for one special person in particular; his fiancé Sherlyn. The love of his life. They had not seen one another in over two years, but when their eyes met it was as if they had never been apart. The two embraced and kissed like it was the last night on Faerun. Unfortunately for the two lovers, it was their last night. After a night of joyous celebration, they were both found dead. He was found in the fields to the south, stabbed in the back. She was found in her farmhouse dead in her own bed. There were no signs of a struggle, which baffled the authorities. To this day the mystery is unsolved"- Suddenly the door blows open with a loud bang cutting the tale short. At that moment the wind whips through the common room and the fire flickers wildly before going out. A blood chilling scream, colder than the winter night's air, echoes from somewhere near. The man stands and fumbles around in the darkness. "It is five past midnight! The exact time that it all happened. Her soul is reliving the torment. I must find her!" The man finds his way to the door and runs out into the cold night.

If the PCs follow the man to the door, the wind slams it shut in their face. The door becomes stuck hard. It takes a full round to get it to open. Once it is opened, the PCs notice that Al is gone. There are no boot prints in the snow to follow. He seems to have vanished without a trace. The snow and wind

lessen and there is another scream somewhere to the north east. It sounds like it is coming from the other side of an old barn across the road. The PCs notice the dove from earlier. It is perched in a tree just outside the inn. It begins to coo at them and flies to the roof of a house on the north east side of the barn. This is Sherlyn's old house. The bird flaps its wings and coos again as if to beckon the adventures. As they approach, the dove flies off into the night. The adventurers notice that the house appears to be abandoned and in need of repairs. The front door swings open with a quick breeze as if to invite the PCs inside.

HOOKS

As the party looks around and investigates, the winds let up and the snow lightens. It is much more tolerable without the wind. As long as the PCs each have winter-weather clothing on, they will be fine outdoors from this point on.

The screams, the disappearance of Al, and strange actions of the dove should be enough of a hook to start the PC's on their investigation. If they want to stay at the inn until morning or continue to their journey as soon as the snow and wind let up, you may need to become inventive to keep them on track. Use the dove to lead them places if need be. The players should follow, if it seems to be beckoning them. If they for some reason kill the dove, have it completely vanish. Then, have it reappear anytime the PCs get too off course. You know what motivates your players best, so you can come up with a better hook if needed.

THE INN OF THE LOST BADGER

Investigating the inn: There are stairs leading up to a hostile and common room upstairs where five drunken celebrators lay passed out from earlier festivities. If they are awakened and questioned, none of them know Al or recall seeing anyone matching his description at the celebration earlier in the night. They are not up for questioning and will express their irritation if continuously bothered.

The Inn keeper has a room behind the bar, in the tap room, by the stairs. He too, partook in the party and is currently in an alcohol-induced slumber, snoring loudly. If the PCs attempt to wake him, he will eventually come to in a very groggy state. He will offer the PCs a stay in the hostile or common room for 2 CP each. He does not know Al or seem to recognize his description. He can recount the story of the murders but has no new information that would help the investigation, other than the locations of places of interest in the cold case.

His suggestion is to check out Sherlyn's Farmhouse where she was found that night. He explains that it has been abandoned and everyone stays away in fear that it is haunted. The house also has an old barn on the property.

SHERLYN'S FARMHOUSE

If the party talks to anyone and finds out where Sherlyn used to live, or if they have followed the dove, the party may wish to investigate the house. They find it was abandoned by the family after Sherlyn's death. Her parents and younger brother moved to the north to

escape the memories. The house is in disrepair but was left as it was. The locals swear it is haunted by Sherlyn's ghost and have not bothered it. There are love letters from Thomas hidden in a false bottom of a desk drawer. DC15 to find if that drawer is searched. This could clue the PCs into the fact she was cheating on Albert with Thomas. It should also point to a motive for Thomas to commit murder if he hasn't already been confronted and confessed. If the PCs happen to find the letters, Sherlyn's spirit will manifest and shed a single tear. She cannot physically speak but mouths the words "Don't Tell" then disappears. The letters speak of the barn as the lover's common meeting place. If the PCs are reluctant to check out the barn have the dove reappear to lead them there.

THE OLD BARN

The barn is unlocked and easy to open. Inside the Players will find Thomas curled up in the hay sleeping. After a night of drinking at the tavern, he came in to seek shelter from the snowstorm and fell asleep. He wakes up and is immediately suspicious and defensive as to why the PCs are there. If the PCs ask about the screams, he honestly says that he heard no screams. If asked about Al, Thomas reacts with surprising aggression and wants to know who they have been talking to? (He knew that Sherlyn was the only one who called Albert by Al)

Thomas is very abrasive toward the PCs and continues to get more and more agitated the longer they talk to him. The party should be very suspicious as to why he is acting so strange. The truth is, that Thomas has seen the ghost of Sherlyn twice in the past two nights and has dreamed that his secret was told to

strangers visiting the village. Thomas thought it was an omen so he begged his pact patron for power and summoned 3 mane demons. He has them trapped in a circle of protection at his house. (See Thomas' House for details)

When he first meets the PCs, Thomas knows that the omens are coming to pass. After a bit of conversation, Thomas loses his grip on the situation and begins yelling his confession. He says that he killed the two lovers out of jealousy because Sherlyn was supposed to be his. He then tells the PCs that the evidence, including the murder weapon, are at his house in the basement and with that he activates his minor ring of invisibility and runs out. This is a trap. He wants the PCs to follow him and find the demons he has in his basement in hopes that they will kill the party

Tracking Thomas is not difficult in the snow. His tracks lead straight to his house.

THOMAS' HOUSE

If Thomas was found in the barn and used his minor ring of invisibility, he will be hiding out here, waiting to ambush the Party. He is still invisible and hidden as well. He throws his boots off when he enters the house so that the wet snow does not give up his whereabouts. He will then

wait for the PCs to go down and investigate the basement.

The basement has two rooms. A 20x20 room at the bottom of the stairs which is connected by a closed (unlocked) door to a second room. The second room is 30x30 and contains a circle of protection with 3 mane demons trapped within.

Trap: the circle of protection which traps the demons is made in salt. The bottom of the door has a small section that has been cut away and has broom-like bristles attached. As the door opens inward, the bristles brush away the salt destroying the circle and freeing the demons who attack the PCs immediately. Once the demons attack,



Thomas attacks (becoming visible) with his eldritch blast. Both the demons and Thomas will fight to the death.

The PCs should find a diary in a lockbox (locked DC 12) along with the murder weapon in Thomas' house. The key to the box is on a keychain that Thomas keeps on him. The diary details how he killed the two lovers and sought forgiveness through his warlock patron.

Upstairs on a desk by his bed, the adventurers will find a current journal that Thomas has been keeping. It details the fact that he has seen Sherlyn's ghost for the past two nights and tells of his recent nightmares of being discovered.

If the players loot the body, they will find his minor ring of invisibility and key to the lockbox, along with any other loot you may wish to give.

The ring is similar to a regular ring of invisibility, except that it has 1 charge a day. The charge is replenished each day at dawn. The user must attune to the ring and it can only be used once per day for 1 hour.

THE FIELD

After the Party defeats Thomas and the demons, the dove should appear for the last time. It coos at the PCs and flaps its wings, then flies ahead of the group short distances until they decide to follow it. Once the group is in pursuit the bird leads them into the field where Albert was murdered. There is a statue there with snow covering the plaque and facial features. The dove lands on the statue and coos again until one or all of the adventurers come to investigate the statue at which point it flies away into the night and disappears. This knocks the snow from the statue revealing the

likeness of the stranger they met earlier in the night (Al) and uncovering the plaque which reads:

'In loving memory of our bravest hero, Albert Fielder. Sadly taken from us before his time.'

If played out well, this should be the moment that the adventures realize the stranger, Al was the manifested spirit of the dead town hero.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

At this point, the adventurers should notify the local authorities of what they found. The townsfolk will be very grateful and may give the party a minor magic item or a small amount of gold for their help. Anything you feel would make a good reward for your player's efforts is fine.



CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

If your players seem to like this place and want to hang around or seek out further adventure, here are some suggestions.

- *Have the party find a strange map or entry in Thomas' journal that leads to discovering a sinister plot that started between the warlock and his patron

- * You could have an authority figure offer them jobs helping out around the area. This could be finding a gang of goblins bothering the townsfolk or checking out a strange blight in the nearby forest.

- *Have the ghost of Sherlyn return to haunt the town until the heroes figure out why she is still restless and figure out a way to lay her spirit to rest.



This concludes The Dead of Winter. I hope you and your players enjoy the story. I wrote it for your enjoyment.

Patrick E. Pullen

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