

Part IV – Held Hostage

And the evil Men came among them, and cast over them a shadow of fear, and they took them for kings. Then the Valar forsook for a time the Men of Middle-earth who had refused their summons and had taken the friends of Morgoth to be their masters; and Men dwelt in darkness and were troubled by many evil things that Morgoth had devised in the days of his dominion: demons, and dragons, and misshapen beasts, and the unclean Orcs that are mockeries of the Children of Ilúvatar. And the lot of Men was unhappy.”

-- The Silmarillion, Akallabêth. J.R.R. Tolkien.

Session: #4

System: ICE HARP

“Level” equivalent: 10th level.

Primary GM: Thom Denholm

Time: 609 (Spring, May 5th)

Adventure Timeline:

Day 1 – Chieftains meet at clearing and are betrayed and captured, with their aides and heirs hung by the trees. No one at the villages knows this has happened, since such gatherings can often take days before their return. There is only one witness, a 9 year old boy named Brëor, grandson of Chief Heor.

Day 2 – (Noon) Brëor arrives in Hëor Village and falls asleep.

(Evening) Mother and shaman-woman coax response from Breor, word is quickly sent by runners to the other villages.

Day 3 – (Throughout the day and night) Representatives from all the near 9 villages arrive at Heor to decide what to do, this also includes the 2 surviving chieftains Hrëbäst and Kuor (who arrive first since they are the nearest to Heor village).

Day 4 – (All Day) Much debate over what to do, and many throw suspicion on Hrëbäst and Kuor.

(Nightfall) In the evening, Kuor leaves meeting in anger to cool off, while he is away, Hrëbäst begins convincing all the other village representatives that this kidnapping must be Kuor's doing.

(Full night) The PC's arrive. They get 15 minutes (GM, watch the “real time” from when you finish reading the introduction of their arrival), then the message is found and brought to the leaders. Kuor arrives shortly thereafter having been told of what was just found.

Day 5+ – (Either just after midnight or wee hours before dawn, or sometime in the day time or that following evening depending on what time they PC's decide). The PC's are lead by Brëor to the site of the slaughter. If the PC's wait until nightfall, they will unfortunately receive the first chieftains body (by troll toss), who is Hëor (the orcs know him to be the most dangerous to keep alive, and also assume that his death will cause the rest to fall in line very quickly).

(Just after full night) The body of Hëor (missing his left hand of course) is flung by Troll toss into the village.

After that, after nightfall of each day, another chieftain will be flung into their own village. In the following order:

Day 5 – Heor, nearly full moon from Night 4 into Day 5, then just before sunrise, dark clouds begin to

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gather and that night heavy rainstorms begin.

Day 6 - _____, rainstorms continue.

Day 7 - _____, rainstorms end around noon.

Day 8 - _____, clear skies, full moon.

Day 9 - _____, clear skies, full moon waning

Day 10 - _____, mid-afternoon storm clouds gather, beginning another heavy deluge by nightfall.

Day 11 - _____, rains continue until evening, when they end and the skies clear.

Game Master's Overview

The dark forces managed through a series of subterfuge, trickery, and betrayal, to take a number of the local village's chieftains hostage.

This was accomplished by sending messages to each of the leaders of each tribe in the area, feigning to be from fellow tribesmen, organizing a meeting between them at a neutral location. A neutral location was required because many of the tribes tended to squabble and fight with each other when the Númenóreans were not around to keep them in line, or when too long a “peace” with the dark minions went on for too long.

Languages & Communication Barriers.

By this time (S.A. 609), the local villagers have had enough contact with the Númenóreans and most have learned to speak Adûnaic (albeit with heavy accents) as the “common tongue” between the other villages. Most still retain their tribal speech, but younger generations are beginning to adopt Adûnaic as their primary rather than secondary language. Each village speaks slightly different dialects in this group of 9, and villages further out have very differing languages. Some few, such as the Chieftains, have learned either Sindarin or Quenya as well.

Tragedy

The tribal leaders met at the location, each with only the leader, their primary aide, one successor and one bodyguard, only to find out it was a trap set by the dark forces, who killed all of the chieftains' underlings, including their heirs. and then took the surviving chieftains hostage. The slain were all hung by the neck from the surrounding trees and left hanging there.

Witness

The only reason the villages even found out the day after the gathering, was that one 10 year old child, Brëor, the grandson of the village's chieftain (Hëor), had stealthily followed and observed from afar. He witnessed the terrible events that followed, but managed to remain quiet. He ran in terror after the hangings, and was lost in the night. He only managed to find his way home during the following

daylight hours.

At first when he came home, he would not speak a word to anyone, he walked in an exhausted daze. He was at first allowed to sleep, then later that evening, his mother, with the help of the local elderly shaman woman, managed to coax a response from him, which he then poured out an accounting of the terrible events in a tear-filled flurry. His father, Hrëor was dead, and his grandfather Hëor taken with his eyes wide open but unable to move. He saw only the Men in the daylight (the orcs hid in the woods out of the daylight, ready for battle if reinforcements were needed to assist the “wicked men”). All tried to fight, then the orcs and wicked Men used small blowgun darts laced with a compound that quickly left their victims conscious but paralyzed. At that point, it was a simple matter for the Men to gather up the bodies, sort the chieftains from the underlings, have the chieftains carted off by wagon and horse, and then hang the rest from the nearest trees.

Seven of Nine

Seven of the local nine were captured. The two who were not caught, escaped the trap, because each had such strong animosity towards the other, that one would not attend if the other was there, so they ended up both avoiding the gathering. Instead, they sent their “representatives” who were much lower in ranking, and of course were slain.

These were the chieftains Hrëbäst (Hray-bahst) and Kuör (Qu-or). They were the nearest neighbors to Hëor Village.

Suspicion

There were a few days of great tension when at first when it was thought that either Hrëbäst or Kuör was responsible for the ambush. All knew of Hrëbäst's strong dislike of Hëor and jealousy over Hëor's influence over the other villages, and none could forget the beating that Kuör had received at the hands of Hëor 11 years ago, and Kuör's animosity towards her later husband Hrëor. The beating had occurred when Kuör challenged Hëor to a match, for the right of Kuör to wed Hëor's daughter (Hëlan) against Hëor's (and Hëlan's) wishes. Hrëbäst was liked far more by the other villages than Kuör. Nearly all the tribes were arguing to attack Kuör's village, since he had been the most obvious culprit.

Fortunately, the ransom message came on the eve of just before many of the tribes were planning to begin their assaults against Kuör or Hrëbäst. The ransom message arrived, fortunately diffused the brewing of war between the villages (which if the orcs had been cleverer would have preferred to happen anyway), but of course this created a new tension and urgency.

However, many of the other tribes will still be suspicious of the two leaders. They will turn out to have good cause, since it is Hrëbäst who turned out to actually have allied himself with Sauron's minions secretly. His hope was that with Hëor and his supporters out of the way, he would take power over all the other villages and unite them in taking Kuör.

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The Demand

Complete surrender and subservience to Sauron and his minions immediately. Each day of delay will lead to another chieftain being slain, with his/her body defiled, and the pieces/remnants dropped into the respective leader's village by the strong arm toss of a troll.

This message was delivered to each village in a gruesome manner just after full night. The head left hand of each of the chieftains had been severed, and wrapped in a rough papyrus-like material inscribed with the message in blood, then tossed into the village by the toss of one of the trolls.

Now the tribes have to be convinced to try to overcome their terror and squabbles and work together, else all fall due to being too weak and discordant. Hrëbäst will be very willing to cooperate with everyone else, even Kuör. While Kuör will be openly against working with Hrëbäst in any way. Hrëbäst sees this as an opportunity to make a power grab, and will try to alienate Kuor, while ingratiating himself with the village de facto leaders and the PC's,

The other villagers are too weak without their leaders, too afraid to attack (and afraid the leaders will all just be slaughtered in a frontal assault – as they would be indeed), and at a loss as what to do. Hrëbäst will step to the fore and “take charge” (to the constant argument of Kuor). Kuor will storm out in anger to go cool off.

Where Are They When Needed?

A small number of Númenóreans (if there are any PC's in the party who are Númenórean) have stayed behind this year, rather than leaving with the ship on the usual years long gap between visits. This was done to try to prevent a recurrence of the previous betrayal by one tribe against the Númenóreans (see Part II - “No Good Deed..”), and to help the villagers advance and not fall into illness (see Part III - “Ill Omen”) or back into darkness, and finally to try to help the different tribes negotiate a peace and unite their resources in an attempt to drive back the ever encroaching minions of Sauron.

Unfortunately, the PC's have been away for a few weeks making initial contact with tribes much further upstream that had been in little to no contact with this group of villages, so they were not around to stop this trickery and the subsequent tragedy from occurring. The PC's return to the village in the evening **just (15) minutes before the ransom note/message is discovered** and delivered (thus diffusing the plans to assault Kuör).

If there are no PC Númenóreans, then the existing PC members are just returning instead, leaving the Númenóreans back at the distant village in negotiations. Either way, it will be up to the PC's to try to get the tribes to work together, and to come up with an effective plan. In a longer campaign setting you may let the players and NPCs interact and role play the development of what to do. However, in convention play setting, with limited time, the PC's will be directed as to the high level plan. Though the PC's can certainly decide on the details of how to implement it.

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The Plan

If the PC's are struggling with ideas, or considering frontal assault (which would be disastrous for the chieftains and the villagers), have Kuör come up with the “cunning plan” to attempt a covert rescue. Hrëbäst will scoff at this plan as foolish, doomed to failure, and putting the other leaders too much at risk, trying to convince the others that Kuör is either the cause of this, or at the least hoping to cause the death of the other leaders so he can take power (ironic of course). Have the other representatives fully on board however with Kuör's plan having the PC's be this “elite force” however, along with at least one NPC as a guide. Neither Kuör nor Hrëbäst can be convinced to come along, citing their critical positions as the last of the free leaders. No amount of convincing, logic, cajoling, or taunting will get them to go further than following the trail to outside the caves. They will NOT help assault the outside or interior of the caves. (They will however be open to using the villagers as a diversionary tactic if suggested by the PC's).

The PC's will first go to the site of the slaughter. From there they can easily follow the trail in daylight, if night time, other accommodations need to be made (such as lantern or torch light, night vision, etc.) following by moonlight is a “Hard” difficulty to follow the wagon, horse and boot prints to the Warren. From there, the plan is for a small elite team to go into the enemy's caves, and try to escape with the hostages immediately. Every day of delay means the loss of another leader, starting with Hëor. This means the group needs to leave immediately in the middle of the night with a minimum of time to prepare and gather any needed gear.

This is no simple task, and definitely requires high skill levels in subterfuge and silent death. But of course, any skilled PC adventurer will be of value.

Outside The Warren

The party will be lead by Brëor to the clearing where the slaughter and capture occurred, they will then follow the trail to a small cave network.

During the nighttime there are 8 orcs on duty outside the caves in various locations keeping watch, while some of the lesser “wicked men” normally on guard in the daytime sleep within the caves in their own section.

During the daytime, 8 lesser “wicked men” act as lookouts while the orcs sleep through the day.

Inside the caves is a warren of orcs who only come out at night time unless there is an alarm or a planned raid. The orcs in the warren are trusting that the evil men will set off the loud alarm bells (3 basic segments of metal in the shape of a triangle actually) in the case of any trouble, so the orcs sleep deeply during the day.

If the party keeps the 8 outer guards from making it to the caves or sounding the alarm, they can stop the orcs being alerted since they keep no watch inside the warren in their arrogance.

Inside The Warren

In the caves is a complex warren-like home to a group of 36 orcs, and a handful of wargs and other Orc-related nasties and slaves throughout the network of caves. If the party prevents the alarms from being raised (bells), then they could conceivably wipe out the orcs a group at a time, if they are very careful (and lucky).

However, if the warren becomes alerted, unless the PC's can hide themselves in the warren during the alarm (possible considering it's size), the party might find they may need to flee back to the village with so many of the orcs in pursuit. This could be used as a diversionary tactic, if it occurs to the PC's. The villagers would be willing to act as "bait" to set off the alarm and draw out as many of the orcs and wicked men as possible, then the party can attempt to sneak in, with far fewer forces in the caves. The NPCs do NOT come up with this however. Of course, the PC's run the risk of being inside the warren if/when the orcs return after the villagers lead them on a merry chase and eventually dissolve into the dense woods losing their pursuers without engaging any in battle.

If pursuing the PC's the orcs will break off pursuit as they come within bow shot range of one of the slightly fortified villages. As soon as the orcs are fired upon by the villagers on the (wooden) walls of the forts, the orcs will turn tail and flee back to the safety of their caves, while some messengers are sent to other orc tribes for advice on what to do next.

Temporary Turning of the Tide

If the villagers round up reinforcements to go chasing after the orcs, they will find that the orcs will collapse the entrance to the caves (trying to crush as many of the villagers as possible in the landslide/cave-in/trap).

Meanwhile, the orcs will sneak out a back way following a river/waterfall. The orcs will go out of their way to avoid a large confrontation at this point. That is saved for Parts 5 & 6 of this campaign.

If the party finds the waterfall entrance, the orcs will fight desperately to try to escape and flee to other neighboring orc tribes. If more time is needed in this session (not likely) some orcs might be found to have remained hidden in the caves if the adventurers wish to thoroughly root them out. Others could continue to harry those that escaped out the back way, trying to prevent their getting to the other tribe(s).

Reinforcements, Not The Cavalry

If the party pursues some fleeing orcs for a few miles, when they party nearly catches up with the fleeing ones, an inverse of the chase before occurs.

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The party stumbles upon another orc tribe's reinforcements, attacking in 50-100+ numbers strong. Forcing the party to turn tail and flee back to the safety of the village. The orcs will not pursue them very far.

Consequences

Whether the players succeed or fail, there will be consequences.

If the PC's are successful this will utterly enrage the evil leadership into ending the relative "peace" and beginning a constant harrying of all the villages, building increasingly in size and severity. That will be a segue into Part V "The Truly Dirty Dozen".

Any tribal leaders the PC's fail to bring back alive, will mean that those villages will scorn the PC's (and the the Númenóreans if any are in the party), and will actually join out of anger and fear, with the minions of Sauron, eventually helping in the final assault against the other villages in Part VI "Battle".

Players Introduction

Read aloud the following to the players:

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It is the fifth day of _____ (May) in the six hundred and ninth year of the Second Age.

You and your fellow adventurers have just returned from a long journey visiting other villages across the countryside in an effort to help build some sort of unity between the villages and stand up to the ever encroaching dark forces of Sauron. You have been away from the greater Hëor (Hay-or) village area for several weeks.

You have returned late on this night, to find the area in chaos and uproar. The hurried words of the villagers as you arrived, have given you some understanding as to what has happened, as they guide you to the center of the village.

Nearly all the chieftains of the 9 villages in the area have been kidnapped. Only a small 10 year old boy was witness to the incident. Only 2 of the villages leaders, Hrëbäst and Kuör were not captured. They are here before you with other representatives of the surrounding villages, gathered at "The Meeting Place" gathered around a large fire. As you party approaches, you see each of them look up at you with various looks of surprise and relief.

At this point, have all PC's roll their perception check (Medium Difficulty) when they first arrive. For those that succeed, have them note that Hrëbäst at first seems very upset at their arrival as they walk into the area, but then quickly changes his expression and comes forward smiling, to welcome them in their time of need. Kuor is nowhere to be seen (yet) he had stormed out earlier in a rage. He will return about 1 minute after the arrival of the "message".

The "Message"

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Your discussions are interrupted when a scream is heard near the village entrance to the East.

As you and the others rush to the front of the village, you come upon a small gathering of villagers staring down at the ground.

Upon closer inspection you a roughly fist sized lump of something wrapped in some sort of papyrus-like material.

As you open the “package” you see it contains a freshly severed hand. The hand has been blackened and cauterized by fire to keep it from oozing onto the writing that is on the inside of this wrapping.

The following is written, apparently in blood:

You may hand “The Message” handout to the players now while reading aloud:

Here this now.

You must give up and bow to us and Dark Lord.

If you not. Each day you get one dead chief by troll toss.

If you try fight, we kill all chiefs.

You want let us know you surrender.

You send messenger to place where chiefs taken from we watch for you.

If Tall Men or Others come, we kill all chiefs. you never find bodies.

So say me, Chief Druzùkh (drah-Zook) of Kututh (Kuh-tuhth) Clan.

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The “Message” (Handout)

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