

The Crystal Skull

The Story So Far

This adventure sways more towards combat, so it would be wise to make sure players are well armed before starting out.

There are no other specific requirements for getting the players into the adventure, as all the parties involved will be new to the players.

A Request for Aid

The players are travelling through an unknown region of jungle when a group of native warriors ambushes them. The warriors all carry spears and shields and appear to be African in origin, right down to their scant clothing and jewelry. Unbeknownst to the players, they have entered the territory of a village of Noble Savages. Any attempts the players make to communicate with the warriors only to be met with fierce stares. The warriors remain silent as they escort the players to their village at spear point.

Upon entering the village, the players will see a well-organized civilization, even if has not progressed much further than mud huts with straw roofs. The children sit together in a sort of school, the areas for raising livestock are separate from the rest of the village and food is stored in special huts raised up on stilts to deter scavengers and vermin. Aside from two guards at the front gate, nobody else in the village pays any attention to the party. Any player able to make a Perception roll with a difficulty rating of 2 will notice that large sections of the walls and some of the buildings inside the village appear to be in various states of repair.

The players are directed to a large hut in the centre of the village where their weapons and other items of equipment are removed before they are ushered inside. They have been bought before the Village Chief, a man who, while advanced of years, still appears as strong as his warriors do. As the players enter, the Chief rises from his throne – an inelegant, but sizeable chair – and speaks. Any player able to make a Linguistics roll with a difficulty rating of 3 will be able to determine the Chief is using a derivation of one of the more common African dialects. If no player successfully makes the Linguistics roll, the Chief will repeat his statement a couple of times before becoming frustrated and switching to English. He is obviously not skilled in the language, but knows enough to get by.

The Chief asks the adventurers who they are, and why they have trespassed into his territory. As the players answer, he listens patiently, but does not appear happy with their answer. Once they finish, he asks if they are working for the “skin wearers” and accuses them of spying for “the vile enemy”. He is obviously very upset about something, and it will take the players best efforts – and a successful Diplomacy or Persuasion roll with a difficulty rating of 4 – to convince the Chief they are not a threat.

Once the Chief has been sufficiently placated, he almost apologizes for his anger and explains that his village has recently been raided a neighboring tribe of cannibals, whom he calls the Skin Wearers. During the raid, the cannibal warriors made off with an ancient artifact that was sacred to the tribe, and of great importance, this is what distresses the Chief the most. He asks for the players’ aid in retrieving the artifact. He would send his own warriors, but many were killed or captured alive during the raid. The rest he needs to defend the village.

Once the players have agreed, the Chief tells them that before they go one of the adventurers must prove their mettle against a champion of his tribe. He gestures to a guard, who leaves the hut, returning a few moments later with a burly warrior – the Village Champion. The guards clear in front of the Chief’s throne, with the adventurers gathered on one side and the Champion on the other. The Chief points at the strongest looking adventurer (the one with the highest combined Body and Strength) and says, “You will be first”.

Combat now begins with the players taking on the Village Champion one-by-one until he is defeated. Both sides will only be able to fight with their fists, as all other possible weapons have been removed from the impromptu arena. Once a player character is knocked unconscious, they are dragged clear and another player will be chosen to face the Champion. Once the Champion is knocked unconscious the contest will immediately end, the Chief sufficiently impressed with the martial ability of the adventurers. Any players who have been injured will be tended by the village's medicine men and quickly recover to full health.

Village Champion
Ally 2

Archetype: Native
Motivation: Duty

Style: 0
Health: 7

Body: 3
Dexterity: 3
Strength: 4
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 2
Willpower: 2

Size: 0
Move: 7
Perception: 4
Initiative: 5
Defense: 6
Stun: 3

Skills
Athletics {4/2/6(3)}
Brawl {4/2/6(3)}
(Other skills not included)

Talents
Staggering Blow, Strong

Flaw
Primitive

Weapons
Punch {0N/0/6N(3N)}

Once all the members of the party have recovered, the Chief invites them to his hut for a meal. While eating, he tells the players more about the stolen artifact. It is a human skull, carved from clear crystal. The skull has been an important part of the tribe for as long as their historians can recall its purpose to allow the tribe's holy men to communicate with the dead. While this may sound macabre, it is most commonly used to seek advice from deceased chiefs and wise men in times of need. The Chief dreads to think what vile use the cannibals would have for it. They could use it to extract information from the bodies of warriors captured, and later killed, in the recent raid. He makes it clear how vital it is that the players retrieve the artifact before it can be used against the tribe.

[Begin Sidebar]
The Crystal Skull
Artifact 2

This ancient mystical device is of unknown origin. Some think that it may have originally been Atlantean, but none like it has been found elsewhere, nor has any mention of it appeared in Atlantean ruins. All that is known about the Skull is its use – allowing communication with the dead. When touched to the head of a dead body, the holder is able to call forth that persons spirit and communicate with it. This is not always an easy process, especially when trying to call forth the spirit of an enemy. When attempting to contact a spirit, the holder should make a Willpower roll with a difficulty rating of 2 for a willing or indifferent spirit and a difficulty rating of 4 for an unwilling spirit. If the spirit is successfully contacted, the Skull's eyes will light up with an inner flame and the voice of the deceased will emanate from the Skull's grinning mouth. Once contacted, the spirit will remain in the skull for five minutes before disappearing. The same spirit may not be contacted again for a full day.

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After allowing the players some time to rest, the Chief introduces them to two of his best scouts. They will guide the adventurers to the cannibal village, and help them from there in any way they can. The team has their weapons and other equipment returned by the village guards and set out with the two guards.

Meeting the Neighbors

The two scouts guide the adventurers through the dense jungle for some time before finally leading them into a clearing that also appears to be on top of a large hill. From the hill, they can see the cannibal village laid out in the valley below them. Where the village they have just left was organized and civilized, this one is a hodgepodge of huts, many of which appear poorly built. Even from this distance, the adventurers are able to see that death is a very strong motif for this tribe. Bones are a popular decorative device, most likely from the larger species of dinosaurs inhabiting the region.

In the centre of the village, a great altar has been constructed. The scouts tell the players that a great pot is built into the altar – used for cooking those captured by the tribe. It is very difficult to see from here, but any character able to make a Perception roll with a difficulty rating of 4 will notice the sunlight glinting off an object located on the altar. It is most likely the Crystal Skull.

It is easy to see the adventurers will not be getting into the town through the front gate as it is too well guarded. The walls are equally unappealing, being both very high and topped with the heads of the village's enemies. The situation appears hopeless when one of the scouts points out a smaller rear gate to the village. He tells the adventurers that it is used by the women of the tribe who travel to a nearby lake to gather water for the cooking pot. They might be able to disguise themselves as water carriers and enter the village that way.

The scouts lead the players to the lake, making sure to stay a good distance away from the cannibal village. It is not a large lake, nor does it have a feeder stream, the water instead bubbling up from a natural aquifer deep underground and flowing out of the lake in a single stream that leads away from the cannibal's village. The lake is surrounded by a rim of small stones and grasses, which eventually give way to the dense jungle found in the rest of the region. Moored to the village side of the lakeshore is a pair of small boats, most likely used for fishing.

Not long after the adventurers arrive at the lake, a small group of women appears each carrying large a sizeable pot on their heads. They are dressed in leathery clothing that completely covers their features – clothing which, upon closer inspection, appears to be sewed from human skin. Compared to the males of the tribe, the females are passive and do not put up much resistance to any aggression on the part of the adventurers.

Once the disguises have been acquired, the adventurers will find they have a relatively easy time making their way into the village. As long as they have remembered to return with pots full of water, that is. Once inside, the scouts keep up the act and lead them to the centre of the village where they empty their pots into the great pot. Once there, the players will find themselves pretty close to the Crystal Skull with very few cannibals around to bother them. The temptation so simply grab the skull and beat a hasty retreat while still in costume should be strong.

As soon as one of the players touches the skull a warning shout is heard throughout the camp and the area around the altar fills with angry cannibal warriors. They are armed with a variety of basic hand weapons and most are scantily clad. Most of the older cannibals are also dressed in the same sort of leathery material the women, and now the players, are wearing. It isn't hard to figure out why this tribe is referred to as the 'Skin Wearers'. Once the adventurers are surrounded, one of the larger cannibals steps forwards and rips away their disguises one-by-one. There are cries of surprise as each of the adventurers is revealed, and even louder cries of anger when the two scouts are revealed.

From out of the crowd steps a warrior decorated in the most macabre fashion they adventurers have seen so far. Not only is he wearing the human skin clothing that the rest of the village wear, but his face is also painted to resemble a grinning skull and various bones pierce his ears, lips and nose. His right hand holds a twisted dagger which is decorated with stylized runes as dried blood. It looks like the High Priest himself will be inspecting these new captives. As he approaches the adventurers he looks them over, one by one, paying special attention to the team's equipment. Once his inspection is finished he stands up to his full height and raises his, previously concealed, left hand to his mouth. He takes a deep breath and blow hard into his hand, releasing a cloud of fine white powder that envelopes the captives. As it does so, each receives a blow to the small of their back, causing them to gasp and inhale the powder. As the adventurers and scouts drift into unconsciousness, the last thing they hear is the loud cry from the High Priest to the assembled warriors which is met with a replying cry that equal parts joy and blood lust.

Dinner Time

The adventurers awake to find themselves inside a small hut. Their hands are bound and wet rags have been placed in their mouths. All their equipment has been removed, but they are still dressed. In the doorway of the hut stand a pair of fierce-looking warriors. The adventurers will all be able to hear the sounds of drums beating outside the hut, it sounds like the village is getting ready for something big. As the tempo of the music continues to build, the guards approach the adventurers, pull them to their feet and push them towards the door of the hut. When they leave the hut the assembled crowd erupts with whooping and hollering. They have gathered around the great pot which now has a wood fire burning strongly beneath it. Standing on the altar, above the great pot, is the High Priest. Behind him, their equipment has been added to the altar, alongside the Crystal Skull. Luckily, the cannibals appear to have no knowledge of what a gun is, or how it is used.

As the adventurers are brought closer to the altar, the High Priest turns to look at them. As he stares down on them, the music reaches a thumping climax then suddenly stops. In the sudden silence, the High Priest descends from the altar and gestures to his guards to bring one of the scouts before him. The man is forced to kneel before the High Priest who asks speaks to him in a quiet voice the players are not able to make out. The scout does not respond, instead staring stoically into the eyes of his captor. Seeing the defiance of his enemy the High Priest gestures to one of the guards who draws a sharp machete and beheads the scout. The crowd roars with animalistic delight as the body and severed head of the scout are thrown into the great pot.

The High Priest then gestures to the second scout and questions him in the same manner. This time the scout spits in the High Priest's eyes. Instead of having the man beheaded, he instead gets his guards to raise the man to his feet. Once standing and restrained, the High Priest draws

his sacrificial dagger and draws it slowly across the man's torso, just below his rib cage. The scout winces as the blade bites deep, but somehow summons up the courage to not give the cannibals the pleasure of crying out in pain. Next, the High Priest thrusts his other hand deep inside the newly cut wound, reaching in and up. The scout struggles and eventually lets forth a terrible scream – much to the delight of the assembled crowd. His struggle doesn't last long, however, as his head falls forward and his body slumps. The adventurers should realize he is dead, even before the High Priest wrenches his heart from his body.

As the second scout's body is added to the cooking pot, the High Priest approaches the players. He observes them for a second, drinking in their palpable fear before issuing a short command to the guards. They are all led up onto the altar and then, one by one, shoved into the great pot. It is large enough to hold all of the players without any of them being trapped underwater. And, once in the pot, they will realize the water isn't quite as hot as it first may have appeared, in fact it is just warm enough to loosen their rough bonds. Anyone scoring at least one success on a Feat of Strength roll will be able to break free of their bonds. All they have to worry about is waiting for the opportune moment, and that isn't too far away. The High Priest returns to the altar and continues with the prayers. After a short while the cannibals will be totally engrossed in their ceremony and not pay attention to the people in the pot. If the players are unsure of what to do, remind them that their weapons are not far from the edge of the pot, and it would be an easy matter for one adventurer to help another out of the pot. Also, the cannibals seem to be unfamiliar with modern firearms, so firing off a few rounds should be rather effective.

Cannibal High Priest
Mentor 3

Archetype: Native
Motivation: Power

Style: 3
Health: 8

Body: 4
Dexterity: 4
Strength: 3
Charisma: 3
Intelligence: 3
Willpower: 4

Size: 0
Move: 7
Perception: 7
Initiative: 7
Defense: 8
Stun: 4

Skills
Brawl {3/3/6(3)}
Intimidation {3/5/8(4)}
Medicine {3/5/8(4)}
Melee {3/4/7(3+)}
Stealth {4/4/8(4)}
Survival {3/4/7(3+)}

Talents
Fearsome 1
Quick Draw

Resources
Status 2

Flaw
Primitive

Weapons
Ritual Dagger {1L/0/8L(4L)}
Bite {0L/0/6L(3L)}
Punch {0N/0/6N(3N)}

The Cannibals warriors have the stats found on page 207-208 of Hollow Earth Expedition.

Having made their escape from the pot, they will have two choices as to where they go from their. They can either flee through the front gates and into the jungle, or out the side gate and down the river on the fishing boats. They might also want to bring the scout's severed head with them in case they need to ask for directions. It's up to you to decide how easy or hard it is for the players to get back to the first village, but once they get there they will be met with both great sadness and great joy. Both of the scouts may have died, but the sacred artifact as been returned to them and, for this, the Chief is eternally grateful.