

A Coward's Guide to

GOBLINS



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Labyrinth Lord
Compatible Product

A Coward's Guide to Goblins

By Bucky Bandersnatch

A supplement for *Labyrinth Lord* and other old-school fantasy role-playing games

Translated by: James M. Spahn

Art by: Jeff Freels & Rick Hershey, Empty Room Studios

Author's Preface

Hullo, my name is Buckland Bandersnatch – but most folks call me Bucky. I am not a hero, nor an adventurer, nor a dungeon delving busy body. I am a halfling and when danger rears its ugly head I recall my fluffy armchair and warm hearth back home. I don't like the dark and I hate monsters. I, in short, am a coward.

Not that such a thing is necessarily bad. I've got quite a few things I'm quite good at. I am an excellent cook and keep a mighty fine garden. Not to mention that I play a mean game of horseshoes. I'm also mighty fond of dicing and games of chance. Maybe that's how I got into this mess in the first place. Unfortunately, the gods have

a twisted sense of humor, and some how or another I fell in with a lot of these so-called “heroes.”

Late one night, I was playing a rousing game of cards with a few strangers visiting my village. They were a rough sort, as most tall folk are. But I

know my manners and they had a mighty heavy purse, so I set about seeing that they were well-fed as any good halfling would do – and if they parted ways with a few coins along the way, well more the better.



I don't rightly recall what happened after the third pint of bitters. I just know I had quite a fine pile of coin in front of me when I passed out. When I came to it was a whole 'nother story. I woke up to the sound of a neighing

horse and was layin' in the back of some rickety wooden cart on some dusty road in foreign parts. Worst yet, someone had strapped a sword on my hip! I'd never held more than a butter knife in all my days!

A'front of the cart was this great beast of a man — had to be orcish in those veins too, judging by the sloping forehead and huge mouth full o' broken teeth. Beside him, walking as light and free as you might please was a blonde elf all clad in green — as fair and happy as if she was on her way to a birthday party! But the sharp sword at her hip and the wooden bow slung across her back told me she was looking for some dangerous business to get mixed up in. Finally, tending to the smelly mule pulling the cart that had become my bed was some holy man, as bald as a new born human and clad from head to foot in ring mail with a great holy symbol dangling from a chain 'round his neck. What's more intimidating was the massive cudgel he had swingin' from a leather strap at his belt.

I had, against all my wishes,

become an adventurer.

And that, dear reader, is why I'm penning this guide. You see, no one in their right mind should ever seek such a life no matter the promises of fortune and glory. But being a considerate young halfling, I'm putting my thoughts regarding adventure down in the book you now hold. When you see the dastardly things and terrible inconvenience that comes from facing the horrible beasts in the wild parts of the world, maybe — just maybe — you'll be smarter than I and just stay in the kitchen with the door firmly bolted and locked.

Now, my “adventuring companions” noticed me writing last night by the camp fire as we rested in some drafty cave in the wilderness of gods-knows-where and asked if they could throw in their own two coppers so you may see words written in a different script than mine through out this journal. They're reckless, foolish people and I'm allowing their “contribution” only to keep things civil. Please ignore whatever supposed insights they offer.

How I Got Into This Mess

We'd been hired by some local lord or another, Mayor Something-Or-Other to drive away a tribe of goblins that had taken up residence in some nearby caves. Why anyone would ever want to live in a cave is beyond me – you're better off asking a dwarf about such things. Give me a nice home with a whistling kettle any day. But, I digress.

So, goblins it is. Now, I may have spent all of my days tending the garden and cooking, but I'd heard all manner of tale about these creatures in my younger days – and not a one of them was good. The stories say that they're tall and scary, with jagged teeth and wicked knives. Now, I know that if this journal ever gets read by any of you tall folk, you'll claim that goblins ain't so tall. But let me say, to a halfling, *everyone* is tall. So mind your manners.

Now all of that horrible business is true, but what there are so much Old Gran's stories didn't say. I'll go through the nasty surprises I found one at a time, and let me say – there were more than a few. But before I get to that, for those little halflings who haven't heard tell of a

goblin, I'll describe them.

How to Spot a Goblin

The key thing with goblins is that they like the dark – so that can make them hard to see. The first thing to look for is those beady yellow eyes. They look bloodshot and predatory. It reminds me of mean ol' Uncle Wigglestaff the morning after an evening in his cups at the Midsummer Festival. They're about as friendly, too.

Just as yellow is their teeth. All the stories say their teeth are pointed, like nasty yellow knives. This isn't entirely true. It's more like one of the little buggers went into a kitchen drawer full of rusted cutlery and started to nibble, but never quite managed to get it all down. Not a pretty sight.

Their skin ranges from rotten-apple brown to color of wine gone foul and they have no sense of propriety or style when it comes to dress. Now, I'm quite fond of a nice waistcoat – but these beasts cloth themselves in rough furs and leathers that seem as though they were practically tanned in blood! Sticky and smelly, absolutely disgusting.

These outfits never match, though they do seem able to turn some of the more glancing blows. Not that Tork ever dillydallies in combat. For that brute it's either a bloody mess or a complete miss. So, apparently, its savagery all around.

The weapons they carry seem to come from the same kitchen drawer where they got their teeth. Their crude, cruel and rusted – but they use them to great effect. Goblins are cowards by nature, and I can understand that, but when forced into a fight or able to ambush a foe, they're reckless and ferocious. It's like watching a great swarm of bees overwhelm a smaller target with ten thousand tiny stings. Except these stings are done with choppers, cleavers and javelins.

I'm not sure what's worse, the smell of these foul creatures or the tittering laugh that echoes through the caves when they find you. And they sing. *Sing!* These are horrible little tunes that can only barely be called songs. They are about death and murder and the joy these beasts feel when their all blood and murder – nothing I'd ever heard in one of Old Gran's stories.

These Things Have Kings!

What's worse than a goblin? Somehow these uncultured brutes have kings, if such a title is worthy of them. What's the difference between a regular goblin and a goblin king? Well, the king is bigger, dumber and more violent than the rest. They're massive, nearly five feet tall and they weigh close to five stone. Huge, blubberous monsters, they've even got crowns! Most often these things are made of bones, broken knives or other terrible trophies. Screaming out horrible, croaking commands and waving the best loot they've managed to plunder from stupid adventurers or lesser goblins, they lead with fear – and they do it well. I sure was terrified!

Still, they're probably smarter than smaller goblins too. They lead from the back, which is something I can admire. They tend to wait for their minions to do most of the heavy, dangerous labor – again, a tactic I can approve of. But when they do fight, they do it with a kind of blind brutality that Tork would be proud of – if he weren't so busy trying to kill the bone-crowned bugger.

GOBLIN KING



No. Enc.: 1 (1)

Alignment: Chaotic

Movement: 90'

Armor Class: 4

Hit Dice: 2

Attacks: 1 (weapon)

Damage: 1d6+1 (or weapon+1)

Save: F2

Morale: 9

Hoard Class: III (III)

XP: 42

Goblin kings are larger, scarier versions of their lesser kin. Often pale and fat, they stand between four and five feet tall. They possess a surprising strength, and when they attack in melee they receive a +1 bonus to all damage rolls due to a high strength score (STR 13). Other goblins in their presence receive a +2 bonus to all morale checks.

Unlike other goblins, they do not suffer a -1 to attack rolls when in bright sunlight, though they prefer the dark. Goblin Kings often go into combat astride massive wargs in a kind of crow's mail barding. These creatures have the exact same statistics as a Dire Wolf, except their armor class is 4.

In addition, goblin kings often possess magical items which they have pilfered from previously slain adventurers and are quite willing to use them against any foes that cross their path.

Songs Fit for Bones!

With the understanding that goblins are stupid and uncultured, you'd think they had no desire or gift for magic. You'd be wrong. There is actually some god somewhere that they worship and gives them magical guidance. I can't abide magic, personally. That kind of dangerous business I'll leave to tall folks and elves, thank you very much. This kind of arcane nonsense is exactly why I have no taste for magic. They hoot and dance and leap around, waving wooden staves and bags of bones, then all of a sudden there we are – wrapped up in vines that sprang from nowhere or covered in some kind of nasty darkness.

There was no sense of piety, like the prayers of Godric the Wise or the spidery words of the elf-maiden Elysia – just grunts, growls and gibbering and then *poof!* a nasty incantation right in our face!

GOBLIN SHAMAN



No. Enc.: 1d4 (3d6)

Alignment: Chaotic

Movement: 60'

Armor Class: 6

Hit Dice: 1-1

Attacks: 1 (weapon)

Damage: 1d6 (or weapon)

Save: C1

Morale: 7

Hoard Class: III (XX)

XP: 13

No one quite knows what god goblin shamans worship, nor how they exactly manage to cast their spells. But, through a series of hoots, shouts, and bizarre dancing, they somehow manage to actually cast spells, though they are limited to only a few. A goblin shaman is capable of casting *Cause Fear*, *Darkness*, or *Protection from Good* once per day. They may only cast one spell, but do not need to memorize it in advance and may select from any of those named above.

Goblin shamans wield the traditional weapons of their kin and wear the same filthy animal skins or leathers as armor. Though they can ride wargs, they rarely do so. Instead they tend to hide amidst a large horde of their own kin, only revealing themselves when the time comes to cast their magic spell.

While individually they are no great threat, when gathered together in large groups they will often cast their spells in unison, sending waves of great fear or darkness of entire adventuring parties. Then they can slaughter them in the dark or run them down as they flee.

As If Wolves Weren't Bad Enough

I've never been one for horses or ponies. I've got two fine and bare furry feet and that's the way I was made. But goblins take bizarre tall folk concept of mounted warriors to new levels of terror. Wolves are troublesome enough. They kill livestock, they prowl deer paths, and hearing their howls as I sleep beneath a sheet of cloth on these horrible adventures induces all kinds of terrible dreams. But wargs are another thing entirely.

These massive creatures are very nearly the size of a pony, with none of their docile friendliness. These savage, snapping monsters might crave blood more than the goblins who ride them into battle! While riding these horrible beasts, the goblins stack and slash with their terrible names while the wargs themselves bite and snap with an unnatural strength.

What's worse, if there is a goblin king amongst them he is often mounted upon a warg so big as to compare to a horse and is commanding his army in terrible charges that leave behind only blood and a song of tittering goblin

laughter and horrible warg howls.

GOBLIN WOLF-RIDERS



Goblin Wolf-Riders can be normal goblins, shamans or even goblin kings. When they ride into battle, they typically wield long spears and attempt to **charge** into battle. While mounted their attack inflict double damage if they are able to move at least twenty feet before attacking.

Goblin kings will often ride the wargs (see Dire Wolf, page xx of the *Labyrinth Lord* core rules) more fierce and massive than the rest. These terrible dire wolves are typically clad in piece mail barding, which grants them an Armor Class of 4. In addition, their great size grants them a +1 to all damage rolls.

How Not To Die

Now, as previously stated, I'm no brave hero. I do not fight and I do not cast magic spells. The thing I'm best at is not being noticed. Therein lies the key to survival when you encounter goblins. If one proceeds carefully, you can often hear them hooting and singing before they notice you're there. When you manage to do so, there's only one thing to do: Hide.

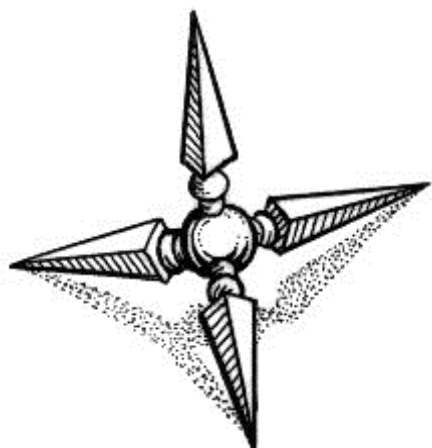
Linger in the midst of the tall folk

and as soon as you hear so much as a goblin-chuckle, slip into a dark corner and wait for the carnage to pass. To be sure, keep a dagger in your hand encase things go poorly and you have to fight. But, hopefully your bigger, stupider companions will be eager to combat these "easy targets," and I say let them!

If you're forced out of hiding and absolutely have to fight, don't let yourself get cornered. Take note of your exits and entrances, and how you can make the quickest escape when the time comes. Remember, you don't have to outrun the goblins, you just have to outrun the slowest tall folk in the party.

Just to be absolutely certain of your escape, invest in a bag of caltrops. Drop them as you make your escape and even if your friends step on them, it'll ensure someone's there to cover your retreat. A less effective, but also less suspicious alternative is to carry a bag of marbles. Tell your friends its for an innocent child's game played back home and when the time comes, toss them on the floor and make a swift exit.

CALTROPS AND MARBLES



A caltrop is a four-pronged iron spike crafted so that one prong faces up no matter how the caltrop comes to rest. One two pound bag of caltrops covers an area of the floor ten square feet in size. Each time a creature moves into an area covered by caltrops (or spends a round fighting while standing in such an area), they must succeed in a Saving Throw vs. Breath Weapon to avoid stepping on one. The caltrop deals 1 point of damage, and the creature's speed is reduced by one-half because its foot is wounded. This movement penalty lasts for 24 hours, or until the injury is healed through magical means. A running individual must immediately stop if it steps on a caltrop. Any creature moving at half speed or slower can pick its way through a bed of caltrops with no trouble. Caltrops may not be effective against unusual opponents and flying or incorporeal opponents are immune to their effects.

Instead of caltrops one may use marbles. One two pound bag of marbles covers an area of the floor ten square feet in size. Each time a creature moves into the area covered by marbles (or spends a round fighting while standing in such an area, they must succeed in a Saving Throw vs. Breath Weapon or fall prone. A prone character loses any bonus to their armor class that comes from a high dexterity and shield. Melee attacks suffer a -4 penalty while the character is prone and missile attacks are impossible. The character can stand on their next action, but if they do so they may not attack. Any creature moving at half speed or slower can pick their way through a bed of

marbles with no trouble. Marbles may not be effective against unusual opponents and flying or incorporeal opponents are immune to their effects.

One two-pound bag of caltrops may be purchased for 1 gold piece and a two-pound bag of marbles may be purchased for 5 silver pieces.

Goblin Warrens

These nasty little beasties have no sanctity for hearth and home. Their domiciles have no kitchen, no kettle, no armchairs – not even a proper larder! The closest thing goblins have to a home is what I'm told is called “warren.” Well, I don't know about you – but that sounds like somewhere rats should live! These are usually the largest chamber in a cavern. They cover the floors with dirty, flea-infested animal skins that are often half-rotted to serve as bedding. Food is piled in great a great heaping mound at the center of the warren, and they set upon that bloody, horrible mess a chair made of wood and bone where their king sits. Or at least tries to sit. The terrifying thing looks as if it could collapse if you so much as breathed on it, but somehow a goblin king manages to perch himself upon it.

Goblin women and children are

kept to the warren, apparently. When my companions and I first found one, they fled like terrified vermin – not that I can blame them. If Tork came blundering into my parlor screaming and swinging that axe of his, I'd run too.

They keep cages against the walls of the cave, where their snapping, angry wargs are kept in a pen – usually with a larger goblin nearby armed with some kind of thorned whip to keep the beasts in line.

What's truly surprising about a goblin warren (beyond the smell, the infestation of fleas and lice, and the fact that they actually *live* in such a place) is the fact they actually trap their own homes! That's right, trap them! Spike traps, pit traps, swinging scythe traps. I have to admit their devices are quite clever and it wasn't something I would have thought them capable of designing.

How did I come to learn this, you ask? Well, you see my “adventuring companions” seem to think that “halfling” is some tall folk word for “scout” or “first victim” and are always sending me ahead to search for traps, listen for noises and other such

nonsense.

Now, I'm as sharp-eyed as any halfling, and I spotted a few of the goblin traps. As I said, they're quite clever. They size them so that they'll often go off without risk to themselves, swinging at heights above three feet or set off by pressure plates that require fifty pounds or more of weight to activate.

I have to admit that Godric chastised me more than once when I told him that I hadn't discovered any traps and then Tork took a swinging blade to the abdomen. I admit, I wasn't entirely honest, I just hadn't found any traps that were dangerous to me. I figured that if they saw what a poor explorer I was that they might dismiss me from whatever cock and bull agreement had been made over those pints and send me back to my burrow.

So far, no such luck.

GOBLIN TRAPS



Goblins are quite fond of concealed impalement traps, such as spikes or swinging scythes. These traps are designed to swing at a high no lower than three feet or be set off only by weights greater than 50 lbs. This prevents them from being accidentally set off by passing goblins and allows them to lead reckless adventurers into deadly traps. Fortunately, they are rarely poisoned.

Because of the low and hidden nature of these traps, they are more difficult to discover than normal traps. All thieves suffer -10% to their Find Traps ability check. There is no penalty when an attempt is made to disarm such a trap.

Typical goblin pit traps deal 1d6 points of falling damage and 1d6 points of impaling damage, as the pit floors are lined with wooden spikes. Characters who succeed in a Saving Throw vs. Breath Weapon avoid all damage, as they manage to avoid plummeting into the pit. Swinging spike and scythe traps deal 2d6 points of damage. Characters who succeed in a Saving Throw vs. Breath Weapon suffer half damage from a swinging spike or scythe trap.

Goblin Tactics

I mentioned before that goblins are surprisingly clever. They're also complete and utter cowards. These are

two character traits that we both share. They, however, have a thirst for blood and chaos that I cannot abide. Watching the others fight from a safe distance, I managed to observe a few things.

Goblins fight in large groups, often swarming their targets. They like to overwhelm the tall folk, often going at them with at least three-to-one odds. If their numbers are sufficient enough, they'll actually pull a foe down and attack with more than just their spears and swords – but actually begin to eat their foe alive! Ghastly!

Goblin Swarm

When goblins out-number their foe three-to-one or more, all goblins attacking a single target receive a +2 bonus to their attack roll.

They're quite fond of the ambush. They like to hide in nooks and crannies too small for bigger folk, leaping out to stab at ankles and calves with their sharp spears in hopes to debilitating a foe. Unfortunately, I discovered this when I myself tried to hide in such a fissure and found myself face-to-face with one of the terrible brutes.

Goblin Ambush

If a small group of goblins (no more than five) are given time to prepare, they may attempt to hide in an underground environment in hopes of ambushing any foes who come within range of their weapons. When attempting to hide in shadows in this fashion, they have a 35% chance of success, though they must have at last five rounds to find suitable places to hide.

Once successfully hidden, any opponents who come within 60' of the goblin fail their surprise check on a 1-4 on d6.

While they have their own shamans, they're not overly fond of magic. They have a deep fear of magic-users and elves, and their reaction can alternate between sheer panic and savage attacks. The exact choice of how they act depends on how many there are, whether a king is present, and how much they've had to drink.

Flight into Death

When they run away, it's not always in retreat. Sometimes they're playing at a mummer's farce, hoping to draw big dumb tall folk into a trap when they follow in hopes of "getting the kill." Violence is as violence does, I suppose.

Fear of Magic

Arcane Insanity

Whenever an elf or magic user kills a goblin with a single spell, such as a *Magic Missile* or *Fireball*, other goblins who see this must make a morale check. If they fail, instead of fleeing combat there is a 50% chance they will be overcome with a suicidal madness and actually charge heedlessly into battle. While under the influence of this madness they receive a +1 bonus to all attack rolls and succeed in all morale checks until they are slain.

Author's Conclusion

In short, goblins are tiny, filthy, bloodthirsty creatures. All I can offer any foolish folk who deem themselves "adventurers" who find themselves looking down a crude spear and a mouth full of yellow, crooked teeth is that I told you so. You would have done better to stay home, minded your own business and most certainly not taken up that fifth pint when a room full of strange tall folk wandered into your village.

Sincerely,
Bucky Bandersnatch

Bucky Bandersnatch

1st Level Halfling

Strength 8 (-1 penalty to all melee attacks and damage)

Dexterity 16 (+2 to ranged attacks, -2 bonus to armor class)

Constitution 11

Intelligence 14 (Two bonus languages)

Wisdom 13 (+1 to all saving throws vs. spells)

Charisma 10

Alignment: Neutral

Armor Class: 6

Hit Points: 6



Special Abilities: Hide Outdoors (90%), Hide Underground (1-2 on d6), +1 bonus to initiative when alone, +1 bonus to all missile attack rolls, -2 bonus to armor class against foes greater than man-sized

Equipment: Dagger (1d4-1 damage), sling (1d4), leather armor, bag of twenty stones, backpack, 50' of silk rope, three torches, bags of caltrops (2), *Potion of Healing*, personal journal, quills (3), bottle of ink, wooden leaf pipe, pouch of halfling's leaf, ruby gem (50 gp, hidden in his boot)

Background: Bucky Bandersnatch was once a wealthy, idle halfling who lived a comfortable life in his burrow. He spent his days reading books and gardening and his evenings trading stories at the local tavern. Always a big talker, and a bigger drinker, Bucky has recently found himself a reluctant adventurer after an evening of drunken gambling. Now out on the road, he fondly recalls a fine pipe of leaf and a hot meal.

Unlike most halflings, Bucky has no courage about him and falls to pieces at the first signs of danger. He frets and mutters to himself at the slightest trouble and will regularly take the opportunity to hide behind his companions when faced with monsters or other threats that dwell in the wild.

He finds few joys on the road and has decided to keep a journal of his adventures in hopes that someone might one day read it and not make the same mistakes he has made. His face does brighten and his step lighten when the time comes to divide the treasure and when such an occasion arises, he is quick to speak at great length regarding his own contribution to an adventure's success.

Unfortunately, his cut of the treasure is often spent quickly when he finds the nearest roadside tavern. Reluctantly, he's forced to take back to the road and return to the life of an adventurer.

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