

PATHFINDER

PLAYER COMPANION™



ORCS

OF GOLARION

HALF-ORC RACIAL TRAITS

+2 to One Ability Score: Half-orc characters get a +2 bonus to one ability score of their choice at creation to represent their varied nature.

Medium: Half-orcs are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

Normal Speed: Half-orcs have a base speed of 30 feet.

Darkvision: Half-orcs can see in the dark up to 60 feet.

Intimidating: Half-orcs receive a +2 racial bonus on Intimidate skill checks due to their fearsome nature.

Orc Blood: Half-orcs count as both humans and orcs for any effect related to race.

Orc Ferocity: Once per day, when a half-orc is brought below 0 hit points but not killed, he can fight on for 1 more round as if disabled. At the end of his next turn, unless brought to above 0 hit points, he immediately falls unconscious and begins dying.

Weapon Familiarity: Half-orcs are proficient with greataxes and falchions and treat any weapon with the word “orc” in its name as a martial weapon.

Languages: Half-orcs begin play speaking Common and Orc. Half-orcs with high Intelligence scores can choose from the following: Abyssal, Draconic, Giant, Gnome, and Goblin.

Favored Deities: Calistria, Cayden Cailean, Gorum, Lamashtu, Norgorber, Pharasma, Rovagug

Favored Regions: Absalom, Belkzen, Cheliax, Isger, Katapesh, Nex, Nidal, Realm of the Mammoth Lords, River Kingdoms, the Shackles, Ustalav, Varisia

Names: Half-orc names often echo the rough and guttural tongue of their orc forebears, and nicknames—particularly boastful or insulting ones—are common among half-orcs, though some half-orcs may seek to distance themselves from their heritage by taking names from other races.

Female Names: Canan, Drogheda, Goruza, Mazon, Shirish, Tevaga, Zeljka

Male Names: Ausk, Davor, Hakak, Kizziar, Makoa, Nesteruk, Tsadok

ORC RACIAL TRAITS

+4 Strength, –2 Intelligence, –2 Wisdom, –2 Charisma: Orcs are brutal and savage.

Medium: Orcs are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

Normal Speed: Orcs have a base speed of 30 feet.

Darkvision: Orcs can see in the dark up to 60 feet.

Ferocity: An orc remains conscious and can continue fighting even if his hit point total is below 0. The orc is still staggered and loses 1 hit point each round. He still dies when his hit point total reaches a negative amount equal to his Constitution score.

Light Sensitivity: Orcs are dazzled in areas of bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Weapon Familiarity: Orcs are proficient with greataxes and falchions and treat any weapon with the word “orc” in its name as a martial weapon.

Languages: Orcs begin play speaking Common and Orc. Orcs with high Intelligence scores can choose from among the following bonus languages: Dwarven, Giant, Gnome, Goblin, and Undercommon.

Favored Deities: Gorum, Lamashtu, Rovagug, demon lords, orc shamanism (see page 26)

Favored Regions: Belkzen, Katapesh, Realm of the Mammoth Lords, River Kingdoms, Ustalav, Varisia

Names: See above.



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ORCS OF GOLARION

This Pathfinder Companion book works best with the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* and the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*. Although it is suitable for play in any fantasy world, it is optimized for the Pathfinder campaign setting.

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Printed in China.



ORCS OF GOLARION

“THEY COME FROM THE BORDERS, LORD, AMID THE SCREAMS OF THE DYING AND THE WAILS OF MOTHERLESS CHILDREN. THEY FLOW IN A BLACK SEA OVER THE HILLS, AND EVERY LAND THEY TOUCH BLACKENS AND SMOKES WITH THE FIRES OF THEIR PASSING. THEY ARE A WAVE OF CORRUPTION, BEASTS WITH THE SHAPES OF MEN, AND THEY DEFILE OUR FARMS AS THEY DEFILE OUR WOMEN. NONE CAN STAND AGAINST THEIR NUMBERS, FOR EVERY RAIDER THAT FALLS IS REPLACED TENFOLD IN THEIR HORDE. THEIR EYES BURN IN THE HALF-LIGHT, AND THE SKY DARKENS WITH THEIR APPROACH. TO STAND IS MADNESS, FOR WE ARE AS SAND BENEATH THEIR WAVE, AND WITH EVERY BEATING OF OUR HEARTS, THEY GROW CLOSER.”

—ANONYMOUS REFUGEE, TO GENERAL HARCHRIST OF LASTWALL

HISTORY OF THE ORCS

Stories of marauding orcs and the depravity of their monstrous raiding parties have dominated fireside tales and bedtime stories for both children and warriors for thousands of years. With their terrifying combination of bestial features and unnervingly human shapes and behaviors, orcs represent a horror that is both tangible and metaphorical—a manifestation of the beast that resides inside humanity. Few corners of the world, no matter how remote, have escaped knowledge of orcs, nor the inchoate fury of their blades.

Yet orc civilization, such as it is, is in decline. Once a dominant race across all of Avistan, orcs thrived and prospered while Golarion lay under a shroud of darkness caused by the apocalyptic Earthfall. But when the conditions that allowed the orcs to flourish were removed, the disjointed orc empire began to crumble.

IN THE DARKLANDS

Although many orcs claim that they were created by Rovagug, their knowledge of the Rough Beast only dates back to the Age of Darkness. Before that, when the orcs of Golarion dwelt entirely in the caverns and tunnels of the Darklands, they were barely more than humanoid animals, struggling among themselves over resources and occasionally menacing other, more intelligent subterranean races—particularly the dwarves.

In an ironic twist, it was their frequent clashes with dwarves that taught orcs how to use tools—mainly weapons, scavenged from fallen dwarves—and encouraged them to try to make their own. Their progress was initially slow, but as the dwarves began their Quest for Sky and the orcs faced ever-greater numbers of dwarven foes, the orcs were forced to adapt more quickly.

The dwarves' vicious pogrom had several effects on orcs' development. First, captured weapons became rarer; dwarves attacked in greater numbers, and worked harder to recover their dead. And although battles were brutal, and neither side was willing to retreat, the sheer number of dwarves surging up from the lower Darklands tunnels where they had traditionally resided forced the orcs to abandon lair after lair, which meant leaving behind not only their caches of captured weapons, but also their rudimentary forges. Orc weapons and armor from that point on became cruder—made of what could be scrounged, and tacked together as quickly as possible, often mere minutes before battle.

Finally, as the constant upsurge of the dwarves stretched into decades of running battles, orcs at last burst forth onto the surface and began to spread out across the face of Golarion. Recently ravaged and covered in a pall of dust and darkness by the tremendous strike of the meteor known

as the *Starstone*, the surface world proved a fruitful escape route for the retreating orcs, and they took to their new home with ease. These upwellings of orc hordes occurred in scattered locales all over Avistan, but primarily in what would later be called the Five Kings Mountains. The first groups of orcs to emerge were among the weakest of their race—the frail, the injured, and the addled, sent first in the retreat so that the capable warriors might fight a rearguard action—but their number also included some more clever and ambitious specimens, who quickly realized that this vast, cold, lightless place was all but undefended. Just as the orcs could not defend their homes from the dwarves, the surface-dwellers could not defend their homes from the orcs.

THE SACKING

Thus began the time that orc storytellers often refer to as “The Sacking,” when they spilled forth from the Darklands and stormed across the surface world, slaughtering the hardscrabble settlements of the humans, crushing and enslaving the survivors of the Earthfall and their descendants, and founding their new, barbaric kingdoms on the ruins of once-glorious cities, particularly those of fallen Thassilon. For several centuries, the orcs ruled all they sought to claim.

Although orcs came to develop a civilization of sorts, they progressed little technologically or philosophically. The most intelligent among them gradually unraveled the mysteries of rudimentary magic—and literacy, for that matter—from scrolls and artifacts recovered from the rubble of temples and libraries, but were never able to quite grasp the more powerful spells. Orc shamans began communing with demonic forces, seeking more and more power. They discovered deities like the Rough Beast, Rovagug, as he finally took notice of them, granting them a measure of his unholy vigor in their savage quest for dominion and destruction.

So aided by arcane and divine magic, orc warlords spread out and conquered everything within their reach, instituting the rule of the strong and the subjugation of the weak. In some areas, orc brutality threatened to wipe out the surface-dwelling races once and for all, but a little over a century into their reign, their old enemies, the dwarves, finally fulfilled their great quest. Seeing that they had not wiped out the orcs—as many had erroneously assumed when the majority of those still belowground died or fled for the surface—they built their 10 mighty Sky Citadels, and began to take back some of the surface world from their ancient foes.

The clashes between these two enemies were many and mighty, but the orcs had had a century to entrench themselves, and proved far more difficult to dislodge

from their surface strongholds than they had been to evict from their Darklands bastions. Centuries of fighting ensued before, to the orcs' dismay, Golarion's long night finally turned once again to day, robbing the orcs of their advantage over the humans and suddenly giving the dwarves—who for the most part peacefully coexisted with most humans, and were quicker to adapt to the surface's glaring light—the upper hand. Mile after mile of orc holdings fell to the dwarves, or were simply abandoned by their orc masters, who were unable to bear the punishing brilliance of the sun. The orcs retreated to their subterranean shelters, venturing out only at night—leaving their kingdoms to the races they had until so recently dominated.

THE BRIGHT TIME

More centuries passed, and with the help of the dwarves, the humans, halflings, elves, and gnomes who had survived the brutality of the orcs' reign slowly reclaimed their world. But the orcs, in their shadowy fortresses and underground enclaves, were not idle during this time. Though they were slower to adapt than the dwarves, they pushed themselves until their eyes could bear the light of the sun—though still painful—and fought savagely to not only keep the bastions they still held, but also to retake their former strongholds, winning back much of what they had lost.

Yet their efforts were disorganized and haphazard. An orc warlord might fight through miles of enemy territory to retake an old keep, only to find that another tribe had already taken it, and had no intention of giving it up. As remains true today, orcs fought orcs as much as they fought dwarves or men.

Finally, though, in northern Avistan, an orc warlord rose to power who was both more powerful and more cunning than the others: Belkzen, whose black sun symbol came to be the standard for a vast army of orc tribes that were united by his determination to drive the dwarves back underground and reclaim the orcs' lost holdings. This mighty force laid siege to the dwarven Sky Citadel of Koldukar in –3708 AR, crushing the dwarves' resistance at the Battle of Nine Stones and pouring into the defenseless city by the thousands,

slaughtering everyone within and looting the dwarven temples and treasuries.

Flushed with their victory, the orcs proceeded to refortify Koldukar against the inevitable dwarven counterattack, renaming it Urgir (meaning “First Home” in Orc). But though the dwarves made several incursions, they ultimately proved unable or unwilling to retake their lost citadel, and Belkzen's armies swiftly spread across the entire region, conquering outposts and burning villages until the so-called “Hold of Belkzen” became a kingdom dominated by orcs.

THE REIGN OF BELKZEN

Despite having led the orc tribes to victory and glory and mounted an impressive offense that won the Battle of Nine Stones, Belkzen found ruling them almost impossible. Without dwarves to battle, the tribes fell to squabbling among themselves, and even the conquest of the region around Urgir was little more than a momentary distraction. The orcs needed something to keep them from each other's throats.

Belkzen's main strategy to keep the orcs united was simple and effective: executions. Whenever an orc killed another orc, Belkzen ordered the murderer tortured and sacrificed to Rovagug—along with ten of his tribe. And when an orc leader declared war on another tribe, Belkzen sent his own bodyguards to bring that leader before him, to be personally disemboweled by Belkzen himself. There were exceptions, of course—sometimes Belkzen wanted a particular orc killed, or a tribe wiped out—but for the most part, the orcs took the lesson: defy Belkzen, and you'll pay with your life.

Understandably, Belkzen's rule was not universally popular. He put down numerous coups and survived countless assassination attempts. During this time, Belkzen imposed his furious will on his subjects, ruling by force until the orcs came to accept his word as not just an order, but as the law. After 2 full decades of obeying the “Laws of Belkzen”—as arbitrary and temperamental as the leader himself—orcs finally grew accustomed to doing what their chieftains told them to do. Even after Belkzen died (or vanished; orc legends say that he set out to singlehandedly conquer the remaining Sky Citadels), his successors on the throne of Urgir were able to give commands and expect them to be followed—although it sometimes took a few savage executions to get the message across. Yet with each generation, the kingdom grew more disorganized, until the lord of the fallen Sky



Citadel controlled little more than the city itself, just one stronghold among innumerable clan holdings.

THE SLOW DECLINE

For more than 8,000 years now, orcs have ruled the Hold of Belkzen—and virtually nothing else. While the warlord-king of Belkzen reigns mostly unchallenged in Urgir and is generally recognized as the strongest of the chieftains, outside the city's walls orcs have reverted to old habits. They fight among themselves, brutalize anything smaller than themselves, and even when they do succeed at taking a city or stronghold, they usually lose it again within the space of a few years, at most.

While the more ambitious orc chieftains dream of one day reuniting the tribes, as Belkzen once did, and again bringing the surface world under their despotic rule, the fact remains that they have lost all the advantages that once enabled them to conquer much of Avistan. The sun still rises by day, the elves have returned, the humans have built their own kingdoms, and the dwarves are stronger than ever—and none of those things seem likely to change any time soon.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TRAITS

Anyone living near the frontiers and unsettled lands where orcs are most commonly found knows them on sight. They are tall and powerfully muscled, with flesh tones ranging from mottled grays to dark green. Most distinctive are their faces, which are savage and bestial. Orcs have broad, flat, upturned noses, wide mouths, and teeth resembling a boar's tusks. Their eyes are small and reddish, glaring from beneath heavy brows and nearly always squinting in any light brighter than a full moon. Their ears are frequently long and lupine, though few orcs make it through childhood without having their ears tattered by bites and cuts or torn off entirely in fights. Their hair is dark, coarse, and oily, although some orcs (females in particular) manage to grow it out into a dark mane of heavy locks, controlled with bone combs and leather ties.

Although orc appearance is unpleasant enough to begin with, they also tend to be hideously scarred, making their faces the stuff of nightmares. Male orcs commonly bear the scars of countless battles: from a milky eye to a missing ear, split nose, or crooked grin produced by a blade. Some of the marks are deliberate, such as emblems cut or branded into the cheeks or forehead. Orc females are not exempt—in addition to the marks they receive at the hands of males, they often file their teeth, scar and tattoo their faces, and pierce their ears, lips, and nose the same way their mates do, both for decoration and to show the status and strength of their mates.

WHY ORCS?

Of all the monstrous races of Golarion, orcs most straddle the line between common foe and player character. Not only do the rules in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook* allow for half-orc characters, but such half-monstrous personalities have long been included in roleplaying games. Yet, rather than focus this companion exclusively on half-orcs, beings without a specific culture or unified society, insights into the details of orc life should serve half-orc players far better than a lengthy investigation into the unpredictable details of their own harsh and wildly varying realities. So, on one hand, the desire to serve half-orc characters fueled this accessory's creation.

But orcs are far more than just their halfbreeds. From the earliest days of RPGs and even in the fantasies that inspired such games, orcs have been among the most ubiquitous foes for heroes to confront. As monsters, though, the specifics of their lives—beyond warfare and pillaging—are rarely detailed. With this companion, we hope to take a step toward correcting that tradition of oversight. Also, just because rules for orcs exist primarily in the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*, that shouldn't mean that it's impossible to have characters of this race. With the GM's permission, a player could easily create an orc character, an extraordinary member of the savage race with aspirations beyond bloodletting. As the *Bestiary* describes, orc characters gain a number of benefits, but the associated drawbacks tend to make them less capable characters than those of other races on average. Players and GMs should both understand that orcs aren't designed to serve as a player race, and so orc characters might require some work if the GM wishes all his PCs to be on an even power level. Yet, as far as monstrous characters go, there are few races that better mesh with the intended powers and abilities of player races than orcs, leaving players more time to consider what extraordinary events might set their savage characters on the path to adventure.

While orcs are often cast as savages and half-beasts, they do possess at least one remarkable physiological advantage: their incredible capacity for mental strain. Orcs are never shocked by sights of violence, never worn down by endless campaigning, and never haunted by dreams of vicious deeds. While part of this psychological endurance comes from exposure to myriad affronts and terrors throughout their young lives, orcs seem to possess a more economical memory than most races. This has little to do with their ability to retain information, though—quite the opposite in fact. Rather, orcs possess a seemingly voluntary, though potentially subconscious, ability to forget. Thus, crippling failures, moments of terror, and unwanted emotion can

CANNIBALISM

Orcs are infamous for their willingness (even eagerness) to eat other humanoids, and sometimes even other orcs. At some level, the practice is a matter of survival—eating what food is available to them. In lean times, humanoid slaves are more important to an orc tribe as livestock than they are for their labor. After all, orcs can always raid for more slaves when the opportunity presents itself later.

Orcs also believe consuming the flesh of other creatures allows the eater to take on their strengths. Just as warriors feast on the hearts of dire boars, cave bears, or worgs, so too does eating a fallen enemy symbolize the ultimate victory: not merely defeating the foe in combat, but consuming all that he was.

As with other orc meals, humanoid flesh may be eaten raw, torn from the body of a fallen enemy or a helpless prisoner, or slowly and carefully cooked. Indeed, orc “cooks” are just as often also butchers and torturers, skilled in gutting and bleeding victims in such a way as to “tenderize” them for slow roasting or stewing. Orcs often talk about other races in terms usually reserved for livestock and game animals, comparing the flavor and texture of elf to dwarf, or the taste of this nation of humans versus that one. When a laughing orc refers to a prisoner as “meat,” he is being entirely literal.

simply be shoved out of mind, allowing lusts and violent pride to dominate. This isn't to say that orcs forget every slight or pain—few creatures hold grudges like orcs—but traumas that might impede their ability to survive and fight on are dismissed, giving orcs a predator-like confidence in their own abilities and willingness to endlessly fight on.

STRENGTH AND STAMINA

“The strong survive,” orcs say, and none can argue that orcs are known for their brutal knack for survival. Orcs who manage to live past childhood have already endured disease, filth, and violence enough to kill most civilized folk. Their animalistic nature has them almost constantly on the move, and only those with the strength and stamina to endure it make it to adulthood. Orc warriors can march at a brisk pace in armor all day long and still be eager to a fight when they arrive. Full-grown orcs wrestle wild beasts with their bare hands for sport, and train with weapons that smaller and slighter creatures can barely lift, much less swing with any real force. Survivors of orc raids have reported the creatures beheading foes with a single stroke, practically cleaving some in twain with their great axes.

Strength is a quality orcs respect, and in many cases, perhaps the only one. Anyone—even another orc—showing weakness invites death or enslavement, for the strong

rightfully take what they want from the weak, and in this way the tribe as a whole is kept strong and imposing.

FEROCITY

To many, the defining characteristic of orcs is the ferocity that makes them such feared raiders and warriors. Anger is an orc's constant companion, what they refer to as “fire in the belly and the blood.” Sometimes it is a banked glow, ready to flare when fresh fuel is thrown in the fire. In battle, it is a blazing rage. Orcs are dominated by their passions, and their greatest passions are to lash out, to kill, and to roar their victory for all to hear.

Everything about orcs as a race is painted with the blood-red palette of their ferocity. They have little to no patience for anything, and are more likely to smash a complex project to pieces than they are to complete it. They believe that pain is the greatest teacher, and care little for words that sit coldly on a page. Challenges provoke their ire, and they are most alive when unleashing the fury that builds within them. An orc who is not fighting, raging, or roaring in either anger or laughter is most likely spent and sprawled out, snoring with the same savageness.

Though much of this furious behavior is enforced by orc culture, it cannot be denied that those rare orcs raised apart from their kind, even from childhood, are often still filled with the same animal rage. All it takes is a momentary annoyance or minor frustration to drive an orc to murderous fury. Their terrible ferocity makes it all but impossible for there to be any lasting peace with orcs. Sooner or later, even if they are cowed by the strength of a greater power, something will send orcs into a rage, and then blood will be spilled.

SENSES

Bred beneath the surface, orc eyes can pierce the deepest gloom, but are extremely sensitive to light. They can tolerate the light of an overcast day easily enough, but full sunlight is painful to them. While daytime races take comfort in the light, orcs see it as a danger. Light is a betrayer, giving away the warrior's position and blinding him so softer and weaker creatures can kill him. The accursed sun was what ultimately brought down the orcs' ancient empire.

An orc's wolf-like ears are not overly sensitive compared to a human's, although they are more demonstrative. Orc ears twitch and shift slightly, showing their owner's attention. A careful observer can see if an orc sentry has noticed him by the involuntary pricking of his ears, and an orc threatening to attack often flattens his ears like an angry dog.

Orc senses of smell and taste seem no more or less perceptive than those of other humanoids, although common wisdom says orcs must not have any of either,

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given their living and eating habits. It is certainly true that orc camps and villages reek with charnel odors of slaughter, spoiled food, spilled drink, and rotting waste. Orcs themselves reek of these smells, along with a rough, animal musk that is their natural scent.

Many scholars posit that the orc body must handle pain differently than those of other races; after all, how else could they endure the hardships not just intrinsic to their savage lifestyles but ingrained in their culture? However, no evidence of heightened pain thresholds or decreased sensitivity has ever been documented among orcs. Thus, they face the violence of their lives with similar vulnerabilities to those humans would face, struggling and surviving in conditions at least perceived as crippling by most civilized races.

DIET

In their original underground homes, orcs subsisted almost entirely on meat, supplemented by a variety of wild fungi. In the wider world, their diet has broadened, but has not changed greatly. Orcs are only nominal omnivores, still primarily eating meat. They prefer their meat in one of two ways: raw and bloody or slow-roasted until it falls off the bones, which can then be cracked to suck out the sweet marrow. An orc feast involves hours of preparation over a fire pit, while orcs in the field will tear fistfuls of meat fresh from a carcass and gulp it down, especially if they are hungry. Although partial to civilized meat like pork, mutton, beef, goat, rat, and occasionally larger game such as bear, orcs will eat virtually anything they can lay their hands on, including other humanoids. Slaves tend pens of domestic animals—usually pigs or goats—and raiding parties steal livestock when presented with the opportunity.

Indeed, orcs are quite happy to supplement their usual diet with foodstuffs stolen during raids, sacking and carrying off stores of grain, preserved meats, and especially any sort of alcohol—the stronger, the better. They prefer dark ales of the kind their forbearers used to raid from dwarven stores, but beer, mead, wine, or any sort of liquor will do. Caravans known to be carrying strong drink make tempting targets for orcs, and capable

brewers and distillers taken as slaves are prized, so long as they continue to produce for their masters.

Orc females and slaves gather the token fruits, herbs, and roots used to supplement the orc diet, consumed fresh or dried and kept for later use, mainly as seasoning and accompaniment to heavy meat dishes. They also raise some fungi that grow abundantly on the waste that accumulates around an orc settlement.

LIFESPAN

Orcs are almost always short-lived. A full third of them die in childhood from a wide range of maladies and plagues, along with accidents or simple violence on the part of parents, siblings, or others. Those that do survive reach full physical maturity around the age of 12 years.

Males usually die violently, in raids, fights with other tribes, or simple arguments which inevitably turn deadly. The idea of infirmity terrifies orcs, especially as advancing age makes an orc a tempting target for all those who would prove their dominance by killing him. As a result, aged male orcs tend to become either extremely canny warriors and manipulators, ruling their brethren through fear of their non-physical abilities, or else become increasingly foolhardy in their efforts to seem hale and hearty, until they meet their end that way.

Female orcs are less likely to die on the battlefield, although many still perish violently at the hands of their mates, rivals, or enemies of their tribe. Others die in childbirth, although orc females are particularly hardy in this manner, and the mortality rate for mothers in labor is barely higher than other races, despite the atrocious conditions and huge numbers of offspring produced. As a whole, females are more likely to live to see old age, which for orcs comes in their fourth decade. Those over 30 are elders, while the rare orc that lives past 40 is truly ancient. Some aged females manage to accumulate personal power, usually by becoming shamans, or else through influence over their male children (as well as their grandchildren, and great-grandchildren).



BREEDING

The short orc lifespan is balanced by a terrible fecundity. “Breeding like orcs” is a common expression in some parts, referring to the creatures’ able to reproduce quickly. Orc females become fertile when they reach maturity, and remain so until they die; orc gestation is relatively short for a humanoid—only 6 months. Given orc breeding habits, mature females are almost constantly pregnant, although a group of mated females will often manage to share their child-bearing and rearing responsibilities through the careful management of their shared mate.

Females typically give birth to “litters” of two to five young at a time. Singular births are rare and considered auspicious. Orcs believe that singular children have killed and devoured their siblings in the womb, giving them the vitality of many. It is certainly true that single births tend to be stronger and more likely to survive.

Orcs are also notorious for their ability and willingness to breed with other creatures, including captured slaves and battlefield conquests, and the results of these matings inevitably reflect their orc parentage. As physical reminders of rape and slaughter that most communities would rather forget, such half-breeds are generally despised and mistrusted by civilized communities.

Within orc society, half-orcs tend to find themselves smarter than, but physically outclassed by, their orc relations, and hence are lucky to avoid slavery. Those who manage to excel in physical combat, however, tend to find themselves promoted to positions of leadership due to the brains with which they can direct their brawn. Indeed, some orc tribes go out of their way to take human women prisoner, with the goal of begetting a great tactician to lead the tribe to victory.

ORC CULTURE

Many scholars say that “orc culture” is an oxymoron, and they’re correct, in that what civilized races consider culture, orcs view with sneering disdain. Philosophy, art, advanced education—how do such things make a tribe strong and ensure their survival? For survival is the only thing that matters to orcs, and so far as they’re concerned, survival is ensured solely through strength and conquest. Yet that doesn’t mean that orcs don’t have certain universal principles and tendencies by which almost all orc clans operate.

DOMINANCE

In spite of their reputation as chaotic creatures, orcs have a sense of a natural order to things: the strong dominate the weak. Predators dominate prey, while stronger predators hunt the weaker ones (along with their prey), and so forth—a great chain of dominance from the weakest of

creatures to the strongest, with the highest spot on the food chain reserved for the orcs themselves.

Of course, orcs are not so foolish as to believe they are the strongest creatures on Golarion. They know full well there are mightier creatures, and frequently bow to superior powers, be it a god, a demon lord, a dragon, or even a powerful human wizard. As a race, however, orcs consider themselves the strongest of the humanoids, and therefore the rightful rulers of all they survey.

The drive towards dominance is strongly ingrained in an orc’s being. They are virtually incapable of relating to others—including other orcs—in any other way. Alliances with orcs are either a face-saving name for what is actually surrender, or else a temporary arrangement, until circumstances change or one of the parties figures out how to dominate the others. The idea of inherent equality is alien to the orc mindset; everything must fall into a pecking order. If there isn’t one, then orcs will establish it, most often with violence.

This drive makes the core of orc culture what civilized races would consider bullying: the strong entirely dominate the weak and are able to do as they please, but their dominance is often shallow and fragile. Someone who proves unusually strong or able to stand up to threats can turn the tables and become the dominant force in the relationship overnight. Orc life is a continuous struggle for control and position.

CONQUEST

Although orcs consider themselves the strongest race, they do not believe rulership or empire is theirs simply by right. Dominance must be earned through conquest. It is necessary not only to prove that you are the strongest, but to continue proving it to every challenger who comes along. This is one reason why orc culture is so chaotic and unstable by outsider standards: orc leaders face almost continual challenges to their authority, and all of them know that, sooner or later, they will fall to one of those challengers. In the words of orc folk wisdom, “The chief wins every battle but one. In that one, he hopes to die well.” Time and age, if nothing else, will eventually bring down the strongest leader.

The desire for the security and prosperity to ensure survival drives orcs to conquer. If they are not the dominant force in their lands, then they must submit, a fate all orcs wish to avoid. While some orc tribes fall under the sway of more powerful outside leaders, they generally try to color the arrangement as banding together in order to increase their personal power... yet even then, orcs feel the shame of serving another, and most inevitably rebel when the opportunity presents itself. Orcs are ambitious by nature, and make poor vassals and even worse slaves.

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SLAVERY

Orcs are natural slave masters, since servitude and submission are, to them, the inherent role of the weak and the conquered. They make only middling slavers, however. Unlike some other savage races, orcs are too likely to abuse and kill slaves merely on a whim, and they lack the organized discipline of hobgoblin slave pens. Orcs simply force useful prisoners taken on their raids into servitude and, from time to time, sell off any excess slaves in exchange for more useful goods. In fact, they're likely to sell to local gnolls or hobgoblins, who know better how to keep slaves and market them, as orcs prefer quick profit to having to deal with maintaining excess flesh. This may be the best the slaves can hope for, since the alternative is likely becoming food for the orcs' larders.

Having one or more slaves is a mark of status for an orc. Technically, only males are permitted to own slaves, although a male orc's female mates can order them around. Still, they are the male's property, and a female who abuses or kills a slave may suffer punishment from her mate. Similarly, a male who assaults another orc's slave is considered to have damaged his property, and may answer for it. The orc attitude toward slaves tends to be fairly casual, however, as they are considered disposable and have to be replaced eventually anyway. Orcs may value a particular slave for certain skills, but becoming sentimentally attached to them is considered as foolish as a human becoming attached to a farm animal destined for the slaughter.

FAMILY

Orc families are perfect examples of the importance of dominance in their culture. Orc males compete for available females, and a male is permitted to have as many females as he can support, defend, and keep under control. Thus, orcs with large families and many offspring are strong and prosperous. The leader of a tribe typically has the greatest number of mates, and therefore children. (Unlike families in other races, however, having a large brood of children doesn't equal greater security, for an orc patriarch is as likely to be killed by his own progeny as he is by an outsider.) For their part, orc females see males with many other mates as desirable, and believe mating

with the strongest males ensures that they'll bear stronger children.

THE ROLE OF FEMALES

Orc females are generally seen as little more than possessions, owned by either their father or their mate, or perhaps a male sibling or eldest son if they have neither. They live and die at the whims of the males, and exist to serve them and produce offspring. Female children are seen as a tradable commodity at best, and are left to their mothers to raise, while males are taken away at the earliest opportunity to turn them into warriors.

That is not to say orc females are helpless victims, however—far from it. They are, in many ways, even more petty and vicious than males. Their circumstances force female orcs to develop a measure of cunning and skill in manipulating others. Females belonging to the same mate compete fiercely for attention and favor, and tend to be bitterly jealous of new favorites, but they must also learn to cooperate for their own good.

Mothers seek to control their children, using them as pawns and bargaining chips. Some daring females conspire to improve their lot through the use of deception, poison, and murder. An orc leader who underestimates the ambition of his females is not likely to be leader for long.

Other than attaching herself to a powerful male (father, mate, or son), the primary route to power for an orc female is magic. Some females become witch doctors, touched by arcane or divine forces beyond mortal control. They are feared and respected for their powers and prized as mates, though their rivalry with the tribe's male shamans is usually bitter and intense.

Strangely, though their lot in orc society seems little better than slavery to outside races, few orc females attempt to flee their lifestyles. Perhaps they're afraid of meeting with rejection in more civilized lands—a reasonable assumption, given their frightening appearance and the reception orcs generally receive in such areas. Yet in many cases, the unbalanced power structure of orc society is perpetuated as much by the females as the males, as those who've carefully built their lot within the system have no patience for upstarts who might seek to work outside it. It's a vicious cycle, and the innate savagery of all orcs—



male or female—makes it unlikely that a solution will be sought or found.

Despite the savagery and injustice faced by most orc females, occasionally individuals do arise who refuse to yield to others of their tribes based on gender alone. Typically heartier and stronger than most females, such warrior females prove just as ferocious and violently proud as men, avenging personal affronts with fang and blade and refusing to let any claim them as property. Those who constantly defy their culture's gender expectations and manage to resist the tenacity and violence so often forced upon them eventually can win a measure of independence. Known to their tribes as "cross-souls," such females are eventually accepted as having the spirits of males, and of stubborn warriors, even reincarnated champions, at that. Once acknowledged as such, orc males typically have little problem accepting these females as fellow fighters and peers—most simply ignore any obvious gender differences. Cross-soul females often go to great lengths to blend in among other males, sometimes even adopting the garb of men, physically altering themselves, or claiming females of their own. In battle, however, all gender related barriers break down, and only viciousness and bloodlust remain.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Orc codes of law are as brutal as the rest of their culture. Indeed, the "law" of a particular tribe amounts to nothing more than a scant body of traditions and the will of the ruling chieftain. The only true law orcs respect is that of the strong over the weak. An orc warrior can punish his family and slaves as he sees fit, and an orc leader can do the same with his warriors, so long as there is no one strong enough to stop him. "Justice" has no role. In fact, orcs consider the concept of judgment by scholars, especially based on words written by dead men, a perverse and contemptible weakness—a voluntary abdication of power.

Execution and enslavement are by far the most common punishments meted out by orc leaders, though torture is also popular. Enslavement is typical for outsiders and those with some useful skills, while execution is more common for orcs who unsuccessfully challenge their superiors, should

they manage to survive the attempt long enough to face punishment.

Exile is considered the cruelest punishment for an orc, worse than the relatively quick mercy of death. It typically involves mutilation, like the removal of the prisoner's axe-hand or possibly putting out one or both eyes. Such wretches are then cast out to die in the wilderness or survive as pitiful beggars, if they can—charity is in small supply in orc lands. Still, orc legends tell of maimed exiles who manage to not only survive, but grow stronger for their disabilities and eventually return and take revenge.

While orc executions are often impromptu beheadings or bloodlettings, some leaders prefer to make cruel and bloody spectacles out of them: forcing prisoners to fight unarmed against wild beasts or slowly torturing them to death as they beg for mercy in front of a jeering crowd. Such events both entertain and serve as a warning to others who might defy them.

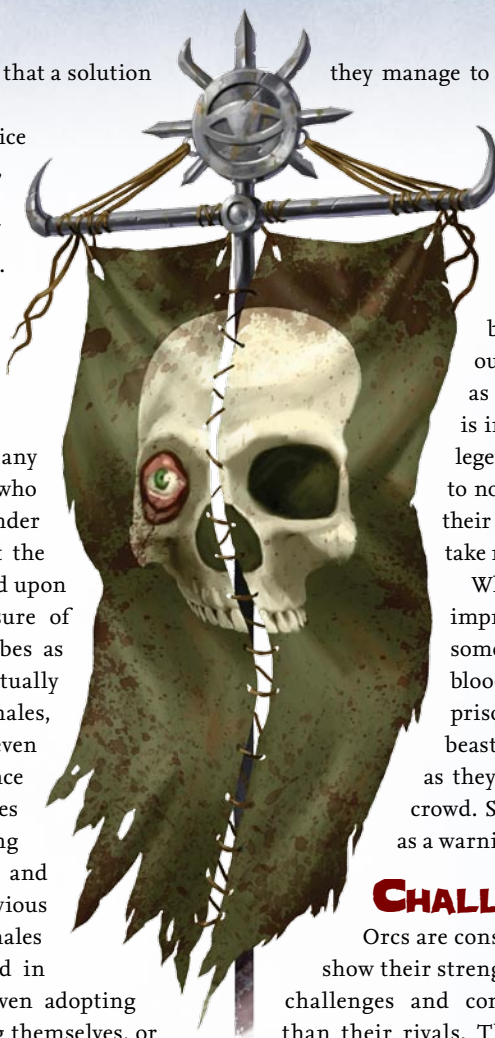
CHALLENGES

Orcs are constantly on the lookout for chances to show their strength and dominance, and use various challenges and contests to prove themselves better than their rivals. These are generally improvised and bloody, with only a minimum of convention. Winning a challenge offers bragging rights and status—at least until the next challenge comes along. Typical challenges include wrestling matches, drinking contests, dangerous games of stoic self-mutilation, and of course the ever popular duel to the death. Two of the broader categories are detailed below.

TESTS OF STRENGTH

Orcs frequently seek to prove their strength through contests like wrestling—both arm-wrestling and full on grappling. Those looking to add to the challenge are known to arm-wrestle over blades, broken glass, or red-hot braziers, or to grapple with wild beasts like bears.

Orcs dislike static shows of strength such as lifting or throwing heavy things; they prefer to pit their might directly against an opponent. Indirect competitions tend to be more contests of endurance, as orcs struggle to overcome pain and fatigue to outlast their opponents in land-races, mountain climbing, or similar events. Not surprisingly, drinking contests are a popular orc pastime,



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typically degenerating into drunken brawls. Regardless of the contest, though, few end as the rules of engagement would allow. Fairness is hardly an orc virtue, and slipping a blade into the ring, a gulp of poison into an enemy's brew, or an irritated rattlesnake into an opponent's armor most commonly bring about the ends such tests of strength.

DUELS

Although they have no civilized concept of "honor," orcs do appreciate a hard-won victory. As a result, dueling and single-combat challenges are common ways of settling disputes among orcs. Most leaders reason that the parties involved are likely to fight it out regardless, so at the very least the fight might as well be formally recognized and provide diversion for the rest of the community. In fact, to be considered a duel at all, the challenge and the fight must be public. After all, anyone can claim to have won a fight when their opponent is dead and cannot debate the point. While some orcs do choose to defeat their enemies through stealth and ambush, most prefer a clear victory in front of many witnesses, and lack the patience for such subtle plotting anyway.

Like other aspects of orc "law," officially recognized duels are entirely at the whim of the ruling chief (though advised by his shamans and witch doctors). He sets the terms, and may choose specific weapons or other conditions, such as fighting only with knives or barehanded, or doing so over a pit of dire rats or poisonous serpents. Sometimes the chief does so to test the determination of those involved—if one of the parties backs out, it is as good as a win for the other. Other times, chieftains simply want to demonstrate their own dominance, weaken the victory of a potential rival, or amuse themselves.

Of course, orcs being what they are, unofficial duels are still common, as unless the chieftain is close at hand, few orcs have the patience to wait for official leave to settle their differences with the edge of an axe.

HUNTING

Orcs hunt for both sustenance and sport. They prefer powerful prey capable of fighting back, and proudly display scars and trophies earned while bringing down a dire boar or cave bear. They sometimes hunt humanoid prey, particularly escaped prisoners or slaves, or those condemned to execution but to whom a chieftain wants to give a "sporting" chance (while also providing entertainment for his warriors). Orcs generally hunt in bands, competing amongst themselves but still cooperating to bring down powerful prey through sheer numbers. Solo hunting is generally the sport of powerful orcs looking to challenge themselves, as well as a rite of passage for young males to prove their worth. As with many of their activities,

orcs prefer to hunt at night, unless their chosen prey can only be found during daylight hours.

Orcs don't bother with petty prey. Few see the point of fishing, sniping birds, or similar acts, as they provide little food in return for the challenge—and typically require the expert use of tools orcs lack the interest in making. Tracking, pursuing, and killing larger game, like stags, boars, rams, and wild horses, proves more satisfying, though sport like bear, mountain lions, and more exotic monstrosities appeal even more. Often, the satisfaction of a triumph over prey proves more important than the actual amount of meat claimed or taste of the meal provided. Should a region host particularly deadly beasts, like lions or mammoths, an orc might attack and kill such creatures, then simply leave the animal to rot, more interested in the opportunity for triumph than in food.

The concept of hunting takes on a broader term in the orc mind than it does among most other races. Just as a human hunter might track prey back to its den to reveal greater game, an orc might follow the tracks of sentient creatures back to their home for the same purposes. Such tracking proves easier too, as civilized creatures blaze trails and construct roads leading directly to their lairs that even the least adept tracker might follow, and that whole warbands might later utilize. From such behavior arises most rural humanoids' fear of orcs, for should a single orc sight a weak-looking community and return to its tribe to tell of it, an entire host of hungry orc hunters might descend in a rampage in short order, eager to glut their hunger for both food and battle.

CRAFTS AND TRADE

While many of their material goods are acquired through raiding, orcs do practice various crafts. Unlike more civilized peoples, orc crafts are crude and entirely focused on function, and the only art involved in their manufacturing comes from making the resulting creations look as intimidating as possible (intimidation is a chief function of everything from weaponry to drinking vessels). Though a few orcs achieve great renown for their mastery of engineering new and ever more intimidating weapons or war machines, most orcs lack the patience for creative endeavors. As one trader's saying goes, "Good enough' is more than good enough for an orc." With the exception of the tools of war, goods that require refined and highly skilled craftsmanship are nearly always the work of slaves or taken on raids.

Crafts in orc society are entirely by demand. There is little, if any, trade, and orc crafters are often females or weak (but relatively clever) males working at the command of a stronger leader. Thus crafters make what they are told to make, when they are told to make it, and little else. After

all, any excess or personal work they do will simply be taken or destroyed by the stronger members of the community, so there is little incentive to work at a craft for its own sake.

The only area of craftsmanship considered worthy of a strong, male orc is weaponsmithing. Orc-made weapons are crude and ugly, but occasionally ingenious things, as brutal as their makers. Dwarf slaves are favored as smiths and crafters in orc communities, and a skilled dwarf weaponsmith, capable of turning out weapons to outfit many warriors, is a prize slave for any orc leader. The most notable exception to this tendency is the Foundry in Belkzen, a combination forge and fortress in which the most gifted orc engineers train their entire lives to craft ever more bizarre weapons and engines of war.

The only things an adult male orc willingly acquires are the products of his strength. Thus trophies and slaves taken in raids or won through combat bring prestige, as does wealth made from the sale or trade of those things. Orcs do not buy—they take. While it's not unheard of for orcs to send chains of slaves off to human communities for sale, these trading expeditions are the exception, rather than the rule.

TRANSPORTATION

Orcs travel virtually everywhere on foot, being capable long-distance marchers and runners. Some manage to steal and retain horses or other mounts, or even capture and train wild horses, but orcs are only moderately capable riders as a whole. They are likely to ride a horse to death, given the opportunity, and mounts are among the first casualties for an orc war-band, with as many lost to raging warriors on their own side—or simply eaten when food supplies run low—as are lost engaging the enemy.

Simple carts and wagons show up in orc communities, some made by slaves, but most stolen. They, too, are used roughly until they inevitably break down and cannot easily be repaired, or are simply smashed through vigorous (and often careless) use. It's a fortunate slave who has a cart to help bear any of the burden. Most do backbreaking labor with nothing but their bare hands.

Orcs also tend to be poor sailors. They mistrust deep water, and prefer not to sail out of sight of shore when they go to sea at all. Though most orcs do know how to swim,

and though some make effective use of rafts on rivers or small bodies of water, they are rarely ever seen on the high seas.

CLOTHING AND ATTIRE

Orc clothing is primitive, focusing on the warmth and protection of furs and leathers, which are also the most easily obtained materials, given the carnivorous orc diet. An orc is more likely to wear a sheepskin than to make anything from the wool, and much of the cloth and finished clothing worn by orcs is stolen.

Outward appearances are actually quite important to orcs, however. An orc's adornment, including things like arms, armor, jewelry, and even body decorations, tells other orcs a great deal. Wealth and status are meant to be displayed for all to see. How orcs treat each other, especially those they don't know personally, depends on how strong, prosperous, and well-armed they appear.

COLORS

While orcs don't often make their own cloth, they are fairly skilled at making and using various dyes, and the color of their attire is important. Orc tribes adopt particular colors as their own, and members of the tribe wear them proudly, particularly when their community's name is known and feared. Using dyes made from various animals, plants, and minerals, orcs color clothing blood and rust red, along with various shades of brown, green, and grey. Putrid yellows also show up, but few blues or violets.

The orc fascination with dyeing sometimes extends to hair as well; some females rinse their locks to give them a sheen like dried blood or a greenish tint males find attractive.

BODY ART

Orcs make extensive use of body decoration, although what they consider pleasing and attractive is often profoundly ugly by other races' standards. Orc body art began with the battle scars proudly displayed by males to show their prowess and strength. Scars earned in tests of strength and rites of passage followed, leading in turn to ritual scarification and branding. "Unscarred" is a derisive orc term for someone who is inexperienced or inept, also implying softness and weakness.



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By rubbing colored clays and other dyes into the cuts for scarification, orcs developed their first tattooing techniques. The use of color appealed to their sensibilities, and tattoos became a widely practiced form of body decoration. Artists use wooden needles to place their dyes under the skin—a long, slow, and painful process that makes larger and more complex tattoos a sign of stamina. Orcs also infuse many tattoos with gamal, a fungal essence that makes their vivid colors visible even to darkvision.

Orc tattoos tend toward the abstract, with interconnected lines and symbols, rather than pictures, although some orcs bear images associated with their tribe or famous deeds. Facial tattoos are common. Orc warriors use them—along with scarification—to enhance their fierce appearance on the battlefield. Orc females use them to improve their attractiveness or to show that they belong to a particular strong male.

Piercings are common to both genders, and many half-orcs also adopt a lesser version of the practice. Orc females pierce their ears, lips, brows, and other areas of the body, using quills or metal jewelry for decoration. Male orcs are also known to have facial piercings, but do so at their peril, as there's a good chance of a piercing getting torn out in a fight or just during the day-to-day struggles of an orc's life. As such, facial piercings usually indicate males who are either tough enough not to care, or foolish or prideful enough to risk the injury.

MASKS

The orc practices of facial tattooing and painting for battle leads naturally to the use of masks among orc warriors. They serve two purposes. First, a mask can present an even more fantastic and terrifying face to the enemy, making a warrior look like a demon or other powerful creature. Second, distinctive masks serve to both identify the wearer while also concealing his true features. Some orcs believe outsiders are not fit to look upon a warrior's true face in battle, and so the mask is the only—and the last—thing that they see.

Shamans and witch doctors also make use of various masks representing gods, spirits, and fiends, and the warriors' practice of wearing masks may have been inspired by a desire to possess some of the same magical power. Some orc witch doctors observe a taboo of never appearing unmasked, allowing them to conceal their true identities even among their own tribes. On occasion, this practice has also concealed the fact that the witch doctor is in fact a female, a half-orc, or some other outcast from orc society.

TROPHIES

Orcs like to display signs of their success, and so often wear trophies of their conquests and victories. Orc warriors

wear necklaces of elf ears, dwarf teeth, or human fingerbones, and their homes may display entire shrunken heads or scoured skulls of their enemies. Mated males often wear or display braided lockd of their females' hair as a sign of their conquest; the addition of a new mate calls for a ritual to braid a new token for the male. Other trophies include weapons and goods taken from fallen foes or looted on raids.

Beyond the treasures held by individual orcs, tribes often keep monuments of their victories, whether those accomplishments be recent, historic, or even wholly legendary. A tribe's trophies tend toward the ostentatious—even by orc standards—marking triumphs on the field of war, conquests of the past, the slaughter of entire enemy tribes, or the razing of whole lands or works. Battered kingly thrones, totems composed of the bones of an entire enemy legion, and the skeletons of great monsters all are common trophies. Typically situated near the center of a tribe's settlement, within sight of the chieftain's hut, such a memorial is held in almost religious esteem, holding great symbolic significance for a tribe. Most are mounted on wheels, crude carts, or sleds, so they can even be dragged into battle, serving as an inspiration to the tribe's warriors. For all the history and morbid pride surrounding such monuments, though, they also represent obvious weaknesses. Should one tribe invade another, the defender's trophies present paramount targets, as ruining them can deal a significant blow to a tribe's morale. It can prove even more debilitating if a tribe's trophies fall into the hands of an enemy, with the victims of such a theft often paying grandiose and demeaning ransoms for their returns. Such exchanges rarely end in the actual restoration of a tribe's trophies though, as any thieving tribe realizes that once they return their symbolic hostage, their opponents will doubtlessly seek revenge.

RELIGION

Religion is a significant part of orc culture, as it reflects the orcs' belief in the natural order of things. Their religious views are an extension of their society, and their gods are merely infinitely powerful divine bullies, worshipped not out of awe or veneration but out of fear and respect for their power. Most religious rituals are intended to appease the gods and turn away their anger, and to serve them as orcs themselves wish to be served. It also means that for a god to gain followers among the orcs, his shamans must be able to show a direct and tangible benefit on the battlefield (or else simply be so physically imposing that they can kill all naysayers themselves). For more information on orc religion, see pages 26–27.

ORC BLOODLINE

The rage of your ancestors burns within you, and the taint of savage orc blood flows through your veins. Your anger is never far from the surface, giving you strength and driving you to seek greater power.

Class Skill: Survival.

Bonus Spells: *burning hands* (3rd), *bull's strength* (5th), *rage* (7th), *wall of fire* (9th), *cloudkill* (11th), *transformation* (13th), *delayed blast fireball* (15th), *iron body* (17th), *meteor swarm* (19th).

Bonus Feats: Diehard, Endurance, Great Fortitude, Intimidating Prowess, Improved Overrun, Power Attack, Toughness, Widen Spell.

Bloodline Arcana: You gain the orc subtype, including darkvision 60 feet and light sensitivity. If you already have darkvision, its range increases to 90 feet. Whenever you cast a spell that deals damage, that spell deals +1 point of damage per die rolled.

Bloodline Powers: You are heir to the bestial power of the great orc warlords of the past. You feel their rage in your blood, and must take care lest the urge to despoil and destroy consumes you.

Touch of Rage (Sp): At 1st level, you can touch a creature as a standard action, giving it a morale bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and Will saving throws equal to 1/2 your sorcerer level (minimum 1) for 1 round. You can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

Fearless (Ex): At 3rd level, you gain a +4 bonus on saving throws made against fear and a +1 natural armor bonus. At 9th level, you lose your light sensitivity, gain immunity to fear, and your natural armor bonus increases to +2.

Strength of the Beast (Ex): At 9th level, you gain a +2 inherent bonus to your Strength. This bonus increases to +4 at 13th level, and to +6 at 17th level.

Power of Giants (Sp): At 15th level, you may grow to Large size as a standard action. At this size you gain a +6 size bonus to Strength, a -2 penalty to Dexterity, a +4 size bonus to Constitution, and a +4 natural armor bonus. You may return to your normal size as a standard action. You may remain in this size for up to 1 minute per character level per day; this duration does not need to be consecutive, but it must be used in 1 minute increments.

Warlord Reborn (Su): At 20th level, you become a true orc warlord of legend. You gain immunity to fire and DR 5/—. Once per day, you can cast *transformation* as a spell-like ability using your sorcerer level as your caster level.

SUPERSTITION

To orcs, the world is a cruel and merciless place, and thus they tend to be intensely superstitious, as they lack the

wit or patience for any sort of philosophy other than their own. To an orc, every misfortune is a direct attack, either by enemies casting curses or plotting against them, or by supernatural forces like demons, spirits, or gods who have it in for them. Succumbing to such misfortune is a sign of weakness. Therefore, orcs believe in all manner of superstitions, omens, and charms intended to ward off ill will and strengthen their defenses. When dealing with the cruel whims of fate, they prefer to be forewarned and well armed, rather than unarmed and helpless.

MAGIC

Few orcs have the patience or mental acuity for diligent study, so orc wizards are rare in the extreme. Most arcane magic in orc society thus comes from those blessed with innate magical powers from birth. Orc sorcerers frequently display the abyssal bloodline, with a lesser percentage manifesting the elemental (fire) bloodline. A rare few (both orc and half-orc) can trace their bloodlines back to legendary tribal chieftains and warlords who once raged across Avistan in orgies of blood, fire, and destruction. These powerful sorcerers often possess the orc bloodline, and frequently rise to become warlords and chieftains in their own right. Typically, though, orcs make little distinction between the divine magic of shamans and the arcane magic of other spellcasters. Yet while shamans enforce their might not just with their personal powers but with the implied—and often violently demonstrated—divine might of the deities they serve, arcane magic-users typically present far less intimidating figures and don't rely upon otherworldly allies. Thus, when confronted by a savage priest bedecked in the trappings of a violent cult and a frail sorcerer, albeit one with considerable destructive might, orcs prove far more willing to serve the emissary of a bloodthirsty deity. This pattern leads to a blurring of shamanistic and sorcerous traditions in many orc cultures, wherein arcane magic-users couch their magic in divine trappings. Although few orcs can distinguish arcane magic from divine, cagey orc spellcasters know their positions, and thus their survival, depend as much, if not more, on the impressions of the rest of the tribe than the actual source of their magic.

TRIBES AND HERALDRY

The orcs of Golarion are fiercely proud of their tribes, and assemble elaborate banners displaying their tribal affiliations. These standards serve not only to declare loyalties and establish the orcs' social ranking, but also to encourage orc warriors to give their all. Presented below are several of the most established and infamous clans, most of them hailing from the regions in and around the Hold of Belkzen.

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Black Sun Tribe: The legendary Black Sun tribe traces its ancestry all the way back to Belkzen himself. Other orc tribes aren't so certain, but few are willing to argue with the Black Sun's leader, Krun Thuul, and any major undertaking in the Hold of Belkzen would do best to get the Black Sun orcs on its side.

Blood Trail Tribe: The orcs of the Blood Trail tribes are nomads who wander throughout Belkzen, raiding and pillaging. Their leader is Kring the Beautiful, who, it is said, keeps her tribe on the move in her quest to find a male orc worthy of fathering her young.

Broken Spine Clan: The Broken Spines made their home in an abandoned keep in the foothills of the Mindspin Mountains. Led by Chief Kroghut, these orcs have a deep-seated hatred of humans, and of members of the Pathfinder Society in particular.

Cleft Head Tribe: The Cleft Heads are infamous cowards among other orcs, often referred to as "last to battle, first to flee." They have historically been led by a succession of chiefs—the latest being K'zaard the Drover—who must keep their tribe's members well-stocked with spoils (mainly alcohol) to keep them from rebelling.

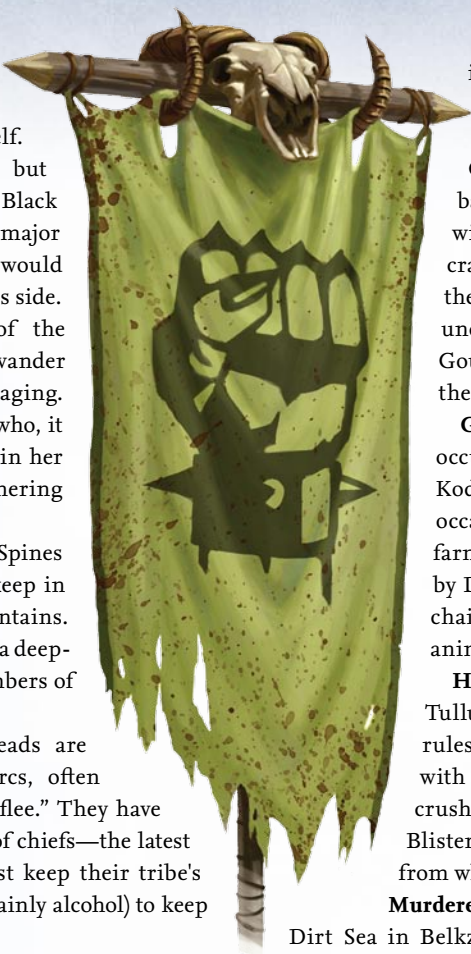
Dead Eye Clan: The Dead Eyes worship a one-eyed orc deity whose name is long since forgotten—an entity which they claim is actually Rovagug's father. They occupy crude villages scattered throughout the Kodar Mountains, near the Brimstone Haruspex.

Death's Head Tribe: The Death's Head orcs are a mercenary company, hiring out to any orc leader who can pay for their services. They operate almost entirely within the Hold of Belkzen, usually around Urgir.

Defiled Corpse Tribe: Feared and reviled even by other orcs, Defiled Corpse orcs revere Zon-Kuthon and delight in torturing captives. The orcs of this tribe are among the most horrific in appearance—regularly applying their barbaric "art" to themselves as a sign of endurance and devotion.

Empty Hand Tribe: The warlord Grask Uldeth rules the Empty Hand tribe, and the Empty Hand tribe rules Urgir, the ancient dwarven Sky Citadel long since conquered and occupied by orcs. Uncharacteristically organized and disciplined, the Empty Hand enforces Uldeth's reign in and around Urgir.

Gnarled Fist Clan: After failing to conquer Nidal decades ago, the Gnarled Fist Clan is in decline. Their leader, Bullgor Backbiter, is a cunning and devious strategist, and



intends to restore the Gnarled Fist to its former glory—or die trying.

Gouged Eye Tribe: Orcs of the Gouged Eye are almost exclusively barbarians, savage even by comparison with most orcs and famous for their crazed bloodlust in battle. Found along the eastern border of Taldor, in caverns under the World's Edge Mountains, Gouged Eye orcs frequently clash with the Taldan army.

Gutspear Tribe: Gutspear orcs occupy several cave dwellings in the Kodar Mountains, from which they occasionally emerge to raid villages and farmsteads in the foothills. They are led by Drog Ten-Heads, who drags around a chain festooned with the necromantically animated heads of his 10 worst enemies.

Haskodar Clan: Led by the formidable Tulluk Clovenface, the Haskodar clan rules Blisterwell in an uneasy stalemate with the One Eye Tribe. Tulluk plots to crush the One Eyes and seize sole control of Blisterwell, perhaps even using it as a base from which to launch an assault on Urgir.

Murdered Child Clan: Wyvernsting and the Dirt Sea in Belkzen are controlled by the Murdered Child Clan, which is led by the vicious and cunning Hundrux Half-Man—unique among orc leaders in that he is a half-orc, and one of the two most powerful and influential clan leaders in Belkzen, rivaled only by Grask Uldeth himself.

One Eye Tribe: Molkk Dwarf-Mangler leads the One Eye orcs and shares rulership of Blisterwell in Belkzen with Tulluk Clovenface of the Haskodar Clan. These two hate one another, and bear countless horrific scars from their frequent clashes.

Rotten Tongue: The Rotten Tongue orcs occupy a complex of caves in the Hungry Mountains, from which they periodically raid Lastwall and Ustalav. The Rotten Tongue is led by a war chieftain, but the chieftain is heavily influenced by a council of orc shamans, who hold the real power.

Severed Hand Tribe: Severed Hand orcs are found throughout the Menador Mountains, and have traditionally menaced both western Cheliox and the dwarven cities of the Five Kings Mountains range.

Shattered Skull Clan: The Shattered Skull orcs dwell in the mountains northwest of the Mwangi Expanse, where they harass the Mwangi tribes and occasionally surge out into western Katapesh.

Skull Eater Clan: Skull Eater orcs, led by Gribrik the Bone-Cracker, lurk in and around Whisperfell Pass, preying on Ustalav and frequently clashing with the troops stationed at the Firewatch Peaks.

Steel Eaters: The Foundry, an ancient dwarven fortress filled with forges and hearths of every shape and size, is currently occupied by this group of orc engineers and weaponsmiths who use the dwarven equipment to invent all manner of weapons—from daggers on up to siege weapons—and sell their inventions to whichever tribal leader can pay.

Twisted Nail Tribe: Twisted Nail orcs, sometimes known as “highland orcs,” live in the northern Mindspin Mountains and are avoided even by other orcs, as the Twisted Nail tribe has long since turned to cannibalism as its primary form of sustenance, and isn’t overly concerned if its meat is dead yet.

Vile Blade Tribe: Orcs of the desert, the Vile Blade conduct night raids on caravans from cavern strongholds in the Barrier Wall.

Wingripper Clan: Wyvern-riders, the Wingripper orcs prowl the high peaks around Wyvernsting, seeking young wyverns to tame—a practice that ensures the clan remains feared but small.

KINDS OF ORCS

Like humans, orcs are hardy creatures, and can be encountered in almost any climate. While the physical differences between orcs of different terrains and climates are small, orcs have strong regional and tribal identities, and the cultural differences between tribes from different environs can be significant.

Darklands Orcs: These orcs regard themselves as the truest and purest of orc ancestry, and as such loathe surface orcs as much as they detest other surface-dwelling races. A Darklands orc is brought up with a rich heritage of folklore, and is more likely to be conversant with orc history. These orcs tend to be more ritualistic, and many sing or chant as they enter battle. Young males must spend a month alone in the Darklands before being considered mature, and many tribes have bizarre initiation ceremonies for warrior groups, which often involve stalking and slaughtering a particularly deadly creature—in some cases purple worms. Darklands orcs have a powerful hatred for the light, and the terrible “scorching angel” (the sun) which many believe will one day come down to swallow them.

Desert Orcs: Orcs in sun-baked deserts have long ago had to learn to live with the unyielding light, and while they only travel and operate by night, they have developed a rich variety of methods of keeping the sun at bay. Many tribes have developed elaborate mobile dwellings that can quickly be covered in sand; such dwellings often consist

of timber frames that can be easily taken apart or covered with hardened skins, and some tribes use tower shields that they cover with sand and sleep under. Some tribes post their children on watch throughout the day, others their females (who of course are still expected to attend to the males when night falls). An orc male reaches maturity by an initiation ceremony involving him spending several minutes staring at the sun. That the ceremony leaves some orc males blind is of little concern.

Jungle Orcs: Extremely rare because of the relative paucity of Darklands entrances in Garund, jungle orcs are strongly territorial, a fact perhaps dictated by the extreme difficulty of demarcating regions within jungles. As such, these small tribes have a strong pictorial or demonstrative tradition—creating elaborate totems, fetishes, or gibbets to mark their territories and their tribe. Many tribes have become expert tattooists, making a wide range of dyes from jungle plants. Some tribes have also become proficient in making and delivering poisons. Orcs who reach maturity often take an elaborate (and often excruciatingly painful) tattoo or series of tattoos to show they are old enough to mate. Where tattoos are not present, tribes decorate themselves variously with bones, thorns or wooden pins, which are thrust through their body parts.

Mountain Orcs: Toughness, hardiness against the cold, and an almost insane love of climbing distinguish a mountain orc from others of his kind. They tell stories of great bravery, of orcs who climb mighty peaks and cast avalanches upon their enemies, scale overhanging walls of stone to capture a foe, or descend vast slopes of snow on sleds to lance a great beast (a trick frequently boasted of but rarely observed). Males prove their maturity by engaging in ridiculously dangerous acts, such as free-climbing some great cliff, hanging over some vast drop by their arms for a certain length of time, or fighting an opponent on a narrow ledge.

Plains Orcs: Being well-adapted to the terrain of the Hold of Belkzen, the orcs of the hills and plains are the most numerous of their kind in Avistan, and these orcs regard themselves as the hardest of their brethren, forming into huge hordes capable of sweeping across the landscape and devastating human battle lines. They are often able to erect or dismantle a defensible camp within minutes, and enjoy the use of huge, armored siege engines pulled by megafauna (such as those war rhinos, mastodons, and other beasts captured in the Realm of the Mammoth Lords). Forced to migrate and follow the local game—as agriculture is an activity for weaker races—and faced with a comparatively high population density, the orcs of the plains and hills are almost always at war, either with the surrounding humanoid populations or with themselves. And truth be told, they wouldn’t want it any other way.

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Winter Orcs: Like their temperate cousins, orcs who live in arctic regions pride themselves on their stamina. The tales they tell are rich with details of suffering, of losing limbs to frostbite and then eating them to survive and fight a deadly foe. Warmth is of paramount importance, and a male will keep as many females as possible to ensure warmth in the darkest of winters. These orcs effectively hibernate during the months when the sun barely sets, having spent long dark nights preparing, raiding, and stocking dungeon complexes or dwellings against the bright days to come.

ORC CIVILIZATIONS

Golarion is full of orcs, and their hordes occupy the ruins of some of the world's oldest cities. They squat among the ashes of the castles and villages they have conquered and lurk in caves and tunnels just beneath the surface, from the Realm of the Mammoth Lords to the deserts of Katapesh.

Orcs have civilization only in the broadest definition; they are much better at simply populating an area than building a civilization. By nature, orcs do not innovate and create so much as they modify and adapt, conquer and occupy. While orcs are perfectly capable of putting up a few tents and slapping together some crude walls, their settlements are rarely more than temporary, and are composed of scrap and refuse—anything that can be lashed or nailed together. What cities orcs occupy, they did not build themselves—why study and labor, when there are so many cities standing ready for the taking? When orcs conquer a place, the sacking is thorough, and the city may be much the worse for wear afterward. Any orcs not driven hard to the next battle are likely to settle and inhabit the squalor they've created, the fecundity of the orcs ensuring that the city will be populated again in no time, and the lines of orc territory will continue to expand. Those living in the city who attempt to appease the conquerors rather than resist quickly discover that orcs have little use for neighbors—but plenty for slaves.

ORC SOCIETY

Orc society is built on the principle that the big and strong rule, and the small and weak serve. This does not mean that orcs base their society around slavery—merely that they find some purpose for anyone they can subjugate. Orcs live by a constantly-changing pecking order: an orc who dominates an entire tribe today might lose a challenge

tomorrow, and find himself reduced to little more than a beast of burden—to be whipped and starved, if left alive at all.

This constant state of tyranny and aggression makes orcs very self-interested creatures. They rarely cooperate with anyone else, except when forced to by a strong-willed (and stronger) master; even then, they look for any opportunity to personally benefit. Orcs see no point in working hard if they can force someone else to do the labor for them.

This philosophy does not extend to war—orcs like violence too much to let someone else have all the fun. Orc offensives are chaotic and brutal, usually hinging on blitzkrieg tactics and a bloody, ruthless mop-up afterward, and are anything but organized. Each orc rushes into the fray, attempting to dish out as much damage as possible before the battle ends—the desire for short bursts of savage ecstasy is a mentality represented in almost all aspects of orc life.

THE HOLD OF BELKZEN

Nowhere are orcs more common than in the Hold of Belkzen in northern Avistan. Once home of the proud dwarven Sky-Citadel of Koldukar, the coming of the orc warlord-king Belkzen reshaped the entire region in the image of its brutal new masters. While orcs in other areas perpetually fight and shift territorial dominance, the orcs here rule uncontested, the last bastion of a savage empire that once dominated much of Avistan.

Modern Belkzen is essentially unchanged from what it was in the wake of the Battle of Nine Stones, and though the orcs were united once more beneath the Whispering Tyrant in an ultimately fruitless campaign to retake Avistan, those 6 centuries of conquest and eventual defeat have long since ceased to be more than a story to the orcs, no different from the legends of the fall of Koldukar. While individual tribes' territories ebb and flow from day to day, the Hold has managed to maintain its borders against all incursions, and in fact has steadily expanded since the Tyrant's fall. Though the nation of Lastwall exists primarily to keep the orcs bottled up in their valley home, that battle line has been redrawn three times by the overwhelming hordes of the



DARKLANDS SETTLEMENTS

Many sages believe that a significant percentage of Golarion's orc population still dwells belowground, the descendents of those orcs who managed to hold their own or hide long enough for the dwarven Quest for Sky to pass them by. While a great many migrated out of the Darklands during the Age of Darkness, drawn by the promise of a new realm to conquer, some yet remain, hunting and warring in the topmost levels of the Darklands in much the same fashion as their deep-dwelling ancestors did.

Most Darklands orc tribes are necessarily small, as resources are scarce and living space is tight. Nonetheless, the Darklands include a few notable orc communities, such as The Edge (a fortress-cavern on the lip of a reputedly bottomless chasm), Warshaft (a long, wide tunnel lined with keeps and strongholds filled with proud warriors), and Dwarfsend (a former dwarven enclave captured during the latter part of the Quest for Sky, and tenaciously held against the duergar ever since).

orcs, and with each annexation of Lastwall territory, the orcs gain more siege castles, weapons, and ambition.

Urgir, Belkzen's theoretical capital city, is a surprisingly civilized island in a sea of barbarity. Under the rule of Grask Uldeth of the Empty Hand tribe, Urgir has become comparatively cosmopolitan, principally because Uldeth has seized upon the idea that allowing foreign, non-orc merchants to do business in First Home generates more wealth for the treasury than all of the villages and farmsteads the orcs have raided in the previous decade. (Though some of the orcs may see this collection of wealth through trade rather than conquest as somewhat effeminate, there can be no denying that it has made the Empty Hand tribe the best-armed force in the region.)

Uldeth's progressive ideas have served the orcs well, though not all orcs see things the same way. Non-orc visitors to Urgir require "sponsorship" from one of Belkzen's orc tribes in the form of a token provided by the tribe's chieftain—and convincing a tribal chief to hand over one of these tokens often requires hefty bribes, in gold and favors. Even with a token in hand, though, the visitors are not made to feel welcome, but rather are insulted and bullied in the streets or worse, murdered in the warrens beneath the city, where the orcs' outcasts and degenerates dwell. Maiming or killing a sponsored guest is punishable by death, but such considerations mean little to the average orc, who lives for the moment.

To those non-orcs who do visit Urgir, the dwarven foundations of the orc city are evident. Despite layers of crude graffiti, ramshackle expansions, and a general crust of filth, the Sky-Citadel of Koldukar is still a stunning

sight—an enduring testament to dwarven artistry and engineering, even after the passage of millennia. Of course, after so much time under orc control, few, if any, treasures remain; the orcs of Urgir may be imperceptive at the best of times, but they are numerous and thorough. If some artifact of Koldukar remains, it is well hidden.

NOTABLE ORC SETTLEMENTS

Urgir may be the largest and most impressive orc settlement on Golarion, but it's not the only one. Keeps and villages fall to orc attacks on a regular basis, and some are never reclaimed. Below are several of the most notable (and permanent) orc settlements, all of them in or near the Hold of Belkzen. While there are certainly orc strongholds outside of Belkzen, such structures tend to draw the ire of their neighbors, and rarely stand for more than a few generations. For more information on the Hold of Belkzen, see the gazetteer in *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #11.

Blisterwell: Dwarves originally founded Blisterwell as a strip mine and quarry—a target far too tempting for orcs to pass up. One of the first dwarven holdings to be conquered, Blisterwell's intricate network of mine shafts, trenches, caves, and pits served as the primary base of operations for Belkzen's horde prior to the capture of Koldukar. Something of a "pit-fortress," Blisterwell is relatively immune to siege weapons and exceedingly treacherous for cavalry—meaning that any assault on its depths must be carried out almost entirely by infantry, fighting cave to cave from the top to the bottom. And of course, down in the pit, the orcs' darkvision gives them a distinct advantage against most attackers.

In the millennia since Koldukar's fall, Blisterwell has changed hands many times, but always between orcs of various clans. It is currently ruled by the Haskodar and One Eye tribes—led by Tulluk Clovenface and Molkk Dwarf-Mangler, respectively—who spend more time fighting among themselves over control of Blisterwell's forges and foundries than actually running them. Consequently, despite the settlement's wealth of metals, conditions in Blisterwell remain as primitive as in the rest of Belkzen.

The Brimstone Haruspex: High in the caldera of a smoking volcano in northern Belkzen, the temple complex known as the Brimstone Haruspex houses a group of ancient orc monks who offer guidance and prophecy in exchange for massive tributes. In addition, the orcs also maintain a lengthy series of cave paintings that supposedly represent the only complete record of orc history on Golarion's surface. While relatively small in size, the Brimstone Haruspex is greatly revered by most clan chiefs, who refuse to go to war without first sending a messenger to receive what revelations the priests have to offer. The chiefs rarely go themselves,

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of course, for the fumes that give the priests their insights are also highly caustic, and those petitioners who anger the priests often come back hideously burned.

Deepgate: Though the orcs emerged onto Golarion's surface in numerous places, the first and largest of their tunnels reached the light deep in the Kodar Mountains. Here, in a rare feat of cooperation and construction, several triumphant tribes banded together to erect an enormous fortress over the tunnel mouth, fortifying themselves against both the dangers of the day world and the swiftly advancing dwarves below. Though ultimately ineffective, the fortress remains a hotly contested prize, falling to a new tribe of attackers with every generation.

The Foundry: When the dwarves still ruled the eastern Kodar Mountains, the ore they mined at Blisterwell came to the forgehold known as the Ironhearth Foundry—a massive smithy-fortress once thought impregnable, until the orc warlord Belkzen conquered the entire region. Belkzen himself originally claimed the Foundry, intending to put it to use equipping his armies for the next campaign, but after his reign ended, the Foundry's ownership was hotly contested for centuries as each warlord sought to establish control.

Within the last several generations, however, the ownership of the Foundry has remained undisputed. The fortress now belongs solely to the Steel Eaters who reside within it—an organization of tribeless and half-mad orc smiths and engineers, who use the ancient dwarven metalworks to design, build, test, and manufacture new orc arms and siege weapons. While other orc tribes still gaze upon the Foundry with covetous eyes, most have learned the lesson that to attempt to oust the Steel Eaters by force is an invitation to have the latest developments in siege warfare technology tested on one's hide. Furthermore, the fact that the Steel Eaters produce the best weapons around, selling them to all tribes without bias, means that any given tribe who angers the cult is effectively guaranteed to be constantly fighting at a disadvantage.

Urglin: Varisia's Urglin (meaning "Second Home" in Orc) has been heavily scarred by centuries of orc abuse—so much so that no one can say who originally built it, or when. Urglin is even more open to non-orcs than Urgir is, though most of its humanoid residents are the scum of Golarion, and even they aren't particularly safe. Unlike in Urgir, there are no codified laws in Urglin, only the rule



of might, which is loosely enforced by the clerics of Rovagug called the Bonecarvers. Under the Bonecarvers, the situation in Urglin is best described as martial law carried out by protection racketeers. As a result, Urglin is even more rife with crime than Urgir, and only the worst or most desperate kind of outlaw chooses to live there.

Straddling the so-called Ooze River (little more than a makeshift sewage system), Urglin is split into five distinct neighborhoods: the "noble" district of Warmouth, the "temple" quarter of Bonerattle, the orc slums of Oozefront, the non-orc slums of Pinkskin, and the market district known as Scabtown. Nominally ruled by seven orc warlords, Urglin is little more than a vile melting pot of the worst of orcs, humans, dwarves, giants, and goblins, where violence and battle go hand-in-hand with crime and corruption. Still, orcs and humans from both Varisia and the Hold of Belkzen trade with the city from time to time, and slaves taken by the orcs often find buyers willing to part with large sums in the nearby city of Kaer Maga (though others end up as food or sacrifices in the city's frequent gladiatorial games).

Wyvernsting: The second largest settlement in Belkzen by population (Blisterwell being physically larger), this mountaintop city is surrounded by a high wooden stockade. With its command of one of Belkzen's rare forests, and its proximity to the valuable and dangerous beasts of the Realm of the Mammoth Lords to the north, Wyvernsting brings its rulers great wealth and power. The city is currently occupied by the Murdered Child clan, and led by Hundux Half-Man, who many believe is building strength for an assault on Urgir. While that can be said of many warlords, the interesting thing about Hundux is that he might just have the power and cunning to succeed.

HALF-ORCS

Orcs are known—and feared—for their ability to interbreed with other races, most commonly humans. The offspring of a human and an orc is a half-orc. Strongly influenced by their orc heritage, half-orcs are unwelcome strangers in much of Golarion. Though they might live within either culture that spawned them, they belong to neither, and are often forced to make their own way in the world. Fortunately, surviving is something half-orcs do very well.

AMONG THE ORCS

Among their orc kin, half-orcs face a strange dichotomy: while their kind is generally despised for their weakness, those half-orcs who prove as strong and deadly as their full-orc kin are revered for their cunning and often elevated to the status of chief or tactician. In fact, some orcs specifically breed for these traits, fathering half-breed after half-breed with captured human women. (Though pairings involving a male human and a female orc are equally viable, they're understandably rare.)

Half-orcs who do not find a niche for themselves can expect a miserable existence among orcs, who abuse, insult, and degrade them at every opportunity. Half-orcs on the frontiers of Golarion are well known for bearing any number of marks, brands, and tattoos placed upon them by their orc cousins to show their inferior place in the world. Often born of captives or slaves, half-orcs are frequently enslaved themselves, or used as cannon fodder. Half-orc females may become the chattel concubines of an influential orc male, but while a clever and manipulative one may achieve some influence over her patron, most are seen as little more than a momentary diversion, enjoyed under the careful eye and iron fist of the male's true orc mates.

Strong, cunning, and charismatic half-orcs often manage to use their mixed-blood—and the advantages it brings—to their benefit. They throw off the torments of their orc kin and achieve positions of power and authority within their tribe, perhaps even becoming tribal leaders themselves. Inspired by the vision of the half-orc as blending the best qualities of two races rather than the worst, leaders such as Naellk, the Proclaimer of Gorum, and Hundux Half-Man have emerged to rival the greatest orc chieftains in power and prestige. Prominent half-orcs often take the marks of shame inflicted on others of their kind and turn them into badges of strength and survival, seeking to outdo the ugliness of their full-blooded cousins with various body-modifications.

In particular, the added cleverness of half-orcs makes them effective crafters and spellcasters, both very useful abilities to an orc tribe. A half-orc with a talent for magic can turn the role of outcast into the fearsome respect



accorded a witch doctor. Half-orc shamans are less common, simply because shamans tend to be greater supporters of the idea of the “purity” of the orc race. Still, a forceful enough half-orc can bend the shaman of the tribe to his will and outwit his crude plots in order to overthrow him.

LIFE AS EXILES

Given the treatment they can expect from their orc relations—and the squalid conditions even should they rise to power—it is no surprise that many half-orcs choose to strike out on their own. Some escape from the tribes where they were raised, while others are abandoned by their parents at birth—by the humans out of shame (especially among those victims who manage to escape slavery and remain in human society), and by the orcs out of general disdain. Religious houses often take in half-orc orphans and foundlings, and some half-orcs take up religion with a passion, seeking to perfect their souls through service. More often, half-orcs are raised as bastards, barely tolerated by non-orc kin, and often taunted and tormented by human children. To opportunistic humans, half-orc orphans make useful laborers, growing in strength and maturity faster than children of other races.

Whereas half-orcs living among orcs are considered weak and soft, those living among other races must constantly struggle with their savage, bestial side. Half-orcs are prone to short tempers, violent rages, and emotional outbursts, making it difficult for them to fit into civilized society. One angry outburst by a young half-orc (a child by human reckoning, but already with the size and strength of an adult) can result in serious injury. Ordinary childhood roughhousing, to say nothing of the passions of oncoming adulthood, are dangerous for a half-orc, and can result in fatal misunderstandings.

Half-orcs living among non-orcs tend to take one of two approaches to life: either they look for a society or culture that values their natural strength and violent impulses, or they seek to divorce themselves completely from the savage side of their nature. In the first case, half-orcs often immerse themselves in the criminal or mercenary worlds, places where the strong survive through dominating the weak. They make excellent members (even leaders) of criminal gangs and mercenary companies, and half-orc gladiators are well

known in lands where blood sports are permitted, often earning some extra coin on the side as hired muscle or bodyguards. The life of a wandering caravan guard or mercenary often suits a half-orc's nature. Those half-orcs who sink deep into their of savagery can become fearsome assassins, known for the sheer brutality of their techniques and able to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies (and their employers).

On the other hand, some half-orcs may seek a measure of self-control through personal discipline, faith, or some other strict devotion. They most often seek out a religious vocation as clerics of gods such as Gorum (or in less civilized lands, Rovagug), although there are half-orc worshippers of virtually every deity. It is a rare half-orc indeed who has the spiritual fortitude and discipline necessary to become a monk or paladin, but those who have it tend to excel in their chosen vocation. Some half-orcs adopt personal codes of honor as warriors or mercenaries, and hold to them as their calm center amidst the fury of battle.

The successes and pride of half-orc leaders and champions have not only led to a greater interest among orcs in breeding with humans and other races, but have begun to see more half-orcs seeking mates among their own kind. Half-orcs are nearly as fertile as their orc cousins, although they tend to have longer gestation and fewer multiple births. Given time, half-orcs breeding true may establish families and even communities of their own, with children raised without the stigma of being rejected by two worlds.

MARKINGS

Many half-orcs raised at least partially in orc society turn the brands, marks, and tattoos inflicted upon them by their orc oppressors into symbols of pride and defiance. In addition to the vivid facial markings of full orcs, half-orcs tend to have more markings on the arms and upper body, although a single sign or marking on the forehead or cheek is not uncommon. Half-orc tattoos are often abstract, like those of orcs, but some have also adopted beautifully complex pictures and mural-like images. Half-orcs of a religious bent often bear tattoos proclaiming their faith and devotion to a particular deity.

Similarly, half-orcs have taken the trappings of enslavement and turned them into decoration. Iron bracelets or bracers reminiscent of slave shackles are a common reminder of the life many half-orcs still endure. Others wear heavy rings pierced through the nose, chest, or neck, echoing the rings used to lead or chain orc slaves. The bracelets or rings may even bear decorative or broken chains to further the image.

HALF-ORC SORCERY

Although they still tend to rely more on their brawn than their wits, half-orcs are more gifted with magic than their orc relations. The mixture of two different heritages, especially the malleability of human blood, sometimes sparks a latent power within a half-orc, and while not generally given to the degree of study required to master wizardry, some half-orcs become potent sorcerers, harnessing the inner fires of their blood as arcane power, tempered and controlled by their will.

Half-orc sorcerers often draw upon the abyssal and elemental (fire) bloodlines, reflecting ancient connections between the orcs and the demons of the abyss, but it is noteworthy that the destined bloodline is especially common for half-orc sorcerers, not due to their heritage, but as a reflection of their potential and what they may yet achieve. It challenges the idea of half-orcs as lesser, failed creatures, and may demonstrate what lies ahead for half-orcs as a people, if they are strong enough to fight for it.

BEASTS, FEASTS, AND FOLLOWERS

Orcs are not farmers, and seldom make any kind of attachment, let alone one to a beast or animal. Yet many animals see little difference between orcs and other humanoids—after all, both cultures want to eat them—and may trail behind orc encampments, living off the filth and refuse. Some smarter orc tribes deliberately encourage this, ensuring that they have a constant supply of fresh meat. It also goes without saying that most orcs revere the carnage that comes from commanding a massive, armor-clad war-beast through the battlefield, which ultimately means that orc encampments are frequently crowded with angry, belligerent animals in addition to their angry, belligerent owners.

Some of the most common orc pets, companions, and war beasts, as well as the relationships orcs have with them, are listed below.

Bulls: Bullfighting is a popular orc pastime, but the beasts of burden have practical uses as well. Brave (or simply foolish) orcs gird bulls or aurochs in poorly forged armor, tie massive blades to their horns, and set them loose in the middle of combat to mow down and gore as many of the enemy as possible before they are slain or flee the battlefield.

Cave Bears: Sometimes maintained as totem animals by an orc clan, cave bears are almost impossible to train effectively, and the most the average orc can hope for is to release the beast's chains in the thick of battle and then run for his life. Like many orc warbeasts, these bears are frequently covered in thick armor plates that are sewn

directly into their skin, the constant irritation only heightening their rage.

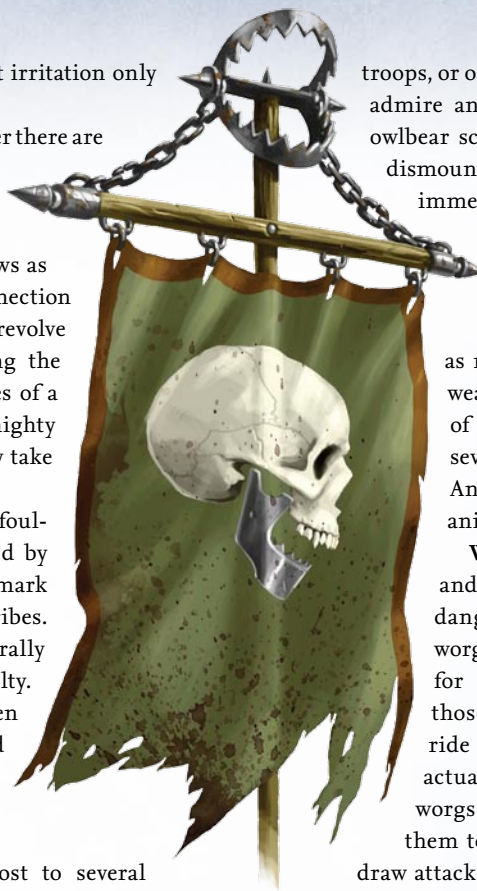
Crows: In temperate areas, wherever there are orcs, there are crows. The creatures follow in huge numbers, and vast black murders often trail in the wake of orc armies. Orcs regard crows as good luck, and tell many tales in connection with them. Such stories generally revolve around crows unexpectedly striping the flesh off foes or pecking out the eyes of a malevolent attacker about to kill a mighty orc warrior. Orc sorcerers frequently take crows as familiars.

Dire Boars: The notoriously foul-tempered dire boar is greatly prized by orcs, and learning to ride one is a mark of great respect amongst certain tribes. Whenever a rider falls, the boar generally attacks him as vengeance for his cruelty. More often, the boars are simply taken along with the horde in chains and loosed upon the enemy. An orc druid can take a dire boar as an animal companion.

Dogs: Orc armies often play host to several unique breeds of dogs, evolved over the generations specifically for life within the hordes and with names as clever as their masters. Each breed has its own peculiarities, but all share a similar cunning and vicious temper. Orc-bred canines like the fighter and the biter are commonly seen alongside warriors. The fighter is a squat and sturdy hound whose powerful jaws seemingly lock into place (+1 on grapple checks), and the biter possesses a vast maw that delivers a vicious bite beyond its size (+1 damage on bite attacks). Other breeds include the gripper, runner, stalker, and bonebreaker. Regardless of their breed, all orc dogs are ugly, squat-faced, mangy, and covered in scars. They are precisely as friendly as they look.

Mastodons and Mammoths: In the Realm of the Mammoth Lords, orcs have learned to ride mammoths or, more often, use them as mobile weapon platforms. A mammoth bristling with a score of orc warriors armed with crossbows or groaning under the weight of ballistas, trebuchets or more exotic siege weapons makes a fearsome sight, and the orcs relish the look of horror on their foes' faces. Orc mammoths tend to learn their place quickly at the hands of orcs with spears, but often when a chance to avenge themselves appears, they turn on their cruel masters.

Owlbears: Orc-bred owlbears are legendarily unstable, and kept for a variety of purposes—as guards, shock



troops, or occasionally even mounts. Orcs greatly admire an owlbear's temper, and to sport an owlbear scar is a mark of great respect. To be dismounted while riding an owlbear is to be immediately disemboweled as well.

War Rhinoceros: Like mammoths, the armored woolly rhinoceroses of the Realm of the Mammoth

Lords are occasionally used by orcs as mounts or, more commonly, as siege weapons decorated with a dazzling array of weapons, ornamentation (usually severed heads), and metal plate armor. An orc can take a war rhinoceros as an animal companion.

Worg: While hardly simple beasts—and in many cases smarter and more dangerous than the orcs themselves—worgs sometimes ally with an orc horde for their own nefarious reasons. In those cases where an orc is allowed to ride the worg as a mount, he's rarely actually in command. Instead, most worgs are happy to allow the orcs riding them to act as bodyguards—and targets to draw attacks—while the worgs direct the action and slaughter enemies at will. Though worgs can sometimes be browbeaten into service by powerful orc leaders (or sheer numbers), they tend to be hard for the orcs to control once battle starts, and a worg not offered significant incentives is as likely to savage his captors as their enemies.

ORC TRAITS

The violent culture and bestial nature of orcs give them a unique perspective on religion, history, magic, and the general challenges and opportunities of life. For more information on traits, see the *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide*.

RACE TRAITS

Only orcs and half-orcs may select one of these traits.

Amazingly Ugly: Your skull is misshapen in a grotesque way. You receive a +1 trait bonus on Intimidate skill checks, and it becomes a class skill.

Beast Rider: You have a knack for breaking animals to your will, though you know little of civilized training methods. You gain a +2 trait bonus on Ride checks, but should you ever be forcibly dismounted in combat, your mount attacks you to the best of its ability.

Big Mouth: You have an innate ability to weave stories about yourself that extol your might and prowess. You

ORCS OF GOLARION

gain a +1 trait bonus on all Bluff, Intimidate, and Perform (oratory) checks made against orcs.

Brute: You are an especially large and hulking individual, and when you strike, you aim to deliver the maximum amount of pain. Whenever you score a critical threat, you add (but not multiply, in the case of a confirmed critical hit) an amount of damage equal to your weapon's critical modifier.

Deadeye: You have only one working eye, but that eye is especially keen. You receive a +2 trait bonus on all Perception checks involving sight.

Demented Inventor: You adore crafting new and ever more creative weapons, and some of them even work. You gain a +2 trait bonus on Craft (weapons) checks, and it becomes a class skill.

Dirty Fighter: You were raised to fight with every dirty trick in the book. You receive a +3 trait bonus on all attempts to feint in combat using your Bluff skill.

Mindlessly Cruel: You take delight in delivering vicious blows with cruel weapons. Whenever you have a morale bonus on weapon attack rolls, you also receive a +1 trait bonus on weapon damage rolls.

Outcast: You are adept at living away from tribes and receive a +1 trait bonus on Survival skill checks. Survival becomes a class skill for you.

Rage of Storms: Summoned creatures can inherit your ferocity. Once per day, a creature you summon creature can have the ferocity ability (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 300).

Tribal: You are especially devoted to your tribe, and within 60 feet of a tribal standard, you gain a +1 trait bonus on attack rolls and Will saves against fear effects, as if you were the recipient of a *bless* spell.

Tusked: Huge, sharp tusks bulge from your mouth, and you receive a bite attack (1d4 damage for Medium characters). If used as part of a full attack action, the bite attack is made at your full base attack bonus -5.

Unbreakable Hate: Your ferocity is focused into your spells, and it is harder to break your concentration. You receive a +2 trait bonus on all concentration checks.

REGIONAL TRAITS

You must be from the listed region to select these traits.

Dominator (Belkzen): The blood of dominance runs thick in the savage home of orcs, and your prowess in fighting is a thing of cruel artistry. You receive a +2 trait

bonus on all attempts to demoralize an opponent in combat using your Intimidate skill.

Linebreaker (Belkzen): Growing up along the border between Belkzen and Lastwall has taught you how to storm human battle lines and quickly overwhelm them. When charging, add 10 feet to your base speed.

Mammoth Master (Belkzen or Realm of the Mammoth Lords): You have experience trapping and training megafauna such as mastodons, woolly rhinoceroses, and other animals frequently used as orc warbeasts. You gain a +4 trait bonus on Handle Animal checks related to these creatures.

Sun-Blasted (any desert): Desert orcs have learnt to survive with practically nothing in the desert. You receive a +2 trait bonus on Survival checks made in a desert, and resolve all checks at becoming lost in deserts as though you had proper navigational tools (a +4 bonus). The presence of such tools does not increase your ability, however.

Unafraid (Ustalav): The horrors of the fog-shrouded land of terror have hardened you. You receive a +2 bonus on all saving throws made against fear affects.

Water Brave (River Kingdoms): Travel through the dangerous waters of the River Kingdoms has given your tribe special skills in relation to them. You receive a +1 trait bonus on Swim checks, and it becomes a class skill.

RELIGION TRAITS

You may only select one of these traits if the god or demon lord listed is your patron deity.

Blessing of the Feast (Zura): You come from a cannibal tribe, and find strength in the flesh of your foes. Whenever you eat the flesh or drink the blood of another orc—a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity—you gain the favor of Zura and receive a +1 natural armor bonus for 1 minute/level. You can only receive this benefit once per day.

Fury (Rovagug): The flood of battle and destruction stirs deep within you. When wielding a greataxe, you receive a +2 trait bonus on attack rolls to confirm critical hits.

Mother's Rage (Lamashtu): The blood of the beast runs thick in your veins, and your appearance is bestial. You receive a +1 trait bonus on Survival checks, and you treat your caster level as +1 higher when summoning creatures.

Sacred Smasher (Rovagug): Your love of carnage extends even to the defenseless, inanimate objects around you. Whenever you make an attempt to break an object, you receive a +2 trait bonus on your Strength check.



COMBAT

HORDE TACTICS

Orcs love the brutality of combat, and only show quarter if they believe an enemy would make a good slave. They also take tremendous pride in their clan allegiance, and inspire each other to ever-greater glories on the battlefield. The following are additional battle feats available to orcs.

Teamwork feats grant large bonuses, but they only function under specific circumstances. In most cases, these feats require an ally who also possesses the feat to be positioned carefully on the battlefield. Teamwork feats provide no bonus if the listed conditions are not met. Note that allies who are paralyzed, stunned, unconscious, or otherwise unable to act do not count for the purposes of these feats. For more examples of teamwork feats, see the *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide*.

AMPLIFIED RAGE (TEAMWORK)

When adjacent to other raging allies, your rages become even more powerful.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, rage class feature.

Benefit: Whenever you are raging and adjacent to a raging ally who also has this feat or flanking the same opponent as a raging ally with this feat, your morale bonuses to Strength and Constitution increase by +4. This feat does not stack with itself (you only gain this bonus from one qualifying ally, regardless of how many are adjacent to you).

BLOOD VENGEANCE

Seeing an ally fall in combat fills you with a murderous fury.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, non-lawful.

Benefit: Whenever one of your worthy allies is brought to negative hit points or killed, you may enter a state similar to but less powerful than a barbarian's rage as a free action on your turn. If you have the rage class feature and are already raging, your morale bonuses to Strength and Constitution increase by +2 for the duration of your rage. If you do not have the rage class feature, or you have no more rage rounds left, this weaker rage gives you all the benefits and penalties of a rage, except your morale bonus to Strength and Constitution is only +2, and this state lasts for 4 rounds. As with a barbarian's rage, when this weaker rage ends, you are fatigued; if another ally falls before this duration ends, the weaker rage lasts for 4 more rounds after that. This feat does not allow you to

enter a rage if you are fatigued. You may only use this feat if the fallen ally had at least as many Hit Dice as you.

BRUTAL GRAPPLER (COMBAT, TEAMWORK)

When helping an ally grapple, you can damage the target.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc.

Benefit: When you and an ally with this feat have grappled the same creature, you may attempt to damage the opponent on your turn (whether you were the one who first initiated the grapple or were assisting your ally in doing so). You and the ally are treated as aiding each other in the grapple (+2 bonus on your grapple combat maneuver) as long as you both decide to maintain the grapple.

Normal: When multiple creatures grapple one target, the creature that first initiates the grapple is the only one that makes a check to damage a grappled opponent, with a +2 bonus for each creature that assists the grapple using the Aid Another action.

DESTROYER'S BLESSING (COMBAT)

Breaking things adds to your power.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, rage class feature, worshiper of the Destroyer.

Benefit: When you are raging and you succeed at a sunder attempt, you regain 1 round of rage. If the sunder attempt causes the object to gain the broken condition, you heal 1 hit point.

FEROCIOUS TENACITY (COMBAT)

You spit in the face of death.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, ferocity racial trait, rage class feature.

Benefit: When raging, if you are hit by an attack that would deal enough hit points of damage to kill you (negative hit points equal to your Constitution score), as an immediate action you may expend 1 or more rounds of rage to negate some of this damage and keep yourself alive. Each round of rage you spend reduces the attack's damage by your raging Constitution bonus, but cannot reduce the damage taken below 1 hit point.

For example, if you are raging, have a raging Constitution score of 18, are currently at 2 hit points, and are hit for 20 hit points of damage (which is enough to bring you to -18 hit points, killing you), you may spend 1 round of rage to reduce the damage by 4 (leaving you perilously close to death at -14 hit points); if you spend 5 rounds of rage, you reduce the damage to 1 (the minimum), leaving you with 1 hit point.

FIRE GOD'S BLESSING

The Fire God rewards you for killing enemies with flame.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, worshiper of the Fire God.

Benefit: When in combat, if you deal fire damage to an enemy, you heal 1 hit point. You can only benefit from this healing once per round. Attacks that cause a target to catch on fire heal you each round the target takes fire damage.

GORE FIEND (COMBAT)

Horrible wounds, whether on yourself or your enemies, makes your blood sing.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, rage class feature.

Benefit: When you are raging and you confirm a critical hit with a melee weapon or suffer a critical hit yourself (whether by a melee weapon, spell, or ranged weapon), you regain 1 round of rage.

SYMPATHETIC RAGE (COMBAT)

Seeing an ally enter a rage causes you to enter a rage-like state.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, non-lawful.

Benefit: Whenever you are adjacent to an ally who is raging, you may choose to enter a similar but less powerful rage as a free action on your turn. This weaker rage gives you all the benefits and penalties of a rage, except your morale bonus to Strength and Constitution is only +2. There is no limit to how long you can rage, as long as you remain adjacent to a raging ally (for example, you could take a 5-foot step away from one raging ally toward another raging ally and maintain your rage). As with a barbarian's rage, when this weaker rage ends, you are fatigued.

THRILL OF THE KILL

Killing fuels your rage.

Prerequisite: Half-orc or orc, rage class feature.

Benefit: When you are raging and your attack brings an enemy to negative hit points or kills them, you regain 1 round of rage. You may only use this feat if the fallen enemy had at least as many Hit Dice as you.

WARLEADER'S RAGE

Your rages are so inspiring to your allies that they don't have to remain adjacent to you to stay raging.

Prerequisite: Cha 13, half-orc or orc, non-lawful.

Benefit: Feats and abilities that allow an ally to rage or enhance a rage if adjacent to you (such as Amplified Rage and Sympathetic Rage) persist as long as your ally is within 30 feet of you and can see you. The conditions to activate the rage effect remain unchanged. For example, an ally with Sympathetic Rage must be adjacent to you to enter his own rage, but once his rage begins, he can continue raging as long as he can see you and you are within 30 feet.



FAITH

CULTS AND SHAMANS

Orcs are not normally thought of as a religious race, but an ancient and influential shamanistic tradition is an integral part of orc culture. Despite the legends and stories, most rank-and-file orcs still wouldn't give faith a second thought, though, were it not for the fact that orc shamans control formidable magic and are quite willing to demonstrate their power (and cement their authority within their tribes) with brutal shows of force.

ORC SHAMANS

Orc religious life is dominated by shamans, most of whom are adepts, though some exceptional shamans are full clerics or even druids. Shamans enjoy great prestige within a tribe as a result of their magic and ability to commune with the gods. Strength and skill in battle are still prerequisites for leadership in orc society, of course, so few shamans become tribal chieftains or warlords unless they have enough power to stand against the tribe's greatest warriors (as in most orc interactions, might makes right, regardless of the form it takes). Any orc warlord or chieftain who wishes to hold on to his position would be wise to heed his tribe's shaman, and a clever shaman uses this respect to gain the chieftain's ear, and thus influence over the tribe and its actions. This is not to say a shaman's words are sacrosanct, however. Accidents still happen, especially in orc society, and a shaman who defies his chief too often or too vocally most likely find himself an accidental casualty in the tribe's next battle.

Shamans generally pass down their knowledge and traditions from shaman to apprentice. A shaman might have anywhere from one to five apprentices, though a particularly old and powerful shaman might have an entourage of up to 20 lower-level novices. Orc shamans choose their apprentices from among the 7-year-old males of the tribe, and none can gainsay a shaman's choice, which is an expression of the gods' will. Occasionally, weak or sickly offspring are assigned to a shaman rather

than chosen, usually after bribery by the child's mother to accept the unwanted spawn as an apprentice. (And of course, being mother to a successful shaman can greatly increase a female orc's status and influence.)



Once assigned to a shaman, a novice undergoes an apprenticeship that usually lasts 5 years, during which the young apprentice is taught the traditions of the tribe and its gods, which vary widely from tribe to tribe, and even from shamans of one generation to the next. During this time, the novice is little more than a slave to the shaman. Novices are regularly starved, beaten, and tortured by the shaman to purge them of weakness and strengthen them for the trials ahead.

In addition, novices constantly fight among themselves for dominance and the shaman's favor. Many novices fail to survive their apprenticeships, and those who do endure carry their scars and injuries (both physical and mental) into adulthood.

As a general rule, there can be only one shaman in a tribe, and an orc holds that position only so long as he can keep it. Paranoid shamans regularly cull novices who seem to be growing too powerful, and many novices who suspect their masters of such intentions strike out on their own before they can be killed, presenting themselves as full shamans to other tribes (and potentially fighting for dominance with existing shamans). Often, however, a shaman's end comes when an apprentice reaches the point where he challenges the shaman for his title. Physical combat (supplemented with magic) is the norm for such challenges, though other means, such as poisoning or murder, are long-accepted traditions as well. These fights are always to the death, and the corpse of an apprentice who fails is usually displayed outside the shaman's hut as an object lesson to other novices who might seek to challenge their master. A novice who successfully slays his master

cuts out the fallen shaman's heart and consumes it, symbolically taking the shaman's power and claiming his title. The former shaman's body is burned, which tradition says forever denies him the afterlife, as his soul scatters to the four winds with the smoke. The ashes are mixed with clay to form the ritual body paints of the new shaman and further enhance his power.

Orc shamanism is usually restricted to males only, though those females who manage to uncover enough magical power on their own to challenge the shaman and win are often accepted as the new shaman without question. In addition, some tribes also possess all-female mystery cults, led by female shamans known as n'ankha. These cults are almost universally dedicated to the Dark Mother, and cater to the females of the tribe. The female mystery cults are tolerated by the male shamanist establishment, but are not officially recognized, save in those tribes where the females have managed to overpower the male shamans and institute their own magical matriarchy by force.

Instead of a single god, many orc shamans worship the dark and nameless gods. Orc clerics who revere a single god usually worship Rovagug, Gorum, Lamashtu, or one of the demon lords.

Orc adepts frequently summon bats, crows, lizards, rats, toads, vipers, or vultures (as hawks) as familiars. Those adepts with the Improved Familiar feat usually choose from fiendish varieties of the above, as well as dire rats, fire elementals, stirges, and quasits.

Orc druids usually select the fire domain, or occasionally, weather. Those who bond with animal companions frequently choose wolves, boars, apes, or bears.

NEW FEAT: ADEPT CHANNEL

Some orc adepts enjoy a greater connection to their gods, and can channel their faith through their unholy symbols. You gain the ability to channel energy as a cleric.

Prerequisites: Ability to cast divine spells, summon familiar class ability, caster level 4th, Cha 13.

Benefit: You gain the channel energy class feature, as a cleric, usable 2 times per day. This ability otherwise functions like the cleric's channel energy ability, except that your effective cleric level is equal to your divine spellcasting class level -3. Unlike a cleric, however, the number of times per day you may channel energy is not affected by your Charisma modifier.

ORC CULTS

While modern orcs sometimes worship individual, named gods—specifically those devoted to battle and destruction, like Gorum or Rovagug—they also frequently pay homage to a traditional, pantheistic faith

COMMON ORC GODS

The gods of the orc cults are as varied as the orc tribes themselves, but several of these deities (or the concepts they embody) are common enough to reappear again and again among different tribes and in different regions of the world. The following list catalogs the most widespread orc gods by their most common “name,” followed by their portfolios.

The Blood God: god of anger, rage, and strength

The Despoiler: god of lust, pillage, and plunder

The Destroyer: god of destruction, disaster, and war

The Dark Mother: goddess of fertility, tribe, birth, and death

The Fire God: god of fire, destruction, and magic

The Iron God: god of iron, siege engines, strength, weapons, and war

The Slavelord: god of slavery, subjugation, and tyranny

The Thunderer: god of storms, lightning, and war

This list is by no mean exhaustive. Countless tribal and regional variations exist. For example, coastal orcs might placate the Storm Lord, desert orcs might venerate the Burning One, and arctic orcs could worship the Ice God.

that dates back to before their arrival on the surface. Tribes of this faith revere a pantheon of nameless deities who embody those ideals most dear to orc hearts and minds, such as the War God, the Fire God, the Dark Mother, and so forth. Collectively, this form of worship is known as the orc cults.

Most non-orc theologians believe that these orc “gods” are not actual deities, but rather concepts that are fulfilled by various gods. Some scholars go so far as to say that the same “god” worshipped by different tribes may in fact be completely different gods responding to the orcs' prayers. An orc god called the Destroyer might be a combination of Gorum and Rovagug for one tribe, while three different fiendish lords fill the same role for another tribe. Conversely, one tribe's Blood God and a second tribe's War God, two different gods in the eyes of their worshipers, might both be the demon lord Kostchtchie. Orc shamans, for their part, not seem to care one way or another—someone, or something, answers their prayers and grants them their spells, and that's all that matters.

The gods of the orc cults are chaotic evil, and their symbol is a large weapon (usually a falchion or greataxe, but varying by tribe), often dripping with blood or enveloped in a nimbus of flame. Clerics of the orc cults can choose from the following domains: Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Fire, Strength, and War. Their favored weapon is the falchion.

MAGIC

ORC ARCANA

To an orc, magic is both terrifying and alluring. In its sheer destructive power, magic represents everything orcs hold in high esteem, and a massive explosion or a spell causing a creature to spontaneously burst into flames never fails to amuse an orc and win its respect. Though few orcs have the patience, faith, or innate ability to pursue spellcasting—choosing instead to take the simpler and more straightforward path to destruction, with the aid of an axe or falchion—a few manage to harness their own abilities or the favor of a deity long enough to rise in the tribe’s magical ranks.

Orc spellcasters are generally divided into two warring traditions. Divine spellcasters, such as adepts, clerics, druids, and oracles, are usually called lumped together and called shamans, while arcane casters like sorcerers and bards are often distinguished via the term “witch doctor.”

ORC WITCH DOCTORS

Those orc spellcasters who cast arcane spells are known as witch doctors, and many also have the ability to cast some divine spells, possessing levels in adept, cleric, or druid. Orc witch doctors lay claim to their positions not through apprenticeship but through others’ awe of their otherworldly powers. Witch doctors commonly live alone on the outskirts of a tribe, and while they may take on apprentices, doing so is an individual choice rather than a tribal tradition. Witch doctors bring ritual scarring to a new level, particularly on their faces, and frequently wear exotic fetish masks crafted from wood or bone and decorated with fur, feathers, skin, and other grisly tokens. Orc witch doctors are a power unto themselves, believed to be touched by the gods. Traditional orc shamans despise the independent witch doctors and the prestige they hold, but millennia of traditions and taboos—not to mention a reluctance to risk their own necks—prevents most shamans from taking direct action against their rivals.

ORC SPELLS

Orc spellcasters have knowledge of several unique spells, either granted by their dark gods or created by crazed witch doctors. Such spells tend to focus on blood, fire, or individual strength and power.

BLOOD RAGE

School enchantment (compulsion) [mind-affecting]; **Level** adept 3, bard 2, cleric 3, sorcerer/wizard 3

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a drop of blood from each creature to be affected)

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./level)

Targets one willing living creature per 2 levels, no two of which may be more than 30 ft. apart

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); **Spell Resistance** yes (harmless)

The targets of this spell become angrier as they fight, the pain of their wounds fueling their strength. An affected creature gains a cumulative +2 morale bonus to Strength and a cumulative –1 penalty to AC for every 5 points of damage it takes (maximum +10 Strength, –5 AC) for the duration of the spell. These bonuses last until the spell expires or the target falls unconscious.

ENEMY’S HEART

School necromancy [death, evil]; **Level** adept 2, cleric 2

Casting Time 1 full-round action

Components V, S, M (creature’s heart)

Range touch

Target living creature touched

Duration concentration/10 minutes per HD of the subject; see text

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** yes

You cut out an enemy’s heart and consume it, absorbing that enemy’s power as your own. As part of casting this spell, you perform a coup de grace with a slashing weapon on a helpless, living adjacent target. If the target dies, you must eat its heart (a full-round action) to gain the spell’s benefits. If the target survives, the spell is not wasted and you can try again as long as you continue concentrating on the spell. When you consume the heart, you gain the benefits of a *death knell* spell, except you gain 1d8 temporary hit points per Hit Die of the target, and the bonus to Strength is a profane bonus.

GHOST WOLF

School conjuration (creation); **Level** sorcerer/wizard 4

Casting Time 10 minutes

Components V, S, F (dire wolf tooth)

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Range 0 ft.

Target one quasi-real dire wolf-like creature

Duration 1 hour/level (D) or 1 round/level; see text

Saving Throw none (see description); **Spell Resistance** no

This spell conjures a Large, quasi-real, wolf-like creature made of roiling black smoke. It functions as *phantom steed*, except as noted above. In addition, the creature radiates an aura of fear. Any creature with less than 6 Hit Dice within 30 feet (except the wolf's rider) must make a Will save or become shaken for 1d4 rounds (this is a mind-affecting fear effect). A creature that makes its Will save is unaffected by the steed's fear aura for 24 hours.

The ghost wolf may also be used in combat. Once per round, the rider may direct the wolf to attack in battle as a free action (bite +10, 1d8+6 damage); unlike an animal mount, this does not require a Ride check or any training. Once the ghost wolf attacks, it lasts for only 1 round per level thereafter.

SHIELD THE BANNER

School abjuration; **Level** adept 1, cleric 1

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF

Range touch

Target standard touched

Duration 1 minute/level

Saving Throw Will negates; **Spell Resistance** no

This spell is used to protect one of a tribe's most valuable possessions: its tribal banner. Any creature (other than a member of the tribe which the standard represents) attempting to directly attack or touch the standard must make a Will save. This spell functions as *sanctuary*, but only protects a standard or banner. In addition, the spell grants a +2 bonus to the standard's hardness, and +10 to the standard's hit points for the duration of the spell.

SPONTANEOUS IMMOLATION

School evocation [fire]; **Level** sorcerer/wizard 2

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (pinch of saltpeter)

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target one creature

Duration instantaneous

Saving Throw Fortitude half and Reflex (see description);

Spell Resistance yes

You point your finger at a creature, causing it to spontaneously burst into flame. The target takes 3d6 points of fire damage and catches on fire (see page 444 of the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook* for rules on burning creatures). A successful Fortitude save reduces this damage by half and prevents the target from catching on fire. Each round on your turn, a burning target can attempt a

new save to extinguish the flames (DC equal to the DC of the spell); otherwise it takes another 1d6 fire damage.

VIGOR

School transmutation; **Level** adept 0, cleric 0

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S

Range touch

Target creature touched

Duration 1 minute or until discharged

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); **Spell Resistance** yes

This spell infuses the subject with a small surge of strength. The creature gets a +1 competence bonus on a single melee damage roll. It must choose to use the bonus before making the roll to which it applies. Ranged or spell attacks are unaffected by this spell.



SOCIAL

CLASS ROLES

Orcs have a long oral history, and many are their tales of great heroes (though what they consider heroic often varies greatly from other races' interpretations). While practically every orc hero fulfills the necessary criteria of incredible violence, strength, and mercilessness, not all orc heroes are warriors, and particularly in the legends told by females, orcs that show great cunning are celebrated. What follows are the typical orc attitudes to the most common adventuring classes.

Alchemist: While orcs admire explosions of any kind, they struggle to understand the need to study and the patience required to ferment and brew alchemical magic. Still, orc warlords often see the benefit of harboring an alchemist follower, provided the alchemist can carry out his work while a host of eager sightseers stand by, hoping to witness an unplanned explosion.

Barbarian: Orc barbarians are respected and admired, particularly for their rage ability, which is greatly envied by rank-and-file orcs. Often such orcs earn nicknames or titles of respect based upon their individual prowess and encounters. The barbarian is orcs' favorite character class, and the wilder the rage, the greater the respect. Many orc barbarian heroes enter combat naked, considering the blood of their many enemies the only armor they need.

Bard: Orc bards concentrate upon songs of war and brutality, and gruesome tales filled with gory detail and graphic descriptions of wounds and suffering. An orc who can tell a good tale of a dwarven death is always welcome at any fireside or corpse-strewn feasting table, and one whose songs and tales rouse courage in battle is even more admired. Orc standard-bearers are often bards, and as such provide the focus for orc courage.

Cavalier: Among mounted orc tribes, cavaliers are seen as elite troops, and their fury and foolhardiness is legendary. While orcs struggle with the concept of order generally, they admire courage in battle and respect those whose commands regularly win the day. Like bards, cavaliers are often given the honor of holding a tribe's standard in battle, and are thus much admired. Orc cavaliers do not stop at riding horses, worgs, and dire boars, into combat, either, and some orc cavaliers take great pride in mounting a ferocious array of dangerous (and generally uncooperative) mounts into battle.

Cleric: Many orcs fear the priesthood, and few survive the rigid discipline necessary to rise as an orc shaman. Orc clerics inspire terror and admiration in equal measure, and often take up advisory roles at the side of powerful chieftains to further their god's ends. These clerics understand that only frequent displays of force can help them maintain their positions of power and influence, and hence regularly match bursts of showy spellcasting with insane acts of physical violence.

Druid: Orcs struggle with the traditional human concept of druids, who revere nature above all things, and instead see druids as beings capable of harnessing and embodying the tempestuous and terrifying power of the natural world. Those druids who are most honored tend to race into battle summoning great storms, flames, and angry lightning to do their bidding.

Fighter: The mainstay of orc life, the fighter is the backbone of orc society. Orc males are ruled by strength, and the fighter is easily the most profligate of classed orcs save for the barbarian. Subtler than their enraged cousins, fighters gain slightly less glory than barbarians, but are often more useful to a warlord, with their more flexible combat skills.

Inquisitor: Orcs fear inquisitors of their own gods even more than other races do. An orc inquisitor generally has carte blanche to do what he will without interference from chieftains or other leaders, and as such their methods are greatly feared. Infamous orc inquisitions are spoken of in hushed words, and members of tribes where inquisitors are working often turn on each other in a desperate attempt to unmask the unfaithful, whoever they might be.

Monk: Orc monks are rare, and their applied skill and subtlety in combat is rarely taught. Orcs therefore tend to find it easier to ignore monk orcs than to try to understand them. Unarmed combat is seen as an inferior method of fighting that results in less gore, blood, and easily identifiable wounds than the same fight involving a greatsword or meat cleaver.

Oracle: Orcs are by nature superstitious, and anyone who is granted visions and omens that aid them is seen as a boon. Oracles are treated as figures of both fear and respect, and crossing one is considered very bad luck. Oracles' use of mysteries makes them an enigma to orcs, and what orcs cannot understand, they either

ORCS OF GOLARION

fear or destroy; which happens to a given oracle depends entirely on the individual's ability to defend against such violence.

Paladin: Almost unheard of, orc paladins are a stain upon orc history, and many orc tribes violently deny any orc paladins exist. Whenever orc paladins are mentioned by the fireside, it is as figures of madness and fun; fools who have strayed from their true nature and gone native with men and elves. Antipaladins, of course, share much the same role as inquisitors.

Ranger: Popularly depicted as hunters, poachers, and stalkers, orc rangers are respected as canny masters of the wild hunt. They work as spies and runners, scouts and hunters for many tribes, but such is their esteem that they can easily be the focus of envy within a tribe. Rangers who have animal companions are even more feared, provided the beasts prove capable of killing for their masters.

Rogue: The art of thievery is generally frowned upon as somehow cowardly—after all, a real orc warrior would just kill his victim and take what he wanted—but some orc rogues are told of in tales. These rogues tend to be overtly violent, but in a sneaky way; slaying scores from the cover of darkness, or poisoning villages and then burning them. Orc rogues operate at the edges of battle, their skills often overlooked by their more overtly violent brethren who wade into combat without subtlety.

Sorcerer: Orc sorcerers frequently become witch doctors, strange mystics only barely understood by their fellows, but feared and respected for their abilities in combat—especially those who utilize explosive evocation spells or other flashy combat tactics. For more information on orc witch doctors, see page 28.

Summoner: While welcomed for their ability to summon creatures to help in fighting, summoners' strange association with dark, ever-evolving eidolons makes them orcs to be feared. Some tribes treat the eidolons as heralds of their dark gods. In such tribes, summoners are greatly respected and revered, and their eidolons are taken as fiendish mascots and employed in battle regularly for the glory and terror they bring.

Witch: Orc witches—particularly females—are either open about their powers and confident in their ability to protect themselves, or else hide their abilities for fear of being killed (either by superstitious kin or the tribe's jealous shamans and witch doctors). Male orc witches often become witch doctors in the

same fashion as sorcerers. Orc females, on the other hand, are sometimes drawn into secret covens that are greatly feared by males, who generally only find out about the mysterious sisterhoods once the coven is powerful enough to challenge the shamans and witch doctors for recognition within the tribe. Where female covens are more open, males broodingly hate the females, but still fear and respect them.

Wizard: Orc wizards are extreme anomalies. Magical study is something no ordinary orc has access to or is encouraged in, and any orc caught reading would almost certainly face the immediate derision of his kin unless he could defend himself quickly and violently. Orcs tend to do two things with books: either burn them, or use them to start fires which they can then burn other things with, and the thought that they may be of other uses never crosses the average orc's mind. Orc wizards therefore tend to hide their skills and magical tomes when operating within a tribe, and most quickly strike off on their own to pursue their studies independently.



COMING NEXT

Where is Isger? What's a Kellid? Who was Kalistrade? While GMs with copies of the *Pathfinder Campaign Setting World Guide: The Inner Sea* might know all the answers, what should the players know? And perhaps even more importantly, what do their characters know? Prepare for a whirlwind tour of Golarion's Inner Sea region with *Pathfinder Companion: Guide to the Inner Sea*, a lore book and guide providing players with everything they need to create true native characters of Avistan and Garund. Whether you're about to set out on your first trip to Golarion or your hundredth, this Pathfinder Companion is where your journey begins.

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FURY OF THE HORDE!

Feel the blood spray and bones crunch as the bestial children of the Darklands come roaring across the landscape, leaving only carnage and lamentation in their wake! Orcs are some of the oldest enemies of civilization, their howling hordes beaten back time and again by the forces of light. Yet in addition to being depraved raiders, orcs are also a civilization unto themselves, with a war-torn history stretching back before the Age of Darkness. In *Orcs of Golarion*, learn everything you need to know about playing (or vanquishing) one of these savage warriors, as well as the outcast half-orc spawn who straddle the line between the worlds of order and chaos.

This Pathfinder Companion includes:

- ▶ Details on the orcs of Golarion—their brutish lifestyles, physical qualities, cultural norms and gender roles, governance of warbands, relationship with slavery, and more.
- ▶ A history of the orc race, from their desperate flight during the dwarves' legendary Quest for Sky to their dominance during the Age of Darkness and subsequent fall from power.
- ▶ An overview of major orc tribes and settlements, such as the Empty Hand tribe in the fallen dwarven stronghold of Urgir and the maddened oracles of the Brimstone Haruspex.
- ▶ Orc tribal magic, including the shamanistic worship of the mysterious Blood God and the arcane witch doctors who rule through fear and firepower.
- ▶ Information on half-orcs and their unique roles in human and orc society.
- ▶ New traits to customize orc and half-orc characters.
- ▶ Orc warbeasts, banners and symbols, ritual scarring and tattoos, and more!

This player-friendly Pathfinder Companion works best with the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game or the 3.5 version of the world's oldest fantasy roleplaying game. Although easily incorporated into any fantasy world, it is optimized for the Pathfinder campaign setting.



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Printed in China. PZO9413