

SIDETREK ADVENTURE MODULE #01

SACRIFICES OF THE DEMON QUEEN

WRITTEN BY KEN AUSTIN



ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The village of Vestor is in a state of shock and mourning. Two hours ago, a band of five well-armed toughs showed up and demanded that five young women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five be turned over to them at once, or they would burn the village to the ground and take the women by force.

The village's leader, Eldaman Mazor, begged the bandits for a few days to decide how to meet this demand. The bandit gave them one hour.

The men of the village put their heads together, while wives and daughters wrung their hands. Some wept softly.

A group of farmers and storekeepers, no matter how determined, could not stop these brigands by force without bringing down catastrophe on the entire village. They were outnumbered, unarmed, and unskilled.

Finally, the men called for all unmarried, childless village women to gather. They asked for volunteers to go with these men, and promised a rescue attempt as soon as help could be found. Five of the thirty women raised their hands. They would save the village from being razed by the muscle bound low-lives, despite not knowing what fate might await.

Friends and family of the brave women broke down as they watched them approach the ruffians. The foremost of the unwelcome visitors, a man of particularly evil mien, approached and appraised each.

With his quarterstaff, he pushed one woman apart from the others.

"How old are you, woman?"

"Twenty-five," she whispered.

With no warning, he struck a savage blow against her back with his staff. She shrieked and fell to her knees.

"Lying wench! How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven," she sobbed. "I'm twenty-seven."

"Get out of my sight before I strike you again," he growled.

As the woman scrambled away, the man jabbed a filthy finger at Eldaman Mazor's only child, Ralisa. "You! Skinny girl! How old are you?"

Ralisa paled, as did her father.

"Twenty."

"Over here, now!"

Her father grabbed to stop her, but she slipped his grasp and stumbled toward the other four women.

Her fiancée, a young farmer named Harcourt, charged toward the villain – only to dropped to the ground by an arrow in his right thigh.

The thugs whistled and jeered as Harcourt writhed on the ground. Several men started forward, but a flurry of arrows at their feet stopped them.

The quarterstaff-carrying wretch sneered down at the injured, yet still rage filled, young man.

"Nice try, lover boy. Imagine what would've happened if he'd been aiming a little higher."

His fellows guffawed.

With that, the brute doffed an imaginary hat at the villagers. "It was a pleasure doing business with you, ladies and gents. We'd love to stay, but we have a delivery to make."

Eldaman Mazor, desperate, shouted at the man's back. "Where are you taking them? What are you going to do with them?"

The brigand bellowed cheerfully over his shoulder, "They're a gift! For the Demon Queen!"

THE SHRINE OF THE DEMON QUEEN

Ten years ago, a goatherd named Posso stumbled upon a long hidden cairn in the nearby foothills. Within, he discovered dozens of books and parchment – all in an advanced state of decay. He carefully examined a few of the sturdier documents. They were filled with the ramblings and ravings of a madman. The author had been obsessed with demons, and had spent untold hours writing about them. Their nature, their politics and ethics, habits and tendencies – all were addressed at length.

Much of the information was wildly inaccurate, but Posso's curiosity was piqued. He spent his free time copying what legible texts he could recover from the cairn, and he drove his herd of goats all over the rocky countryside searching for other hidden cairns.

Over time, his hopes of finding a second cairn faded. Posso showed copies of some of the tamer documents to people he thought might be interested. Before long, people of like mind and interests approached and introduced themselves. He eventually took the priestly orders of a fiendish deity, and he continued to show an interest in demons as he learned from his unholy bretheren.

Six months ago, Posso was visiting the old cairn when he spied a buck standing atop one of the larger outcroppings of granite. At first, the giant deer appeared to be pawing frantically at the rock, but when he got closer, Posso could see that one of



the buck's hooves was stuck. When the buck saw him, a burst of adrenaline surged through the beast's body, giving it the strength to pull free.

When Posso reached the summit where the beast had stood, he knelt and examined the blood and fur in the crevice that had held the hoof so tightly. A musty draft – almost too gentle to be noticed – blew cool upon his hand.

He kept the knowledge of the extensive complex beneath that oubliette style entrance a closely held secret. A few close friends accompanied on his subterranean expeditions; none participated more than once. The well-preserved books describing profane, obscene rites for summoning demons, he spoke of to no one.

When Posso discovered a massive chamber containing a 40' statue of a marilith named Asomim as its centerpiece, he took it as an omen. He took up residence in the tunnels and devoted himself full time to finding more of the writings – and to summoning the terrible, beautiful marilith Asomim – his Demon Queen.

When his research was completed, he hired a gang of local brutes to kidnap five young women whose sacrifice would fuel the ritual.

Hooks: One of your players' characters might have a relative or love interest that lives in Vestor. (*Even better, one of the abductees.*) Vestor might be a halfway point to the party's eventual destination, perfect for an overnight respite.

Uses for this Encounter:

This encounter can be used in several ways to enhance a larger campaign. First, villagers who are grateful for the safe return of the five women can offer substantial discounts on accessible items and services for the adventurers. Second, Eldaman Mazor (*or another NPC of your creation*) might have connections that will pay off later in your campaign. Finally, friendships (*or enmities*) that last a lifetime might affect future campaign events.

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

The protagonists arrive in Vestor about two hours after the incident. After gathering what information is available, they proceed to an underground labyrinth where they encounter traps, guards, and eventually Posso. They discover four of the captives; Ralisa has been taken to the main shrine to be sacrificed. The heroes take on Posso around the Shrine of the Demon Queen, attempting to defeat him before Ralisa perishes.

PART 1: VESTOR'S RECENT UNPLEASANTNESS

The gently rolling hills and pastoral countryside has been a pleasure through which to travel. A recent rain settled the road dust and left the ground soft to your tired feet. The mountains on the horizon loom majestic, and tidy farmhouses and barns indicate that you're near the village of Vestor. The friendliness of the residents is legendary, and travelers you passed today spoke highly of a kind widow who rents clean bedrooms for a fair price, and throws in a hot breakfast that has no equal.

However, when you enter the village proper, you get anything but a cheery welcome. The few villagers who pass you on the street have pained expressions on their faces. Two women on a nearby bench appear to be comforting each other. A group of five men huddle and talk quietly in front of what looks to be a meeting house or small chapel.

Any villager can relate today's events described in the adventure background. However, the normally talkative populace is too upset to discuss details with strangers.

If the party can shift the villagers' attitude from indifferent to friendly (*Diplomacy DC 15*), loosen the local tongues a bit. Parties lacking in Charisma or etiquette might immediately draw the suspicion of the group of men - one of whom is Eldaman Mazor.

Thuria Cluros and Barbara Aliceon, female humans Com 1, hp 3.

These two ladies, married and mothers themselves, are very anxious about the kidnapped women. They are more receptive to parties with at least one female human, elf, or half-elf; they're unaccustomed to talking to men without a proper introduction. They worry what Ralisa's fiancé, Harcourt, might be planning.

Korus Omean, Throx Korvas, Harcourt the Younger, male humans Com 1, hp 3.

These young men are eager to grab available farm implements and take off after the brigands. They're disappointed and angry that the men of the village allowed the women to be taken without a fight.

Salensus Marentina, and Eldaman Mazor; male humans Exp 3, hp 12.

These men are levelheaded farmers. They've weathered a lot of crises over their lifetimes. And they know that if they had acted recklessly today, the entire town would be in cinders. Worse yet, many lives could have been lost. The adventurers are blessings from the gods to whom the villagers have been faithful all these years.

Use these responses to possible in-character questions, or come up with your own if you'd like to tie in this adventure more closely with your own campaign.

Where did these kidnappers come from?

I don't know. They weren't wearing anything distinctive - no coats of arms, foreign accents, or anything to distinguish them from your average sell-swords. They came into town from the east, and left that way, too. They knew their business, that's for sure; they all had sets of manacles with them.

Was there anyone in charge?

There was one that did most of the talking. But nobody ever mentioned a name.

What were the women's names? And what did they look like?

Well, there was Eldaman Mazor's only daughter, Ralisa. And Eve - she's such a quiet, sweet thing. Magda...she's the tomboy. She's likely to give them a kick to their pants if they turn their back on her. There was Ruth. Now she's a looker, that one. Many a young man has set his cap for Ruth, but she is keeping everybody guessing. Oh, and Stella. They're liable to send that one back, if you get my meaning. Such an ugly attitude isn't a good fit for such a pretty girl.

Eventually Mazor and the others will approach the player characters and beg them to mount an immediate rescue. They offer 10 gp to each hero - a very dear sum for a small village.

Knowledge: History, Local, or Nobility; Bardic Knowledge DC 20: There are a series of ancient underground tunnels in the nearby mountains, built as a hiding place for the nobles of a once great kingdom that disappeared centuries ago.

PART 2: ENTERING THE FORGOTTEN LABYRINTH

The soft ground reveals, even to the untrained eye, the boot tracks of the kidnappers. But, the road eastward becomes increasingly rocky as you approach the foothills of the mountains you saw earlier.

Suddenly, the path veers off the road and across a field strewn with rocks. You thread your way through the piles of stone until the path ends at a large and irregularly shaped hole in the ground. A new rope, knotted every few feet, is tied to a nearby boulder and hangs down into an irregularly shaped hole in the ground nearby. (*Climb DC 5; failure by 5 or more results in falling for 2d6 dmg*)

Twenty feet below the opening, you find yourselves in a long, straight hallway. Though the only source of light is the sunlight streaming through the hole, you see that the hall is ten feet wide. The floor is made of skillfully textured stone that has aged well, protected from the weather and rarely used. The walls are smooth and dry. The only sign that moisture has penetrated the structure are the cracks on the 8' ceiling. Most

are hairline; some are the width of a small vine. The only way to go is east.

Knowledge: Dungeoneering or Engineering DC 15: The structural integrity is sound. The tunnels are quite safe.

As you enter the hallway, a pair of magical images appears, each in the shape of a mouth. A booming bass voice from the mouth on the left thunders in ancient Common, “None may enter this place that is not of the royal family.”

“Beware,” howls a powerful, cultured female voice from the right, “the unseen forces that protect this place.”

There is a trap approximately 80’ down the hall, added hundreds of years ago by the original designers of this complex.

An open pit, ten feet by ten feet, impedes movement down the hallway. A Perception check of DC 15 reveals that the trap doors that once covered it hang open – their spring-loaded mechanisms broken decades ago. Spikes, rusty and dull but still dangerous jut upward. Scattered on the pit floor are bones and other detritus of widely varying age and species.

A successful running jump across this pit would normally require a DC 10 Acrobatics skill check. However, there is a permanent and very invisible Wall of Force flush with the pit’s far side, depositing an unaware jumper unceremoniously onto the spikes. The 10’ x 10’ x 1’ spell effect subsides temporarily when a humanoid places their hand on a well-concealed wall plate. The effect resumes three rounds after the wall plate is touched, or until someone passes through the spell effect area – whichever comes first.

The Perception check to notice the wall plate is DC 25. A success reveals the wall plate’s presence, but not its purpose. Only a player character with the trapfinding skill can determine the magical nature of the trap, the reset conditions, and how to disable the mechanism. There is an identical wall plate on the far side of the pit.

The Wall of Force is silent when it drops and resets, so have some fun with this trap.

INVISIBLE WALL TRAP CR 5

Type Magical Perception: DC 25; Disable Device DC 25

Effects

Trigger special; Reset: automatic (3 rounds or until humanoid passes through)

Effect 20-ft.-deep pit (2d6 falling damage); pit spikes (Atk +15 melee, 1d4 barbed spikes per target for 1d6+2 damage each); DC 20 Reflex for half damage

A successful Disable Device attempt succeeds in bringing down the Wall of Force until the wall plate is repaired.

Suggested tiles for this encounter:

Tile 36 (1) – Entrance

Tile 39 (2) – Hallway, 120 ft.

PART 3: BUSH-WHACKED!

The corridor opens up into a larger chamber filled with a forest of stone columns, their surface still smooth and shiny despite their age. A peculiar red symbol has been painted in several places on the floor.

A small hunting party of vegepygmies has wandered far from its russet mold patch. They are long overdue, but dare not return empty-handed. Each is eager to take home as much fresh adventurer as he can carry.

Unless the party has been taking great care to move quietly, the feisty little plants Take 10 to conceal themselves behind columns, and begin the combat aware of the adventurers. Player characters who succeed on a DC 20 Perception check hear the clicking and tapping the creatures use to communicate, and may act in the surprise round.

VEGEPYGMY (4) CR 4

N Small plant

Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +7

Defense

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 14; (+2 Dex, +3 natural, +1 size)

hp 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +0

Defensive Abilities plant traits, DR 5/slashing or bludgeoning; Immune electricity

Offense

Speed 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +1 (1d4) or longspear +1 (1d6)

Statistics

Str 11, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 8, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +0; **CMB** –1; **CMD** 11

Feats Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +10 (+18 in vegetation); Racial Modifiers +4 Stealth (+12 in vegetation)

Languages Undercommon, Vegepygmy (cannot speak)

Suggested tiles for this encounter:

Tile 20 (2)

PART 4: FINDING THE CAPTIVES MINUS ONE

The door in front of you is made of a very hard wood and strapped with iron. The lock looks quite formidable.

Strong Wooden Door, hardness 5, hp 20 (*break DC 25*)

Lock: Disable Device DC 25, hardness 15, hp 30

POISONED DART TRAP CR 3

Type mechanical; Perception DC 20; Disable Device DC 20

Effects

Trigger touch; Reset none

Effect Atk +15 ranged (1d3 plus Medium Spider Venom)

MEDIUM SPIDER VENOM

Type poison, injury; Save Fortitude DC 14

Frequency 1/round for 4 rounds

Effect 1d2 Str damage; Cure 1 save

Four human women, obviously the captives you seek, are bound tightly with coarse rope, and each is gagged with a filthy rag. With the exception of minor scrapes and a few tears in their clothing, they appear to be unharmed. Two of the kidnappers stand around a table, playing cards and coppers scattered and temporarily forgotten. Their hands go to their weapons.

Suggested tiles for this encounter:

Tile 15 (1)

Tile 20 (1)

KIDNAPPERS (2) CR 5

Male human fighter 3

N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; Senses: Perception +1

Defense

AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 17 (+6 armor +1 Dex)

hp 19 (3d10+6)

Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2; +1 against fear

Offense

Spd 30 ft.

Melee mwk greatsword +8 (2d6+4/19-20)

Ranged longbow +4 (1d8, 1d8+3 mwk arrows)

Special Attacks Power Attack, Cleave

Statistics

Str 17, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 17

Feats cleave, dodge, power attack, weapon focus: greatsword

Skills Climb +6, Jump +6

Languages common

SQ bravery, armor training

Combat Gear potion of cure light wounds x2, mwk greatsword, longbow, masterwork breastplate

Other Gear 10 mwk arrows, 2 sleep arrows, mwk manacles, tanglefoot bag x2, everburning torch 16 gp,

EVE, MAGDA, RUTH, STELLA

Female Human Commoners 1

AC 11 (*touch 11, flat footed 10*)

hp 3 (1d6)

Melee unarmed strike +0 (1d3)

Ranged shoe +1 (1d4)

Note: *Unarmed strike provokes an attack of opportunity.*

When the women's gags are removed, their heartfelt thanks swiftly turn into frantic, anxious questions. Ralisa was dragged roughly from the room mere minutes before the party arrived, and they overheard one of their guards say that "the ritual was about to begin."

PART 5: THE SHRINE OF THE DEMON QUEEN

The immense room reeks of foul incense. On the far side of the room is a cyclopean idol, a horrifying corrupted version of the female form, eyes fixed on the stone altar at her feet.

Bound tightly to the altar is a frightened woman, struggling in vain against her bonds. A figure in a black priestly robe, face obscured by a cowl stands behind her. In one hand is a book; the other holds a wicked dagger.

Allow player characters with Bardic Knowledge or Knowledge: Religion an attempt to identify which of your campaign's deities Posso worships.

Posso is preoccupied. Subtract 10 from his Perception roll to notice the arrival of the hopeful heroes.

Suggested tiles and placement for this encounter:

Tile 20 (2)

Tile 21 (1)

Tile 25 (2)

Tile B03 (1)

Top Row: Tile 25 (90L), Tile B03, Tile 25

Bottom Row: Tile 20, Tile 21, Tile 20

POSSO CR 5

Male human cleric 6

LE Medium humanoid (*human*)

Init +3: Senses Perception +4

Defense

AC 18 touch 9, flat footed 18 (+9 armor, -1 Dex)

hp 36 (6d8+12)

Fort +7 **Ref** +1 **Will** +9

Offense

Spd 20 ft.

Melee +1 heavy mace +6 (1d8+2)

Special Attacks channel negative energy 4/day (3d6, *Will save DC 16 halves*)

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6 concentration +10) fire bolt 7/day, touch of evil 7/day

Prepared Spells: **Lvl 3:** searing light x2, magic vestment (*fireball*) DC 17; **Lvl 2:** darkness, enthrall, hold person x2 (*produce flame*) DC 16; **Lvl 1:** cause fear x3, command, shield of faith (*burning hands*) DC 15; **Lvl 0:** Bleed, Guidance, Light, Read Magic

Tactics

Before Combat In case the ceremony evokes any unpleasant surprises, Posso has already cast shield of faith (AC 21). Because he is so focused on the ritual, give him a -5 penalty to his Perception checks to notice the adventurers.

During Combat Posso is on the verge of performing a coup de grace on Ralisa, and does so unless interrupted. Once he notices the adventurers, he quaffs the levitation potion even if it provokes attacks of opportunity. Once above melee's reach, he casts offensive spells and channels negative energy at the player characters until the potion wears off (2 minutes). If there is a skilled archer in the party, Posso drinks the potion of protection from arrows to soak the next 20 points of arrow damage.

Morale Unless Posso is subdued or restrained, he continues to fight until he can resume the ceremony. He is madly in love, or so he thinks, with the demon he's trying to summon. (*Hostile, Diplomacy DC 26*)

Statistics

Str 12, **Dex** 8, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 14

Feats combat casting, improved channel, improved initiative, selective channeling

Skills Concentration +10, (+14 *combat casting*), Heal +13, Knowledge: Religion +9, Sense Motive +13

Languages Common

SQ channel negative energy (3d6), Evil domain, Fire domain

Gear potion of levitate, potion of protection from arrows, holy symbol (*silver*), 193 gp

Consider carefully when you want to begin the coup de grace. Would your group enjoy witty repartee with the villain before he acts? Or would the drama of a ticking clock suit them better - trying to stabilize the mortally wounded maiden before her time runs out?

For some parties, the potion of levitation is a game stopper. Use with care.

PART 6: HAPPY ENDING?

OUTCOME ONE: JUBILANT ENDING

If the party succeeded in rescuing all five abductees:

The villagers of Vestor are ecstatic when you return their loved ones safely. You are hugged until your ribs ache, and your hands are shaken so often and so vigorously that it hurts to grip your knife and fork at the fete given in your honor that night. The evening's events close with a toast in your honor by Eldaman Mazor proclaiming you "heroes of the highest degree." The townspeople roar their approval.

Opportunities for Roleplay:

1. One of the rescued young ladies develops a romantic interest in one of the adventurers. Better yet, two of them become interested in the same adventurer.
2. The mother of one of the rescued young ladies decides to play matchmaker, for or against her daughter's will.
3. Ralisa becomes interested in one of the adventurers, and the spurned fiancée Harcourt calls him (*or her*) out. Perhaps Harcourt shows up in a later adventure to further complicate a dire predicament.

Widow Bienna provides you all with free lodging for the night, and the following morning piles the breakfast table high with staples and delicacies galore. She stuffs every available space in your bags with breads and meats that she guarantees will “stay fit to eat for a couple of days.”

As you ride out of town, Eldaman brings a small coin purse for each of you. “We’re not rich,” he explains, “but we are grateful.” All the villagers turn out to see you go, and the five women you rescued wave and cheer until long after you are out of sight.

Treasure: coin purse containing 10 gp, uncut gemstone worth 5 gp; Widow Bienna’s Refreshing Tea (3 doses) see Appendix A.

OUTCOME TWO: GLOOMY ENDING

If the party returned with four (*or fewer*) of the abductees:

News of your return spreads quickly through the village, and anxious men and women flood the tiny dirt street. Mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers of the kidnapped women run to greet their loved one. One among them slows, then stops, his face suddenly ashen. “Ralisa?” Eldaman moans. “Where is my Ralisa?”

The majority of the villagers offer their congratulations. Some pat you on the back and offer sincere encouragement, saying that without your help, none of the young women would have returned. A few, grieving the loss of Ralisa, don’t interact with you at all. It’s clear that Eldaman, though inconsolable, doesn’t hold you personally responsible. But Ralisa’s former fiancée, Harcourt, glares at each of you intensely at every opportunity.

Opportunities for Roleplay:

- 1) See above.
- 2) See above.
- 3) The players try to console Eldaman.
- 4) Harcourt calls out one of the party members, promising he will make them pay for letting Ralisa die. Perhaps Harcourt shows up in a later adventure to further complicate a dire predicament.

Widow Bienna’s beds live up to their reputations. She mentions at the somewhat sparse breakfast the next morning that she was Ralisa’s godmother, and she blinks a few times before excusing herself.

As you ride out of town, Eldaman and Harcourt are nowhere to be seen. However, a handful of villagers turn out to see you off; one of the elders approaches with a coin purse for each of you containing the agreed upon amount of gold. The four women you rescued wave and cheer until long after you are out of sight.

Treasure: coin purse, 10 gp.

APPENDIX A: SPECIAL ITEMS

Widow Bienna’s Refreshing Tea: When immersed in a cup of hot water for three minutes (30 rounds), this small white bag produces a drink that, when consumed, temporarily removes the fatigued condition from a character for two hours. When the effect wears off, the fatigued character must succeed at a DC 12 Fortitude save or become exhausted.

It is a standard action to drink the tea. The effect is instantaneous. A Fortitude save negates (*harmless*). Drinking the tea also cures 1 point of nonlethal damage.

The tea loses its effect if the tea bag is opened. It can only be used once per day. Using before twenty-four hours has elapsed results in no effect.

The tea becomes stale and loses its efficacy after one month.

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