

THE GOBLIN ADVENTURES

THE DEMON
EYE GEM



THOMAS SHULER

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The Demon Eye Gem (The Goblin Adventures)

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PROLOGUE

Stormhoof strode down the steps, moving deeper into the dungeon. He knew that the gem had to be somewhere in the chambers below the long forgotten temple to some ancient sea god. The massive minotaur didn't care who the shrine was dedicated to, he was after the prize rumored to be hidden deep within.

"Hurry up, Isaar," growled Stormhoof.

"Yes, Captain," said the orc, his pig-like eyes trying to spot landmarks to find his way back to the surface. Unlike his captain, Isaar could easily get lost in all the twists and turns. Behind the orc were three others of his kind, and a dark haired half-elf wearing mystic robes. An orb of light floated above the half-elf, providing light for the raiding party. Stormhoof pulled out a map he had captured from a merchantman his pirates had plundered and scuttled a week earlier.

"Battelle, come here with that light," barked Stormhoof.

"Coming, Lord," answered Battelle, moving past Isaar and the other orcs while being careful not to let his robes make contact with the sailors' filthy clothes.

"I'm not a Lord, yet. You're here to help me find the means," snarled the minotaur. He held the map up for the half-elf. "Which way?"

The half-elf squinted, trying to determine if a line was where ink had flaked away or if it was a natural discoloration of the material. After a moment, he looked up and pointed.

“To the left. That should lead us to the tomb. If the gem is anywhere, it will be in there,” Battelle advised.

“It had better be,” growled Stormhoof.

The captain of the merchantman had tried to hide the map under his laundry when his ship had been captured by Stormhoof’s pirate crew. One of the orc pirates had discovered it when he had been searching for any valuables hidden away, and had decided that the merchant captain’s silk shirt would make a fine gift for a wench. A few strokes of the lash had convinced the fat merchant to give up the tale of a gem of great power.

The parchment the map had been drawn on, had been scraped and reused. The current depiction was that of a chart, showing the location of an unknown island. The half-elf’s sharp eyes had noted where another drawing had been previously made, then removed. It was the map of the catacombs under the temple. Once Stormhoof had found both the island and the temple, the map proved to be a guide through the darkness under the ruined buildings. This was fortunate, as there were traps aplenty to kill or maim the unwary.

“Wait. Pit ahead,” said Battelle. Stormhoof tapped the floor with his iron shoe, and watched as the floor flipped over. He caught the trapdoor as it swung around and held it in his muscular hand. Below, a human skeleton in armor lay impaled on spikes.

“Amateur,” snorted Stormhoof. The minotaur lowered the trap’s cover, and waved Isaar up.

“Spike the trap, and let’s get moving once it’s secure.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” replied the orc. Isaar dropped his pack and fished out a hammer and four spikes. Two spikes on either side locked the cover firmly enough in place to allow the heavy minotaur and orcs to cross safely. Battelle tested the cover with his foot, then stepped aside and gestured.

“After you,” said Battelle with a smirk. Isaar scowled, and strode out onto his handiwork. The trapdoor held as the

orc crossed. He grinned a toothy challenge at the half-elf.

“It’s safe enough. Move it, long ears,” said the orc. Stormhoof crossed the pit first, followed by Battelle and the remaining orc crewmen.

The orcs spread out behind Stormhoof and Battelle and gaped. The passage opened to a natural cave/ In the center was a huge boulder, at least fifteen feet in diameter, carved to look like a horned, grinning human skull. The jaw hung open, revealing a passage and short steps leading up.

“It has horns,” mused Battelle, rubbing his chin. “Humans don’t normally have horns.”

“Because they are fools,” snarled Stormhoof. “Horns rip flesh, break bones. A weapon you can never drop.”

Battelle shrugged. He wasn’t going to argue the relative aspects of horns versus steel or magic as a weapon with the short tempered pirate captain.

Stormhoof held his lantern before him, illuminating the mouth of the skull. “Looks like a room behind the eyes. Probably where the gem is. Let’s go.”

Without waiting, Stormhoof ducked and entered. The short steps led to another room, this one with two large round and one small triangular hole. The eyes and mouth. The minotaur moved into the center, wide nostrils drawing in any scents over his nose ring. There was something amiss...

“Well, Lord Stormhoof?” asked Battelle as the half-elf moved into the room behind his captain. He looked around, noting the eye and nose holes, and a small altar between the eyes and under the nose. There was a small depression in the center.

“Nothing’s here. No gold, no gem, no... Wait a moment.”

The minotaur knelt and lifted a rude wooden staff from behind the altar. It was about three feet long, adorned with two ragged feathers and a small leather bag tied to the top. He sniffed the bag, then pulled back.

“What is this? What does it mean?” he asked as he handed the pole to the half-elf. By this time, Isaar had

entered the room.

The half-elf took the staff and looked it over carefully. Magic symbols, crudely carved, covered the surface. He ran the palm of his hand over them, sensing their magic. He opened the leather bag, then closed it quickly. A smell like rotten eggs wafted out.

“I’m not sure, Captain. It’s a wizard’s staff, but the magic is crude. Some of these symbols are arcane, the others? I don’t know.”

“Shaman. Probably goblin from the size,” said Isaar. The orc had come around in the cramped space to look at what Stormhoof and Battelle had found. “Goblins have some magic to them, nothing like the elves or human wizards, but some.”

Stormhoof scowled at the staff in the half-elf’s hands.

“Looks like someone got here before us. Do you have any way of finding the original owner? I would like to have words with them,” said the minotaur in a deep, low voice. Battelle knew the pirate wasn’t likely to ask for the now missing gem. He wouldn’t want to be the goblin who stood between the powerful minotaur and his goal.

“Perhaps, Captain. I know a spell or two that should put us in the right area to start looking at least.”

“Then let’s go.”

The half-elf removed a roll of coarse cloth from his bag, and rolled up the shaman’s staff to keep any traces of the owner from being lost. Soon, he could cast spells that would lead the Captain to the gem, and the power the minotaur sought. Battelle didn’t want the gem himself. He wanted to be the force behind the throne. Elves lived a long time, and could always wait for the best opportunities to seize true power.

CHAPTER 1

Dizzy growled as he woke up. That stupid goblin Dregs was biting at his leg in his sleep again. “Oi! Knock it off! That’s not a turkey leg, you idiot!”

Dizzy jabbed at the goblin’s head to make it let go. With a groan, the other goblin released his grip. Blood oozed from the teeth marks left behind.

“Ouch, why you kick so hard!? I was having a wonderful dream. We had raided a farm, and I was in the chicken coop all by myself!”

“Yeah? Well, we’re not living in your dream world. Time to get up and get some food for real.” Dizzy snapped at the smaller goblin as he kicked his blanket into a pile near the rest of his stuff. Grabbing the bag with his more valuable property, he pushed aside a board that acted as a door.

Outside the hut, he looked around the village bleary eyed. Other goblins were beginning to wake and shuffle about. It would be a short time before they started squabbling for breakfast.

Dizzy stood three and a half feet tall, and had dark green skin. Large, pointed ears stuck straight out from the side of his head that seemed too large for his body, and a mouth full of sharp, yellow teeth. His clothes, if you could call them that, were rough spun trousers and a shoddy woven tunic held closed at his waist with a frayed bit of rope. Dizzy glanced around his surroundings as he adjusted the stolen

kitchen knife he used as a sword.

As goblin villages went, this one wasn't too bad. There was plentiful material to cobble together shelter, and to even burn as firewood on the rare cold nights in the swamp. Humans had once had a town here. The humans' huts had been mud and wattle, with thatch roofs. Most had collapsed, but the goblins were able to make repairs. Out of the original twenty or so buildings, twelve had mostly survived. But one building stood apart, having been built of stone blocks rather than mud, thin branches, and long grass.

Butted up against a small hill was a stone temple, built in ages past. It was a low, flattened pyramid with a shrine built at the top. Inside was a bronze water buffalo with a ring through its nose. The goblin chief used the temple as his "palace," even though the building was mostly open and the roof had collapsed in one section. The chief and his concubines slept on the raised altar nearest the hill. The bronze bull that the humans had worshiped when this had been theirs had been moved to the center of the floor. Most of the bull was green from weather and corrosion. The only clean bit were the statue's testicles, which were shiny from being rubbed by the goblins for luck and strength.

Nestled deep in a swamp, the goblins were able to raid the scattered small farms and nearby towns, then retreat into the marshland where the humans feared to tread.

The Chief claimed it was fear of the goblins, and his own personal combat skills, but Dizzy knew it was the alligators and feral boars that the humans feared more than he and his kin.

As he stretched and scratched himself, he saw the others emerge out of their huts and join the milling crowd facing the temple, waiting for the Chief to send out the food the tribe had gathered the previous day. Goblins had a voracious appetite, and the Chief knew that if he didn't ration out the food, he wouldn't get the best bits. Oh, and that several goblins would go hungry as the rest stole from the weaker

ones. Chief knew the most important part was making sure he himself was well fed.

“Hey! Dizzy! Good morning!” called a young goblin. Dizzy looked over and saw Kitty crawling out of her hut, brushing bits of debris off of her clothes. She wore a shapeless shift. It had started as a night shirt for a farm girl, but Kitty had stolen it off of the drying line. Near the central fire pit another goblin named YDB pushed himself up to his feet and brushed his thin hair back. The male looked at Dizzy and Kitty, then smiled.

“Morning,” said YDB.

“Good morning YDB,” she said. Dizzy smiled his usual goblin smile, showing many sharp teeth. YDB said nothing more. ‘You Dumb Bastard’ was what he had been called by the Chief when he had been but a whelp. The rest of the goblin tribe had shortened it YDB. YDB didn't speak for the first four rains, then when he finally did, he only spoke one word sentences. This usually made it hard to figure out what he meant.

Kitty picked a bit of fish from her back teeth, looked at it, and decided that sitting in her mouth overnight hadn't ruined the flavor any. With a flick of her tongue, she swallowed the morsel. She joined the other goblins slowly making their way to the palace.

As the goblins assembled in front of the shrine, a groaning sound could be heard from within. After a moment, the Chief stepped out of the shadows. He was closely followed by his attendant. The Chief was the fattest of the goblins, but there was a solid layer of muscle underneath. Many a young and ambitious goblin had learned the hard way that fat didn't mean weak, although it had been a while since the Chief had last been challenged for his throne. The two goblins stopped, and the Chief raised his hand.

“Greetings, my loyal goblins! I trust you all slept well?” boomed the Chief. Without waiting for an answer, the Chief continued. “Good! We will all need our strength in the days

to come! I, Chief Ravenous, have decided that the human town of Driftwood Landing has failed to provide sufficient tribute, and we shall raid the town and take what is ours!”

The goblins cheered at the idea of a raid. Any chance to cause chaos and mischief was a good day to be a goblin. The little village had not done a raid in months.

“But first! We need to gather up supplies! We need weapons, torches and armor! Go out and find what you need, come back by the end of the day. Don’t get caught, we don’t want the stupid humans to think something is up!”

“What about breakfast?” asked Kitty, feeling that a tiny bit of fish from her back teeth wasn’t exactly a well-rounded start to her day.

“No time for breakfast! Go, my warriors! Find metal, find wood, find weapons! When we attack, we will destroy everything! And we’ll steal enough food to feed us for a year!”

The goblins all cheered their wise and all-knowing Chief. Within a few days, they would have much better supplies. Kitty looked over at Dizzy and YDB, who had wound up near each other as the Chief spoke. Those two would get into trouble if she left them alone.

“Hey, you two! Come with me. I have a plan.” Kitty lied, but goblins obeyed anyone who seemed to be in charge at the moment.

“What’s the plan?” asked Dizzy as the other goblins of the tribe ran to and fro.

“We’re going to the Grindle Farm. I was watching it the other day, Missus Grindle has been putting in a new kitchen. There should be a lot of good stuff in their junk pile.”

“Oh, yeah!” agreed Dizzy. “If they replaced their stove, we can get a lot of metal for armor!”

Dizzy pounded his thin chest. “I will be a great warrior, with armor and a sword!” He drew his old, rusty kitchen knife, and waved it around.

“Put that away before you poke your eye out,” said Kitty.

Turning to YDB, who had been standing quietly as usual, Kitty added, “Maybe we will find stuff for you to make bombs or fireworks with? You like bombs, right?”

YDB nodded and said, “Bombs!” He hopped up and down a few times, then ran to the hut he sometimes shared with Dizzy and Dregs to get his spear. Kitty slung a small bow over her back, and hefted a crowbar she had stolen from a merchant’s wagon. Dizzy checked his kitchen knife sword, decided as it was all he had, and that it had to be enough. The trio were as prepared as any goblin could expect to be. Kitty pointed at a gap between the trees to the west, and the trio set out. Behind them, the rest of the goblins broke into groups of three and four to conduct their own raids against the outlying farms and farmers.

Soon, the three goblins were heading through the slow moving swamp. Kitty rubbed her belly. She was hungry since the Chief had sent everyone out before breakfast could be brought out. ‘The fat jerk just wanted more for himself,’ she thought.

The Chief was famous for being able to put away as much food as half the village by himself. Dizzy, Kitty and YDB would have to find and eat something within the swamp. Mushrooms, slow swimming fish, frogs, or even some fat worms. Goblins ate anything that had protein, and were never picky.

Dizzy soon took the lead through the swamp. He had a knack for finding a path through the water and mud that kept them mostly dry. Only once were they forced to swim a short way, but no alligators or snakes were around to bother them. Within a few hours they were hiding at the edge of the woods, looking out at the Grindle Farm.

The farm was typical for the area, a small house with only one stout door, a split log fence, a barn of sorts, pigsty, and chicken coops set against the barn. Off to the south was the main field of the farm, with corn growing in neat rows. Near the house was the vegetable garden, growing all the

small crops the family in the house needed. As the goblins watched, the farm's owner appeared from behind the barn with a young girl, of about ten, in tow.

Dizzy and Kitty tried to guess the route the two would take, looking for places they could steal items without being seen.

The girl fed the chickens while her father slopped the pigs.

"Daddy! Four eggs!" she called out as she gathered up the chickens' offerings.

"Good, Pumpkin! Take them to your mother, then come back here. Bring the water pitcher with you."

The girl skipped to the house with the eggs tucked into her apron. After a few minutes, she reappeared with a water pitcher and a tin cup. Her father accepted it, and took a big gulp of water, then handed it to his daughter to return to the house, after she had had her fill.

Dizzy and Kitty noticed the father carrying some broken equipment to a junk pile near the edge of the farm. Once he had tossed the tools and debris into rubbish pit, he returned to the covered well where his daughter waited. Drawing water from the well with the wooden bucket, he refilled the pitcher. He sent his daughter back to the house with a playful swat to her bottom. Cheerfully smiling, he followed her to the house.

"Looks like that's the place," said Kitty, nodding at the debris pile. "I heard metal clinking. Let's see what we can find!"

Slipping along the fence line, Dizzy, Kitty and YDB crept to the farm's scrap heap. The three goblins' greedy eyes scanned for anything of value.

The farmer had tossed out a broken hoe, the handle split and the cheap metal blade not worth salvaging. Other scraps were scattered about, pot lids with broken handles, a rusty frying pan, and a small mattress bag. Some of the old straw poked out of the sack, but it was mostly empty. Dizzy

glanced at the house and saw toys a human boy would play with littering the porch. The mattress must have been thrown out once the child was too big for a crib.

Climbing the fence, Dizzy kept an eye on the house in case the farmer came out. Humans threw away such good stuff, but became so angry whenever a goblin took it. Probably because goblins were experts in turning junk into weapons. Kitty swarmed over the fence, while YDB crawled under. Soon the three goblins were wolfing down the fresher food scraps while looking over the junk in the pit.

“This will make a good chopper,” said Dizzy as he looked at the hoe blade. He stomped on the blade to twist it into line with the broken handle, turning it from a hoe to a dull axe.

Kitty rolled the mattress into a cylinder and hoisted it onto her shoulder.

“Now I will have a real bed! Kat thinks she so cool just because she’s my older sister. She’s going to have to sleep on the dirty rags. I’m not sharing.”

While the other two goblins gloated over their finds, YDB found a bag of fertilizer tossed out by the farmer. Inside was a small amount of grayish-white powder. The goblin grinned, and held it up.

“Boom!” he said, still grinning at his friends. He pulled on the bag’s drawstrings to close it, then looked towards the farm, in case the farmer had finished lunch early. His eyes widened. “Cat!”

As Dizzy whirled towards the farm, a heavy paw struck him across the face, narrowly missing his left eye.

“Aaah!” screamed the goblin as he flew across the pit and landed on the far side.

A huge cat stood at the edge of the junk pit, fur standing on end. This was a farm cat, used to fighting rats and other pests, not some lady’s dainty house pet. His muscles rippled under his fur, and he hissed fiercely at the goblins.

“My eye! That stupid cat almost took out my eye! Get it!”

yelled Dizzy.

Kitty yanked her crowbar from her back and waved it threateningly at the cat.

“Shoo! Go back to the barn, you mangy cat! We’re not doing anything wrong!” she hissed at the cat. The cat growled low in his chest at the female. Kitty stood her ground, blocking the cat from making a second attack on her friend.

“Gwen! Where are you?” came a high voice from near the farmhouse.

“Gwen, you silly kitty! Come back here!”

Dizzy looked across the farm and saw the little girl, hands on hip, calling for her cat. Gwen growled again at the goblins. Seeing an opportunity to escape without further injury, Kitty grabbed Dizzy and pulled him back to the tree line.

“YDB! Move your tail!” she commanded with a hiss. The smaller goblin scrambled out of the pit with the bag of fertilizer.

“Gwen! I have a snack for you!” called the girl again, holding up a slice of bacon.

With a final glare at the goblins’ retreat, Gwen loped across the yard to the girl and meowed for the treat. The girl tore the bit of bacon in half, feeding the cat first one piece, then the other.

“Is there a raccoon by the dump?” asked the girl, mistaking the cat’s aggressive behavior.

“Meow,” was Gwen’s reply.

The girl watched the trees and dump for a bit, then looked down at the cat.

“Well, it looks like the ‘coon went back to his family. I’ll let daddy know, in case he wants to set a trap for him,” said the girl. She skipped back to the house, calling for her father to tell him about their visitor.

“We better get out of here,” said Kitty as she used a bit of cloth from the stolen mattress to clean Dizzy’s wound. A

moment later, YDB rejoined his friends, and the trio moved deeper into the swamp, towards the relative safety of the goblin village.

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