

Rites of Passage



The Unkindest Cut of All

written by Osvaldo Oyola Ortega

“Rites of Passage” is an Interlude for a party of 4 to 6 1st-level characters (or alternately, 4-8 characters with NPC classes of levels 1 to 2). This is adventure is meant to introduce new characters to their first real combat encounter... and learn that all is not always what it seems.

* Magic Items ω Towns v Non-player Characters (NPCs) τ Traps υ Objects μ Monsters

Adventure Overview

While passing through or near to the town of Cutter Jack’s the party discovers a standing bounty on the ears of goblins; left ears that is. The catch is that the bounty has been around for generations as a way to curb the local goblin population, and the goblin tribe (the Na-Sor) adopted the custom of removing the left ear of adolescents when they reach adulthood as a sign of defiance against their human oppressors. The law regarding the bounty was never changed, and the goblins population has not risen sufficiently in the past few generations for the monsters to be a threat. So, it was forgotten except for a few moldy signs and some mischievous locals.

When new-comers come through or nearby town, the locals tend to bring up the goblin bounty to send the would-be bounty collectors on a wild-goose chase. Even if they find and kill goblins, the left ear has already been removed, making it worthless in terms of profit.

However, if and when the PCs go hunting goblins they will stumble upon the very ceremony of coming of age where these ears

are removed, and in interrupting the goblin rite of passage, instigate their own.

Beginning the Adventure

The adventure can begin one of two ways (or a DM could incorporate both):

- While traveling through the hilly woods south of Cutter Jack’s the party is startled by a deer being chased by two hunters. If you want to get your players into the right mood with a few skill checks, you could give Druid or Ranger PCs a chance to calm the deer, or for others characters to down it. Whatever they do, the two hunters (David and Andre) explain that the deer was startled by the sound of the party coming – and they hesitated (rather than chase right away) afraid that the party was a group of goblins. If the party inquires about the goblins, the hunters inform them about the bounty for goblin ears: 1 piece of gold per left ear. They add that it has to be left so that people don’t try to cash in twice. Such bounties can be collected in at the town guardhouse. They give directions to the ravine and mine shaft. If the party enters town, locals can confirm what the two hunters said.

Adventure Area

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The town of Cutter Jack’s itself is not detailed in this adventure, and the name is only provided as an easy reference. This “interlude” is meant to be easily slipped into a reasonably secluded area away from general civilization with a nearby hilly area.

V Andre – Human Male Expert 2: CR ½ Medium-sized humanoid (6' tall) HD: 2d6+4 hps: 13 Init: +1, Spd: 30 ft., AC: 7 (leather + dex) At: +1 (+2 melee or ranged) Al: N SV: Fort: +2 Ref: +1, Will: +3;
 Str: 12, Dex: 13, Con: 15 Int: 10 Wis: 11, Cha: 10
 Skills: Climb (+3), Craft, Leatherworking (+4), Handle Animal (+3), Hide (+5), Intuit Direction (+2), Knowledge – Nature (+3), Move Silently (+4), Profession – Hunter (+5), Spot (+3), Swim (+3), Wilderness Lore (+5)
 Feats: Tracking
 SQ: Suffers –4 attack penalty with bow and axe.
 Possessions: Hand axe, short bow (12 arrows), skinning knife, dagger

V David – Human Male Expert 2 : CR ½ Medium-sized humanoid (6' tall) HD: 2d6+4 hps: 13 Init: +1, Spd: 30 ft., AC: 6 (leather + dex) At: +1 (+2 melee or ranged) Al: N SV: Fort: +2 Ref: +1, Will: +3;
 Str: 13, Dex: 14, Con: 12 Int: 11 Wis: 13, Cha: 9
 Skills: Climb (+3), Craft, Leatherworking (+4), Handle Animal (+3), Hide (+5), Intuit Direction (+2), Search (+3), Move Silently (+4), Profession – Hunter (+5), Spot (+3), Swim (+3), Wilderness Lore (+5)
 Feats: Martial Weapon (short bow)
 SQ: Suffers –4 attack penalty with axe.
 Possessions: Hand axe, short bow (12 arrows), skinning knife, dagger

O The second option is as follows: after coming into town to re-supply, the PCs come upon an old posting that reads:



Asking locals about town will confirm this. They can give directions to the PCs towards the “old mine” as they call it.

The Ravine and the Old Mine

The place the locals refer to as “the old mine” was once the goblin tribe’s lair. However, they were forced to abandon the place when the locals discovered that copper could be found there and the old bounty first began. While the goblins have found another place to lair that they prefer, they still see this spot as a sacred part of their homeland and return for important ceremonies like the coming of age ritual.

The ravine itself is surrounded by a layer of brush that gives (25%) cover to anyone at the top. The western side is a steep wall of black stone (climb DC 25), while the east side (above the mine shaft) is a craggy hill of plateaus that while covered in small shrubs provide no cover (climb DC 15). The southern side is much less of a steep slope covered in thorny vines that (painfully) aid climbing (climb DC 0). The natural erosion of the stone on the northern side has created a ramp down to the ravine floor (see map).

The floor of the ravine is a fine gravel, that kicks up into dust easily.

The following text includes a description for characters that sneak up to the edge of the ravine to spy on the action below:

The moonlight reveals a strange ritual. Large ruddy-skinned goblins in studded leather armor flank a black altar stone. They appear impassive, and wield spears. Behind the altar are five apparently young goblins in two rows. They are armored as well, but not armed. Just off to the side and front of the altar stone is a line of 5 more young goblins. They are armed and hold spears upright at their sides, but have their hands up to the left side of their head. Immediately before the altar is a squat goblin dressed in wolf-hides. Around his neck is a necklace, which holds a wolf-skull, and at his side is a vicious-looking club.

As you watch, a young goblin steps up onto the black stone and kneels before the wolf-skin garbed one. This goblin begins to speak some words and look to the sky. He punches the goblin twice in the chest, who then growls and bows his head. The leader of the ceremony then takes the young goblin’s head in his hands and there is a quick jerking motion. The performer of the ceremony steps back, as the young goblin steps off the stone dazedly. He steps over to one of the flanking warriors and his handed a spear. He then takes his place in

line with the others holding their hands to their heads

It is wholly possible that the game-master may have to abridge or alter the above description based on the character's actions. The intensity of the ceremony makes it so that all involved suffer a -4 circumstance penalty to spot or listen checks. However, Gar-wog's (the goblin sorcerer) familiar (a bat) is hanging in nearby tree, near the north end of the ravine. If the party approaches from this side the bat will surely see and/or hear them, unless the party is taking precautions to be stealthy.

μ Bat Familiar – Diminutive animal, HD: ¼ d8 Hps: 2, Initiative: +2 (dex), Speed: 5 ft., fly 40 ft (good), AC: 16 (+4 size, +2 dex), Attacks: Nil, Damage: Nil SQ: Blindsight Saves: Fort: +2, Ref +4, Will: +2 Abilities: Str: 1 (-5) Dex: 15 (+2), Con: 10, Int: 2 (-5), Wis: 14 (+2), Cha: 4 (-4) Skills: Listen: +9, Move Silently: +6, Spot: +9

The bat will immediately fly to within range to alert its master. Allow the PCs in the area a spot check to notice the bat, it will be moving at four times its speed to get to its master.

Once the goblin warlock is alerted to the PCs' presence, he will send the two flanking warriors up the stone ramp to engage them, and yell at the dazed goblins who have had their ears removed to take some action. He will do this as moving to place the ramp wall against his back to avoid being a target for spells or missile fire and remain there until all his goblins have engaged and then support them with spells. He will send out his bat to circle above to give him reports on where PCs might be hidden and then yell instructions to his warriors.

The "uncut" goblins will stand about confused for a round and then begin to run towards the southern end of the ravine and climb out in order to escape. As they are officially not "adults" until their ear is cut, they are not allowed to take part in combat.

The "cut" goblins will stand dazed in pain for 1d3 rounds, or until attacked.

μ Goblin Warriors (2) – Small Humanoid (goblinoid) Warrior 2 HD:2d8 hps: 13 each CR: ½ Initiative: +1 (Dex) Spd: 30 ft. AC: 15 (Studded leather + dex + size) AT: short spear +1 or dagger +1 (ranged: +2) Damage: short spear 1d6-1, dagger 1d4-1. Al: LE SV: (Fort: +3, Ref: +1, Will: +0); Str: 8 (-1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 Int: 10 Wis: 11 Cha: 8 (-1)

Skills: Hide: +6, Listen +3, Move Silently: +4, Spot: +3. Feats: Alertness SQ: Darkvision 60 ft. Possessions: Each wears a small leather helmet, a short spear and a dagger.

μ "Cut" Goblins (6) – Small Humanoid (goblinoid) Warrior 1 HD:1d8 hps: 4 each (6 unhurt) each CR: ½ Initiative: +1 (Dex) Spd: 30 ft. AC: 15 (Studded leather + dex + size) AT: short spear +1 (ranged: +2) Damage: short spear 1d6-1 Al: LE SV: (Fort: +2, Ref: +1, Will: +0); Str: 8 (-1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 Int: 10 Wis: 11 Cha: 8 (-1) Skills: Hide: +6, Listen: +1, Move Silently: +4, Spot: +3. Feats: Alertness SQ: Darkvision 60 ft. Possessions: Each has a short spear. These goblins have a -2 penalty to listen checks because of the recent loss of their ear.

μ "Uncut" Goblins (4) – Small Humanoid (goblinoid) Warrior 1 HD:1d8 hps: 4 each (6 unhurt) each CR: ½ Initiative: +1 (Dex) Spd: 30 ft. AC: 15 (Studded leather + dex + size) AT: Unarmed +1 Damage: Unarmed (1d2-1) Al: LE SV: (Fort: +2, Ref: +1, Will: +0); Str: 8 (-1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 Int: 10 Wis: 11 Cha: 8 (-1) Skills: Hide: +6, Listen: +1, Move Silently: +4, Spot: +3. Feats: Alertness SQ: Darkvision 60 ft. Possessions: These goblins carry nothing.

These goblins will seek to escape as quickly as possible. If confronted they will run rather than fight, and will only fight if cornered, and even then if the sorcerer and the two warriors are killed they will surrender, and try their hardest in broken common to beg for mercy. As soon as they get out of ravine they will run back to their lair. The lair does not fall into the scope of this adventure and is over an hour's march away in an abandoned fort (see *Continuing the Adventure.*)

v Gar-Wog – Small humanoid (goblinoid), Sorcerer 2; HD: 2d4 hps: 13 CR: 2 Initiative: +1 (dex), Spd: 30 ft. AC: 14 (Size + Dex + Leather), AT: Club +1, Ceremonial Dagger +1 Damage: 1d6-1 (club), 1d4-2 (dagger). AL: LE SV: (Fort: +1, Ref: +1, Will: +4); Str: 9 (-1), Dex: 13 (+1), Con: 12 (+1) Int: 11, Wis: 12 (+1), Cha: 14 (+2) Skills: Concentration +3, Hide: +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +3, Spellcraft +3.

Special Spells



The spells marked with the green star can be found in *Sword & Sorcery Studio's Relics & Rituals*®

If you do not have access to this book, replace them with these core spells respectively: *Ghost Sound, Burning Hands.*

Feats: Light Armor Proficiency, Toughness
SQ: Spell-casting, Has the benefits of Alertness (+2 Listen and Spot) when his familiar is within arm's reach, Darkvision 60', +2 to listen from familiar when
Spell Progression: 0: 6 1: 4 (10% Arcane failure)
Spells Known: 0th -- *Daze, Detect Magic, Resistance, Steal Sleep**; 1st -- *Acid Spittle*, Disappear**
Possessions: Gar-Wog wears leather armor, has a necklace with the skull of a young wolf, flanked by the skulls of two wolf-pups. He wears a tarnished gold signet ring (worth 80 gps; see below), and carries his spell components in a belt pouch. He also wields a club and carries ceremonial knife made of an ox bone. It is fragile and dull and only does 1d4-1 (minimum 1) points of damage when used in melee, a bag of goblin ears (a number equal to the "cut" goblins).

Gar-Wog will remain behind his goblin warriors and cast spells from there, casting acid spittle and then moving in to spit it and moving away. He will also try to use *Daze* on obvious fighters and his warriors will gang up on that character for that round. If forced to flee he heads first towards the southern end of the ravine to climb away. If this way is blocked, he heads to the mine to hide and then use *Disappear* and try to sneak past the party.

Points of Interest

1. The Black Stone: This black square stone obviously was brought here from somewhere else, but examination of how it lies will tell an observant individual that it has been here quite some time. It can be pried out of the gravelly dirt, but weighs 200 lbs. It is 1½ feet tall, by 2 feet wide, by 3 feet long. It is stained in fresh goblin blood.

2. The Old Mine: The entrance is about ten feet high and 15 feet wide. Any light from outside reaches about 20' in and then visibility becomes a problem. Anyone using the tracking feat should be able to tell (DC 10) that no one has walked here in quite some time.

3. The Break Room: This room once had a door, which now hangs splintering from one rusty hinge. Read the following aloud to your players:

This dusty room carved of the earth is filled with broken furniture and rubble. There are hooks by the entrance and in the low ceiling for lanterns, though none are there now. The furniture appears to have been wooden benches and tables. There are also shards of crockery and bits of metal around. The rough-hewn walls are slick with moisture that runs

down from the ceiling, and that has smeared the now illegible scrawls on the walls.

This was once a break room for miners. There is nothing of value left here, as vagrants, vandals and other questionable creatures and people have stayed here over the years. The graffiti was painted by children, but in its smeared state *could* be mistaken for arcane symbols. In reality it calls the local lord's mother a kobold.

4. The Dark Mine Shaft

Read aloud:

The tunnel slopes downward in the form of broad steps to a 20' x 20' shaft that goes straight down into the darkness. Two rusty rings are set into the ceiling, one with a splintering wooden pulley, with a bit of frayed rope still hanging off. Water drips soundlessly, plummeting into the abyss with an echoing ploop below.

The mine does not really play into this Interlude. The easiest way to handle it is to have the lower mine levels be flooded. The surface of the water should be 60' down, and should go down at least another 20' to discourage exploration. Alternately, the DM may decide to attach this encounter to some to some other related or unrelated adventure involving a copper mine. The walls of the shaft are dangerously slick (DC 30).

Ending the Adventure

The Interlude basically ends when the encounter is finished, with either all the goblins fleeing or being soundly defeated. If the PCs retrieve the bag of ears, the town authorities will be very surprised to see the goblin ears, but will be obligated to pay the bounty.

Continuing the Adventure

Of course the nature of this interlude makes it so that the GM can expand upon it in many different ways. Below are some suggestions:

O The Signet Ring: The signet ring with a fancy "S" (or whatever letter works for the campaign setting) belonged to a long lost member of a local noble family that will give a 100 gps reward for its return (a local pawn-broker would be able to identify it as such). This good deed could gain the party

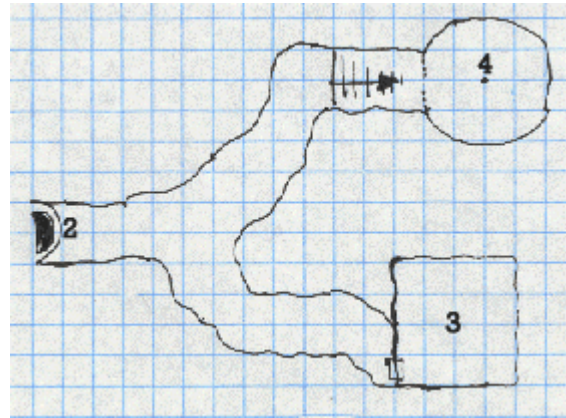
employment from this family. This could easily be linked with the “armor” plot point below.

○ **The Studded Leather Armor:** When and if the characters examine the armor the goblins are wearing they find it is of very fine quality (just short of masterwork). Where did these goblins get such access to such fine armor? The GM could develop a conspiracy with another town or nation who is helping to arm the goblins in order to weaken their neighbor. The non-serious attitude towards the goblins that locals have would mean that an attack by them would be unexpected and quite effective. Perhaps that is why so many young goblins are being initiated.

○ **The Old Mine:** What is in the old mine? Why was it abandoned? Why have the goblins not returned to their home? Perhaps it is merely flooded, or perhaps something more frightening and powerful live within. This could be a dropped clue for a future adventure when “fish-men” (kuo-tua? sahuagin?) begin to attack the town.

○ **The Goblin Lair:** The goblins that escape have a long march home. PCs could track them back to the old fort that they are now using as a lair, and find the goblins preparing for war.

The Old Mine



(See next page for the map of the ravine).

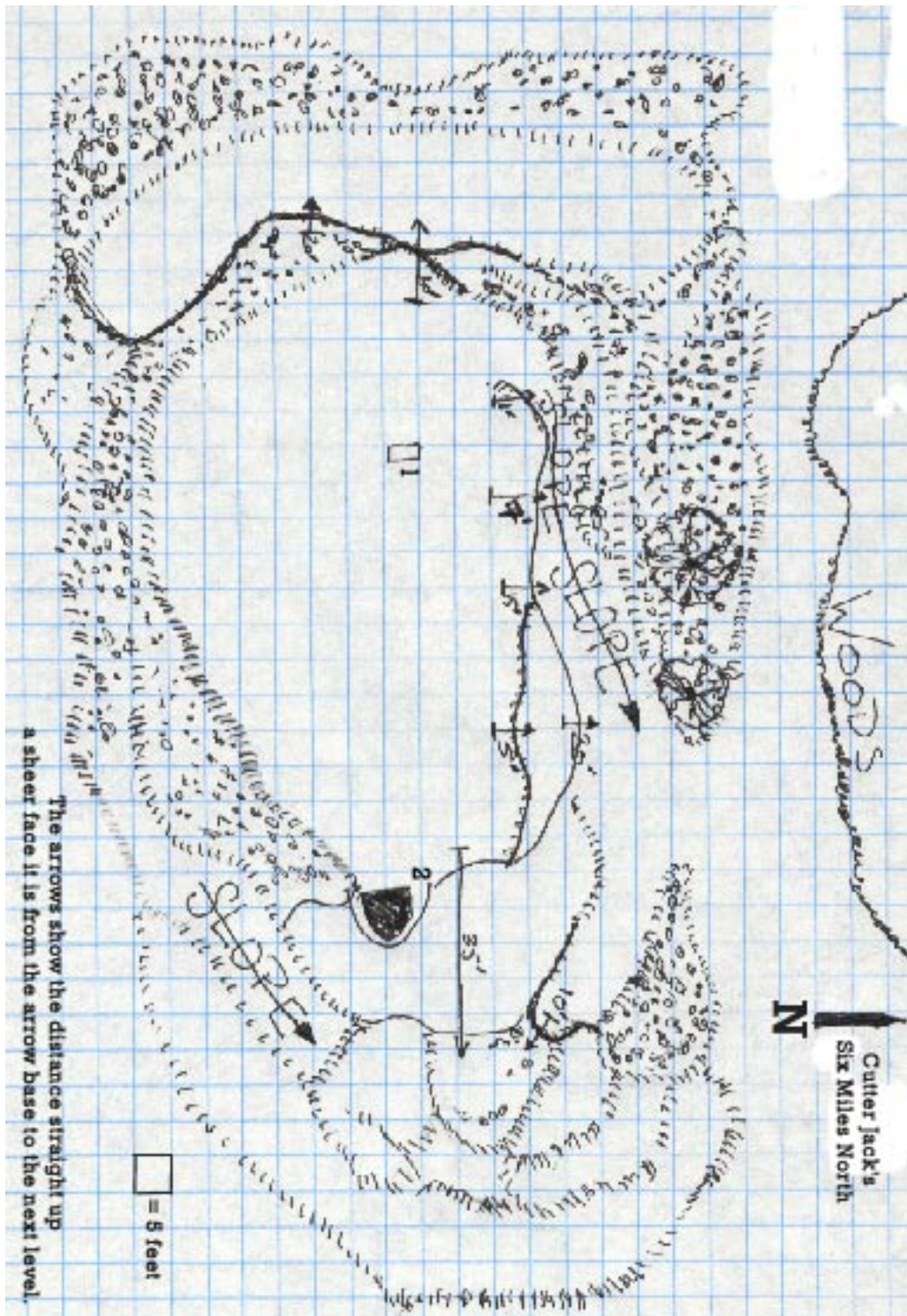
Scaling the Adventure

Although intended as an introduction for low-level characters, there are some adjustments possible for more experienced parties:

○ 3rd-level PCs: Double the number of “Cut” goblins and goblin warriors. Make Gar-Wog a 4th-level sorcerer.

○ 5th-level PCs: Triple the number of “cut” goblins, add a worg for each of the goblin warriors and the sorcerer, who are resting in the entrance to the mine (or foraging around) the brush. Make Gar-Wog a 4th-level sorcerer.

○ 7th-level PCs: Quadruple the number of “cut” goblins, and triple the number of warriors making them 3rd level; make Gar-wog a 6th-level sorcerer, with an assistant of the same level as Gar-wog is in the original adventure, add a warrior-leader who is 5th level, add a worg for each of the warriors, and one for Gar-wog and his assistant – give Gar-wog a *heavy mace* +2, and his leather armor masterwork.



The broken lines show the graduated level downwards towards the center/bottom of the ravine. Solid lines show sheer drops of a depth equal to the amount shown on the appropriate arrow, to the next level.

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