

Cliffhangers Adventures

Training Grounds

Episode One: The Wake

By Jeff Quick

Training Grounds is a short adventure for four 5th-level characters. The adventure is set in a long field in the homelands of a hobgoblin army. *Training Grounds* requires very little adjustment for higher-level characters. If PCs are above 10th level, adjust by adding levels to the hobgoblin opponents.



Adventure Background

The leaders of an army of hobgoblins have decided to set up a challenge for their elite troops. They need live, unwilling opponents to train against. So they decide to capture the PCs and use them as the training exercise.

Character Hooks

The hook for this Cliffhanger is easy to say and hard to do. The PCs must be taken captive by the hobgoblins. As any experienced DM knows, PCs hate being taken captive -- maybe even more than dying. This is no reason not to do it, but make sure you play fair when you capture them.

One way to do this is by having the hobgoblins watch the PCs on an adventure, wait until their resources are mostly spent, and then ambush them with nets and saps. If you go this route, give the PCs intermittent Spot checks (opposed by the hobgoblin watcher's Hide check) to see that they are being watched.

Another way to set this up is for the hobgoblins to lure the PCs into a CR 5 pit trap. Once in the pit, the hobgoblins throw rocks on them and use longspears to prevent anyone from climbing out.

Cliffhanger Features

The obstacles that the heroes must face are described in each individual Cliffhanger episode, but some commonalities exist from one episode to the next.

Regular Hobgoblins: The fifty regular hobgoblins move with the PCs, though they attack constantly only during the first Cliffhanger episode. In later episodes, the hobgoblins merely watch the PCs. This isn't their exercise. They're merely there to help keep the PCs along the track. Should a PC attempt to leave the exercise via means not mentioned anywhere, the hobgoblins on that side of the course attempt to push them back on course by attacking with javelins.

Captain Yornlheth: The captain of the Fang Warband hobgoblins makes his way to the end area of the training grounds while the PCs move through the course. He doesn't intercede in any way until the end.

Camouflaged Pit Trap: CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Reflex save (DC 20) avoids; 50 ft. deep (5d6, fall); multiple targets (first target in each two adjacent 5-ft. squares); Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 17).

Remember to use the aid another action (pg. 135, *Player's Handbook*) to help the hobgoblins hit heavily armored opponents.

The Wake (EL 4)

The adventure begins when the PCs wake up to rough kicking. Any PC who interrupts the following monologue is beaten into unconsciousness with clubs (1d6). Attempts at discussion are not heeded. The PCs each have pointed leaves glued to their ears to emulate elf ears, though they won't know this until one of their party points this out. Read the following aloud:

You feel a rough boot in your side, jarring you out of unconsciousness. Ten hobgoblins stand in a circle over your prone bodies. They each wear chainmail and their left fangs are capped with gold. More hobgoblins stand farther behind them in a line.

You are wearing only a rough, dirty smock. You have none of your equipment, jewelry, weapons, armor, or spell components, and your arms are tied behind your back. You also have something oozing into and out of your ears.

A muscular, snaggle-toothed hobgoblin in plate armor steps into the circle and stands above you. He laughs slowly, "Hrr hrr hrr."

"I'm going to explain things to you." He says in Common, very loudly and slowly, with hand motions, as if speaking to foreigners. He looks at the circle of hobgoblins and says, "Beat the first one that interrupts me."

"You're in custody of the Fang Warband of the third army of the Underking Garlhessl. The Fang Warband is part of the Underking's elite force. Our best soldiers. I am Captain Yornlheth. I want to put my warband up against powerful elves. But how will I know how they fight without training? I can skirmish among my own troops, but elves are crafty. So then I thought, what if I found some elves to practice on?"

"That's where you come in. I have made you honorary elves for this training exercise.

"Here's how the exercise works. Your armor, weapons, and equipment that we didn't want are at the other end of this obstacle course." He points to a long field to the west where the afternoon sun glares. You cannot see your equipment, though you can see tall grass and what appears to be a wooden structure in the distance.

"If you make it to the other end of the course, then you have a better chance of living. My troops will line up along the obstacle course and try to kill you with spears. Some of them will also stand back and try to kill you with javelins.

"To make sure you're good training material, here are some healing potions." He points to three potions on the ground just out of your reach. "If you're good elves, you won't need them. Hrr hrr."

"If you start running now, you make yourself a harder target."

The PCs have been unconscious for about a day. They were stabilized and healed via two *cure light wounds* spells each (1d8+3) by the hobgoblin battle adepts earlier that day (though these healers are not present now). The hobgoblins kept them insensible as long as possible during this process by using a foul mixture called oil of taggit (Ingested DC 15) that causes unconsciousness for 1d3 hours. The hobgoblins also treat the PCs roughly, causing continual subdual damage equal to two unarmed strikes apiece. (The hobgoblins cause 1d3+1 points of damage per blow.) Essentially, even as the characters heal subdual damage, they receive more. If they show signs of waking up, they get another dose of the oil of taggit or get kicked into unconsciousness, whichever works better. All in all, the characters have enough hit points to get them going, although without access to *restoration* spells, they retain any ability damage or drain and level loss that they sustained before the hobgoblins got them.

Any PC who listened quietly through the speech heals an hour's worth of subdual damage, too. The PCs are in no danger of dying, but they are in imminent danger of falling unconscious again from the piercing damage of spears and javelins as they perform the hobgoblins' exercises.

The potions that the hobgoblin drops are *cure* potions. They are from the PCs' own equipment stores if they had three *cure* potions before they were captured. If not, then the hobgoblins give them *cure light wounds* potions to make up any difference.

Creatures: There are ten hobgoblins around to beat up on the PCs when they reach consciousness.

Fang Warband Members (10): Male hobgoblin Ftr1; CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d10+1; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +2 melee (1d8+1/x3, shortspear or 1d6+1, club); SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +0, Jump +0, Listen +3, Move Silently +0, Spot +3; Alertness, Dodge.

Possessions: Chainmail, shortspear.

Hobgoblins (50): hp 5 each; see *Monster Manual* pages 119-120.

Tactics: Since the hobgoblins have been watching the PCs for a while, they know who's dangerous. Any who have displayed monk or spellcaster abilities have their hands glued together with the same oozing paste that holds the leaves onto their ears. A character must succeed at a Strength check (DC 20) to pull his or her hands apart. If a spellcaster cannot break

out of the ooze, he or she cannot cast spells with somatic components. Monks are not limited by the lack of hand and arm movement since they actually use their whole bodies when fighting.

Fifty hobgoblins line up on each side of the PCs, providing a 60-foot wide "corridor" for them to move through. These hobgoblins hold javelins and form a constant wall of bodies to delineate the edges of the course. When the PCs reach the midpoint of the hobgoblin "wall," the hobgoblins on the back end run behind the wall to the front of the line, effectively moving with the PCs, and keeping them encircled. These hobgoblins do not have gold-capped fangs, and all have the normal hobgoblin statistics found in the *Monster Manual*.

Only the middle four "active" hobgoblins on either side of the course will hurl javelins at any given time. The rest are either preparing to throw, recovering from the throw (which includes grabbing another javelin from one of the supply areas that dot the field every ten feet on either side), or moving behind the line keep it even with the PCs. If any single PC ever gets ahead of the line, they focus on the front-runner in an attempt to keep up with the party. Remember that if the PCs force these hobgoblins to use their javelins as melee weapons, they attack at -4 since javelins in melee are considered nonproficient weapons.

It is possible for player characters to try to pick up thrown javelins, but they are immediately targeted by all eight "active" hobgoblins if they do so. If a PC succeeds in getting a javelin, that makes the person an immediate, lone target for as long as the PC holds the weapon. If multiple PCs pick up javelins, the hobgoblins split their efforts between them evenly, or you can roll randomly to see which of the weapon-bearing targets gets the brunt of the "active" hobgoblins' attacks.

Captain Yornlheth gives the PCs three rounds to stand up and start moving west before he signals to attack. Then, the hobgoblins in the moving wall begin throwing javelins at the PCs. The ten hobgoblins with the gold-capped fangs move to the edge of the field during the initial three rounds, and then down to various points along the course where they attack the PCs.

Harder Target (EL 4)

The 120-foot-long field is open and grassy, and the grass stands about 18 inches tall. More importantly, gopher holes riddle the ground, which creates a bad surface for the PCs to move over. A PC moving at full walking speed must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 15) each round or fall prone. A PC who runs must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 20) each round or fall prone and take 1d6 points of damage. Player characters who move at half of their normal walking speed can avoid being tripped up.

Anyone who falls prone in the tall grass or simply drops to the ground on purpose may move at a crawl through the growth at half speed. The prone character does not need to make any further Reflex saves for moving across the gopher holes, and the grass provides the prone character with nine-tenths concealment. Up to eight javelins are thrown at the PCs at a time from the regular hobgoblins in an effort to keep them moving along.

The Cliffhanger

When the PCs reach the end of the field, they see two 6-inch-wide planks over a 10-foot-deep trench. Two hobgoblins with spears stand in the trench, grinning.

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The Cliffhanger

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Cliffhangers Adventures

Training Grounds

Episode Three: Up and Over

By Jeff Quick

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Up and Over (EL 3)

Past the trenches, the PCs must cover 20 feet of open ground with high grass as before (but no gopher holes). Then they must scale the wall. This wooden wall is 20 feet high and 20 feet wide -- a huge square slab of hardwood. On the other side, two Fang Warband hobgoblins wait with longspear.

Player characters must succeed at a Climb check (DC 15) to scale the wall. It is roughly hewn and tree-like, but otherwise has no ropes or netting to help anyone climb over. Climbing characters move at half speed as a full-round action. Failing the Climb check means that they make no progress. A check that fails by more than 5 means that the character falls.

The top of the wall is lined with jagged metal and broken pottery. When going over, PCs must make a Climb check (DC 10) or take 1 point of damage from the jagged edge at the top.

Coming down on the other side requires another Climb check (DC 15). Anyone who climbs down 10 feet may also make a Jump check at (DC 15) to land safely at the bottom.

Creatures: The two Fang Warband hobgoblins await the

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Captain Yornlheth: The captain of the Fang Warband hobgoblins makes his way to the end area of the training grounds while the PCs move through the course. He doesn't intercede in any way until the end.

PCs on the other side of the wall.

Fang Warband Members (2): Male hobgoblin Ftr1; CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d10+1; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +2 melee (1d8+1/x3, shortspear or 1d6+1, club); SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +0, Jump +0, Listen +3, Move Silently +0, Spot +3; Alertness, Dodge.

Possessions: Chainmail, shortspear.

Tactics: The two hobgoblins with longspears take jabs at the first two PCs down the wall, but after that, quickly back off so that their reach weapon does not hinder their ability to defend themselves. If an aggressive PC gets inside a hobgoblin's reach, he drops the spear and attempts to fight with his fists.

If the PCs attempt to run around the wall instead of going over it, the hobgoblins have readied partial attack actions to attack as soon as they see a PC come around the side. If they see someone come over the top before they see someone come around the side, they drop their readied actions at the next opportunity and attack as necessary either to bedevil PCs coming over the wall or to defend themselves from someone coming around the side.

The Cliffhanger

As they turn to face the next challenge, the hapless PCs can see a short stretch of turf and a long bed of hot coals running down the center of the course. In the distance is a table -- is their equipment at hand?

Cliffhangers Adventures

Training Grounds Episode Four: Hotfoot

By Jeff Quick

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Hotfoot (EL Variable)

This 100-foot stretch of field has a 20-foot-wide strip of hot coals running down the center of it. The PCs can see a table in the distance with armor and various other indistinguishable items on it. The hobgoblins on the sides continue to pepper them with javelins.

Creatures: Six unarmed Fang Warband hobgoblins await the PCs as they make their way to the end of the exercise.

Fang Warband Members (6): Male hobgoblin Ftr1; CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d10+1; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +2 melee (1d3+1, unarmed strike); SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +0, Jump +0, Listen +3, Move Silently +0, Spot +3; Alertness, Dodge.

Equipment: chainmail

Tactics: Fang Warband hobgoblins wait at intervals just behind the line of javelineer hobgoblins, one at 30 feet down the strip, one at 60, and one at 90, with three on each side. They have readied actions to partial bull rush when a PC passes their position. If a hobgoblin does not push his target into the coals, he continues trying, but attempts to set up bull rushes instead, on subsequent rounds until he succeeds in pushing a PC into the coals.

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Captain Yornlheth: The captain of the Fang Warband hobgoblins makes his way to the end area of the training grounds while the PCs move through the course. He doesn't intercede in any way until the end.

As soon as the first PC reaches the 30-foot mark and the first Fang Warband hobgoblin runs out to attempt a bull rush, the javelineers stop throwing javelins. They don't want to risk hitting one of their own troops. Since each side has only three attacking hobgoblins, the PCs might outnumber the attackers if they all stay on one side. If the PCs stay together, the elite hobgoblins from the other side do not run around. Instead, they

prepare themselves for the final assault after this one.

Anyone pushed into the hot coals takes 1d6 points of fire damage each round until he or she gets back out. Note that it is very possible for a PC to turn on the attacker and shove the hobgoblin into the hot coals, too, if he or she thinks quickly.

The Cliffhanger

Fifty feet ahead stands a wooden table with the PCs' equipment, weapons, and armor on it. Can they get there before the Fang Warband hobgoblins cut them down?

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Cliffhangers Adventures

Training Grounds Episode Five: Final Fight

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Final Fight (EL Variable)

The final part of the training grounds is a wooden table set 50 feet away from the end of the line of burning coals. Most of the PCs' equipment, weapons, and armor are on or around the table, although items that hobgoblins might recognize as powerful or have a use for are conspicuously absent.

For instance, jewelry and armor will probably be on the table, since most hobgoblins do not want to disturb their militaristic conformity with clashing appearances. Exotic weapons, spell component bags, spellbooks, and holy symbols are also present since the hobgoblins cannot use them. Potions will be here, except for healing potions, which they have identified and taken. Simple or martial weapons, on the other hand, especially high quality ones, will be not only absent, but possibly used against them by the onrushing hobgoblin warriors. Other items are present or absent depending on their apparent usefulness or value to an average hobgoblin.

Note that if in the course of your campaign, you have accidentally given the PCs unbalancing items, this is an excellent opportunity to remove them from the game. In the end, this Cliffhanger is a great way to bring down some of the treasure that the PCs might have. If your party already has balanced treasure for your campaign, then see the optional treasure listed at the end of the Cliffhanger.

Creatures: Captain Yornlheth sits on a high wooden surveying chair, 10 feet off the ground, and watches the proceedings at the end of the course. He does not move or intervene unless things turn very badly for the hobgoblins. All hobgoblins present will give their lives to protect their captain, but once PCs have access to spell components again, the captain might well become a target.

Additionally, the remaining living Fang Warband hobgoblins are ready for the final fight. They arm themselves fully with shortspears and clubs on their way to the fight if they don't already possess weapons.

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The obstacles that the heroes must face are described in each individual Cliffhanger episode, but some commonalities exist from one episode to the next.

Regular Hobgoblins: The fifty regular hobgoblins move with the PCs, though they attack constantly only during the first Cliffhanger episode. In later episodes, the hobgoblins merely watch the PCs. This isn't their exercise. They're merely there to help keep the PCs along the track. Should a PC attempt to leave the exercise via means not mentioned anywhere, the hobgoblins on that side of the course attempt to push them back on course by attacking with javelins.

Captain Yornlheth: The captain of the Fang Warband hobgoblins makes his way to the end area of the training grounds while the PCs move through the course. He doesn't intercede in any way until the end.

Captain Yornlheth: Male hobgoblin Ftr4; CR 4; Medium-size humanoid (goblinoid); HD 4d10+8; hp 36; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19 (touch 11, flat-footed 18); Atk +8 melee (1d8+4/19-20, masterwork longsword); SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +3, Jump +3, Listen +5, Move Silently +1, Ride (horse) +4, Spot +6; Alertness, Cleave, Dodge, Mobility, Power Attack.

Equipment: Masterwork full plate, masterwork longsword.

Fang Warband Members (varies): Male hobgoblin Ftr1; CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d10+1; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +2 melee (1d8+1/x3, shortspear or 1d6+1, club); SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +0, Jump +0, Listen +3, Move Silently +0, Spot +3; Alertness, Dodge.

Possessions: Chainmail, shortspear.

Tactics: All remaining Fang Warband hobgoblins from previous encounters band together and advance on the PCs as they leave the hot coals area. They give the PCs a sporting head start of one round to run to their equipment before pursuing with a double move. As before, the regular hobgoblins on the sides do not attack as the Fang Warband hobgoblins approach. Now it is down to the remaining Fang Warband hobgoblins and the partially armed PCs to finish the obstacle course.

The Cliffhanger

After a few rounds of combat (or if the PCs are almost dead), Captain Yornlheth calls a halt to the combat. He laughs raucously and shouts from his surveying post, "You make miserable elves! But for your services, my warriors will not kill you outright. Leave this land and do not return uninvited."

Again, further attempts at negotiation fall on deaf ears. If the PCs press the point that not all of their equipment has been returned, Yornlheth simply calls for the hobgoblins to renew attacks, and they attempt to cut down all the ersatz elves who remain.

Optional Treasure Note: If your party actually lacks the level of treasure that they should probably have at their level and they don't try to attack once the captain tries to shoo them away, the captain makes the following offer only once: The PCs not only get enough food to get them to the nearest town, but they also receive 10 gp apiece, a *vest of escape*, and a *glove of storing*. The stash is about one mile from that particular area and is hidden in a decaying tree stump.

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