

ORCS: THE GODSWORN

To feel the thunder of orcish war drums outside the gate and to hear a chorus of voices growling, “Gruumsh!” is the nightmare of every civilized place in the world. For no matter how thick its walls, skilled its archers, or brave its knights, few settlements have ever withstood a full-scale onslaught of orcs.

Every soldier who lives through a fight with orcs tells of confronting a hulking foe that can cleave through a warrior with a single blow, part of a force that can cut down enemies as though they were trembling stalks of wheat before the scythe. Only a skilled and determined hero can hope to survive single combat with an orc.

Savage and fearless, orc tribes are ever in search of elves, dwarves, and humans to destroy. Motivated by their hatred of the civilized races of the world and their need to satisfy the demands of their deities, the orcs know that if they fight well and bring glory to their tribe, Gruumsh will call them home to the plane of Acheron. It is there in the afterlife where the chosen ones will join Gruumsh and his armies in their endless extraplanar battle for supremacy.

GODS OF THE ORCS

Orcs believe their gods to be invincible. They see the principles that define them and their deities at work every day in the world around them—nature rewards the strong and mercilessly eliminates the weak and the infirm. Orcs don’t revere their gods as much as they fear them; every tribe has superstitions about how to avert their wrath or bring their favor. This deep-seated uncertainty and fear comes forth in the form of savagery and relentlessness, as orcs ravage and kill to appease the gods in order to avoid their terrible retribution.

At the pinnacle of the orc pantheon is Gruumsh One-Eye, who created the orcs and continues to direct their destiny. He is aided and abetted by the other warrior deities, Bahgtru and Ilneval, who bring strength and cunning to the battlefield. The followers of all three gods are a tribe’s raiders and ravagers—often the only part of an orc tribe that its victims ever see.

Deep within the den of a tribe, far away from the war-hearth where warriors gather and celebrate, dwell the followers of Yurtrus, the god of disease and death, and Shargaas, the god of darkness and the unknown. Orcs too weak for battle (because of bodily weakness, malformation, injury, or age) often join these cults instead of facing daily humiliation, exile, or death.

Serving as the bridge between the two parts of the tribe are the priestesses of Luthic, the orc goddess who represents both life and the grave. It is her worshipers that raise young orcs to be warriors, and then, at the end of their lives, take them to Yurtrus and Shargaas to be carried into death and the great unknown.

GRUUMSH, “HE WHO WATCHES”

Gruumsh, the undisputed ruler of the orc pantheon, pushes his children to increase their numbers so they may be his instrument of revenge against the realms of elves, humans, and dwarves. In order to spite the gods who spurned him, Gruumsh leads his orcs on a mission

Lord Dağult Neverember once told me, during a drunken tirade, that orcs are fearful of their gods, and, if one plays one's cards right, they can be controlled through that fear and made to dance to any tune.

—Volo

of ceaseless slaughter, fueled by an unending rage that seeks to lay waste to the civilized world and revel in its anguish.

Orcs are naturally chaotic and unorganized, acting on their emotions and instincts rather than out of reason and logic. Only certain charismatic orcs, those who have been directly touched by the will and might of Gruumsh, have the capacity to control the other orcs in a tribe.

A Chosen Few. Orcs don’t become renowned in their tribes by choosing Gruumsh; he chooses them. An orc might claim its allegiance to Gruumsh, but only those who have proven themselves through feats of strength and ferocity in war are considered worthy of being true worshipers. Gruumsh singles out these individuals by bestowing upon each one a powerful dream or vision that signifies acceptance into his inner circle.

Those who are visited by Gruumsh are transformed psychologically and often physically by the experience. Some are driven to the brink of madness, reduced to muttering about omens and prophecies, while others become imbued with supernatural power and rise to positions of leadership.

NISHREK AND THE ETERNAL WAR

Orcs believe that if they die with honor, their spirits go to the plane of Acheron, the Infinite Battlefield—specifically the layer of Nishrek, where they join Gruumsh’s army and fight on his behalf in the endless war against the goblinoid followers of Maglubiyet. Gruumsh sees this conflict as a chance to pit his people against an eager foe and enable them to prove their worth before their deities. He relishes every short-term triumph and swears revenge for every setback.

Luthic, though, takes a longer view. She understands the cosmic implications of Maglubiyet’s attacks. To prevent the goblinoids from outstripping her people in population, she urges the orcs to have many offspring and teach them the ways of battle not only for survival in the material world, but to keep Maglubiyet at bay in the conflict on the planes. Her children will remain in her care, and if need be she wouldn’t hesitate to take to the field herself and claw Maglubiyet’s beady eyes from his face to prevent him from taking them from her.

The cosmic battle between the two pantheons has raged for eons without resolution, leading those who study its ebb and flow to expect the stalemate to continue. A different view is put forth by the archmage Tzunk, who notes that Maglubiyet has never faced a foe as ferocious and protective as Luthic. He predicts that the war will end with Luthic the only deity standing, as the cave mother ascends to rule her warrior children.



Eyes of Gruumsh. A few of the orcs touched by the power of Gruumsh are given the ultimate honor of carrying a small part of the god's overwhelming rage into battle, in the form of magic that augments their weapons and helps the tribe succeed. To become an eye of Gruumsh, an orc that has been chosen by Gruumsh must gouge out one of its eyes as a sign of devotion, sacrificing half of its mortal vision in return for divine power. These god-touched orcs are revered as living connections to Gruumsh, and are treated with respect even when they are old and infirm.

ILNEVAL, "THE WAR MAKER"

Ilneval is the loyal right hand of Gruumsh. He is the god who plans the attacks and devises the strategies that allow the forces of Gruumsh to dominate the battle and fill their war wagons with plunder and severed heads. Ilneval stands with his bloody sword, calling to those who understand the ebb and flow of combat to sit around his council fire and learn the ways of warfare.

Skilled Strategists. Orcs that show aptitude for the nuances of warfare at an early age are considered chosen by Ilneval and are groomed to serve as blades of Ilneval. These individuals are battle captains that follow the orders of the tribe's chief, leading a portion of the tribe's warriors into the thick of battle and bringing a measure of strategy to the assault. Blades of Ilneval are fearsome opponents, seeming to have an uncanny sense of when to move and when to strike, able to exploit the weakness of their enemy like a pack of hungry wolves.

BAHGTRU, "THE LEG BREAKER"


Despite the influence of Ilneval, orcs are and will forever be brutal and feral in how they wage war. Bahgtru is the deity who epitomizes the physical might and ruthlessness that orcs use to overwhelm their foes. He is the one who drives every thrust of an orc's weapon, so that it does as much harm as possible.

Fearless and Mighty. In the myths, it is said that Bahgtru was out hunting when he was surprised by the mightiest of the behirs, one with hundreds of legs. In a flash, Bahgtru was wrapped in the creature's coils and gripped by its legs. No one had ever escaped the grasp of the behir, but Bahgtru saw this as the ultimate test of his strength, and laughed at his good fortune. One by one, Bahgtru broke the behir's legs, and freed himself from its clutches. The creature's shrieks became the lightning of the storm, and its broken femur became the symbol of Bahgtru's followers, reminding them that anything can be broken and defeated by superior strength.

Competing in Cruelty. Most young orcs that an explorer or an adventurer might encounter are followers of Bahgtru. Orcs of Bahgtru continually try to prove their superior strength and endurance through cruel contests against their tribe mates, acts of unprovoked belligerence, and great success in battle. It is through these tests of strength that Bahgtru's followers prove which among them will eventually be worthy of Gruumsh's unwavering gaze.

The Sacred Bull. Orcs of Bahgtru sometimes enter battle astride aurochs, large creatures that resemble

NOT ALL ORC WEAKLINGS ARE TAKEN BY THOSE WHO SERVE YURTRUS AND SHARGAAS. SOME ARE SENT FORTH INTO THE CITIES DOMINATED BY HUMANS, ON DARK MISSIONS. BEWARE THEM.

 — ELMINSTER

oxen or cattle but are much more ferocious (see appendix B for their statistics). By doing so they honor the creatures as well as their deity, because legends tell that Bahgtru also rode a great bull into battle. No orc will eat or harm one of these sacred beasts, which are believed to be imbued with Bahgtru's spirit.

LUTHIC, "THE CAVE MOTHER"

While Gruumsh is the external force that pushes the orcs to victory over their enemies, it is the influence of Luthic, his wife, that binds them together and makes the orcs internally cohesive. She is the force that keeps the explosive rage of Gruumsh from bursting the orcs apart. If it was not for the followers of Luthic, it is possible that the race of orcs would be no more than small bands of warrior-nomads, scratching out a meager existence, rather than a force capable of great destruction.

Far from the den's war hearth, within the protective depths of the caves, the followers of Luthic tend the orc brood, raising them to be strong and cruel like their progenitors. By invoking the power of superstitions, omens, and traditions, these claws of Luthic hold the tribe together through ritual, fear and, if necessary, force.

Talons of the Bear. Luthic is often thought to take the guise of an enormous cave bear. Her followers honor this aspect of her by keeping cave bears as pets to guard the whelping pens that are filled with squabbling young. Luthic's devoted also grow their claws long and paint them black to mimic the fearsome talons of their goddess. Luthic rewards them by making their claws as strong and tough as iron.

Holding the Fort. Along with protecting the young and the tribe's food stores, the worshipers of Luthic also serve as the crafters, engineers, and builders of an orc tribe. They fashion crude weapons, armor, and the few manufactured items that the orcs need for daily life. When the tribe is away on raids, they are expected to dig deeper into the caverns of the den to create more living space for the ever-increasing population.

YURTRUS, "THE WHITE HAND"

Yurtrus is often depicted as consumed by rot and covered in oozing pustules, utterly repulsive except for his hands, which are pure white and free of any blemish. Yurtrus has no mouth and never utters a sound, so that he may come in absolute silence for his chosen.

The followers of Yurtrus are allowed to dwell on the fringes of the tribe, but are looked upon with distaste and unease. They interact with the tribe mostly on occasions of death, claiming the bones of fallen warriors to add to the ossuary shrines of Yurtrus, and sometimes during shamanic rites when contact with spirits occurs.

The White Hands. Shamans who heed the telepathic whispers of Yurtrus walk the perilous line between the

living and the dead, and gain uncanny powers from doing so. Through this nonverbal communion, they begin to comprehend how to use the magic of death. These shamans, known as White Hands, cover their hands in white ash or wear pale gloves made of elf skin to symbolize their connection to the power of Yurtrus. The necromancy practiced by the shamans of Yurtrus is a force considered taboo by orcs, which makes them both revered and feared by the rest of the tribe.

Traffickers of the Dead. Orcs who die "a good death" are sent to Gruumsh by the priests of Yurtrus. The priests seek out the bodies of such fallen heroes and sever their heads, boil or smoke them to rid them of most of the flesh, and then use a ritual punch to break out the bridge of the nose and leave the skull with a single eye. Orcs that appreciate the strength and ferocity of a foe might choose to honor that enemy by giving it the same treatment. The bodies of orcs that die in a failed battle are left behind; they were weak and don't deserve to join Gruumsh. Those that die of old age have typically already been taken into Yurtrus's fold, and their bones are used to build furnishings and structures in the area of the lair dedicated to the worship of Yurtrus.

Chosen of Yurtrus. Orcs that suffer from gruesome diseases are brought into Yurtrus's fold and tended like prized cattle. These orcs are called nurtured ones, and they are considered the chosen of Yurtrus because they have been picked for the special purpose of spreading his virulent message among the enemy. At night, or during a heavy fog, these infected orcs rush toward an enemy's encampment, often through a hail of arrows, in order to spread their affliction within their foe's ranks.

SHARGAAS, "THE NIGHT LORD"

Shargaas is a god of darkness and the unknown. He is a secretive and murderous deity, dangerous to all except Gruumsh. His realm is the darkness that no creatures but those devoted to him can see through.

To other orcs, the followers of Shargaas are depraved and twisted creatures that have no honor and skulk in the shadows. Rejected by Yurtrus as too unsuitable to serve as custodians of the dead, these orcs live even deeper inside the lair, close to where the entrance to Shargaas's realm is located. There in the darkness, orcs exiled to meet their fate are either brought into the fold as members of the tribe's Shargaas cult, or are torn to pieces and devoured as sacrificial tributes by the worshipers of the Night Lord.

Culling the Weak. Although most followers of Shargaas are exiles, living in the farthest reaches of the lair away from the rest of the tribe, others remain within the main body, posing as ordinary warriors. These agents single out the weakest members of the fighting force, because removing these weak links strengthens the rest of the group. Soon after being born, an orc must be able to show that it will grow into a capable warrior, or else it will be visited by the cultists of Shargaas. The cultists also waylay orcs that have proved themselves ineffectual in leadership or combat, then drag them into Shargaas's dark caverns to be ritually murdered and devoured.

This culling of the weak and the unworthy is accepted as necessary by the tribe, but speaking about it is taboo.

Those that disappear are simply said to be “with Shargaas” and are spoken of no more.

Alliance of Convenience. When faced with a particularly skilled foe able to withstand direct assaults, a war chief might call upon the cultists of Shargaas to assassinate an enemy leader, kidnap an influential hostage, or steal a valuable item.

Gruumsh doesn't always look kindly on acts of subterfuge and indirectness, because orcs are meant to take and do what they want through straightforward assault and brutality. Nonetheless, when the chief seeks the aid of Shargaas to accomplish such a task, the leader of the cult is willing to comply—for a price. In exchange for its less than honorable services, the leader will strike a deal with the war chief to provide food, tools, slaves, or some other commodity that the cult prizes.

LIFE IN THE TRIBE

Orcs survive through savagery and force of numbers. There is a life that has no place for weakness, and every warrior must be strong enough to take what is needed by force. Orcs aren't interested in treaties, trade negotiations or diplomacy. They care only for satisfying their insatiable desire for battle, to smash their foes and appease their gods.

BOOMING BIRTH RATE

In order to replenish the casualties of their endless warring, orcs breed prodigiously (and they aren't choosy about what they breed with, which is why such creatures as half-orcs and ogrillons are found in the world). Females that are about to give birth are relieved of their other roles and taken to the lair's whelping pens, where they are tended to by Luthic's followers.

Orcs don't take mates, and no pair-bonding occurs in a tribe other than at the moment when coupling takes place. At other times, males and females are more or less indifferent toward one another. All orcs consider mating to be a mundane necessity of life, and no special significance beyond that is imparted to it.

At 4 years old an orc is considered a juvenile, and by age 12 it is a fully functioning adult. Most orcs don't live past the age of 25 due to battle or illness, but an orc can live to about 40, remaining healthy almost up until the end. Luthic's divine blessing can further extend an orc's life, though Gruumsh is never happy when she uses this power and tends to frown upon the one so “blessed.”

FUTURE WARRIORS

Young orcs must mature quickly in order to survive their perilous upbringing. Their early years are fraught with tests of strength, fierce competition and nothing in the way of maternal or paternal love. From the time a child can wield a stick or a crude knife, it asserts itself and defends itself while learning to fight, to survive in the wild, and to fear the gods.

The children that can't endure the rigors of a life of combat are culled from the main body of the tribe, taken into the depths of the lair, and left for the followers of Yurtrus or Shargaas to accept or reject. A fully grown orc warrior is well prepared for a lifetime of combat.

SEARCH, DESTROY, REPEAT

When a tribe is on the move, orc warriors are commanded to scour the surrounding landscape for any opportunity to spill blood and bring glory to their gods. Often, bands of warriors work on a rotation, with one group heading out on a raid just as another group returns, laden with severed heads, sacks of loot, and armfuls of food. Warriors also serve as scouts, bringing back detailed reports about the surrounding area so that the chief can plan where to send raiders next.

The territory that orc war parties cover can extend for many miles around the lair, and any encampment or settlement of elves, dwarves, or humans in that area is at risk. If orcs come upon a target that is too large to assault directly, they will lurk along supply routes, taking out their frustration on caravans and travelers. Left unchecked, a tribe can subsist on this sort of prey and booty for quite some time.

WAR WAGONS

Orcs pillage and scavenge wherever they go—everything is loot, and loot is always something to be proud of. In order to haul as much food and booty as possible back to the tribe's den, every tribe has a sturdy war wagon. Since orcs are poor crafters, most of their wagons are stolen from human or dwarven strongholds, and then decorated with uniquely orcish accessories.

A war wagon is a source of great pride for a war chief, comparable to a human army's banner or flag. Many are clad in armor and festooned with garish trinkets and grisly trophies that hang from hooks and spikes. A war wagon makes a good shield against arrows when orcs besiege an elven fortress, and a heavily modified wagon could serve as a battering ram if a settlement dares to close its gates, blocking the way to the treasures and tasty food that lie within.

A heavily laden wagon that requires the strongest orcs to return it to the lair is a sign of great success. One that can be moved by the runts of the tribe is proof of a shameful performance.

The loss of a tribe's war wagon can undermine the chieftain's authority and cause the tribe to collapse into chaos, with the survivors scattering either to join new tribes or to strike out on their own. At the other extreme, warriors that return home with a heavily laden wagon or after heroically defending it from thieves gain great respect and advance higher in the tribe's pecking order.

ALL ARE FIGHTERS

Most of the orcs that stay behind when the warriors go on their raids are weaker than their tribe mates or otherwise not suited for a life of battle. Worshipers of Luthic fall into this category, as do some of those that revere Yurtrus or Shargaas. But even these orcs are trained in combat, and all of them are expected to act like warriors if the lair is attacked or threatened. Their numbers are augmented by any orogs in the tribe, which are primarily responsible for making sure that the lair is protected from intruders.



SPECIAL ENEMIES

When orcs attack a settlement of humans or halflings, they will kill anyone who presents a threat, but they are more interested in grabbing plunder and food rather than in wanton slaughter. The elderly, children, and any who seem weak or meek enough might escape death. If they leave the population more or less intact, the orcs leave themselves the option of returning to raid the community over and over.

When orcs fight elves, all of that changes. The enmity between the two races cuts to the core, and no orc will leave an elf alive. Orcs become so frenzied in combat against elves that they forget all about taking loot and valuables back to the tribe—the only trophies of any worth are the heads of their enemies.

Orcs treat dwarves somewhat differently from other foes, because they covet the homes that dwarves fashion for themselves. If a tribe succeeds in fighting its way into a dwarfhold, the orcs will butcher any dwarf that stands against them, but it's really all about the property—they would be just as happy if all the dwarves ran away.

STRENGTH RESPECTS STRENGTH

Orcs appreciate physical prowess and formidable combat ability in any form. As such, they might accept other creatures into their ranks from time to time. Orcs have been known to associate with wereboars and ettins, both creatures that can markedly improve a tribe's murderous efficiency. For a promise of sufficient food and loot, a troll might accompany a tribe temporarily.

A group of orcs can be dominated by evil creatures of immense power, and they accept this subservient role either because they are forced to or because it offers them a measure of security while they engage in their savagery. Green dragons, for instance, sometimes use orcs as sentinels or shock troops. Orcs are sometimes attracted to the service of frost giants or fire giants, who then “reward” their loyalty by turning them into slaves.

If a tribe is defeated and driven from its lair, the survivors might come under the sway of a strong but dimwitted creature, such as a hill giant or an ogre. It is also not

unheard of for an exceptionally strong and charismatic evil human to lead stray orcs that no longer have a tribe to call their own.

WHEN TRIBES TEAM UP

An orc tribe typically has no more than a few hundred members, because a larger group would need a prohibitive amount of resources to remain strong. As a rule, a tribe is violently hostile toward any other tribe it meets, seeing the rival orcs first and foremost as competitors for food and victims.

On some occasions, though, tribes that have a common concern band together. The result is an orc horde—a sea of slaving killers that washes over the countryside and leaves vast tracts of devastation in its wake. Such an event is rare in the extreme, but its consequences can lay low entire nations that are unable to stand against the wave.

ORC CULTURE AND BELIEFS

Orcs live in constant fear of their gods, and their behavior is rooted in that mentality. They believe that they can see the influence of the gods everywhere in the world around them, and the priests of a tribe are entrusted with the responsibility of identifying these signs and omens—both good and bad—and deciding how the tribe should react to them.

As a race, orcs have no noteworthy universal social traits, but some commonality does exist in the crude written communication that all orcs employ and in the way that they use pigments to decorate and distinguish themselves and their lairs.

OMENS AND SUPERSTITIONS

Orcs believe that any seemingly unimportant discovery or event—a bear's claw marks on a tree, a flock of crows, or a sudden gust of wind—might be a communication from the gods. If the tribe has encountered a similar omen before, the priests understand how to interpret it, but if a sign from the gods has no clear explanation, the



priests might have to meditate for hours or days to get a vision of its meaning.

Every group of orcs has particular superstitions and recognizes certain omens. These tenets vary from tribe to tribe, and are often based in events that the tribe has experienced. Here are a few examples:

- If a dwarf or a human invokes its god upon dying, you must carry the corpse's ears for three days to ward off any retribution, and then bury or burn them.
- Three ravens is always a good sign.
- It is good luck to spit where you are about to sleep.
- Gnome bones can ward off diseases if they are worn.
- Don't stand inside a ring of stones, mushrooms, or any other kind of circle.
- Seeing a shooting star before a battle is bad luck. To ward it off, you must swallow a stone.
- A tribute of elf ears brings favor from Gruumsh.
- If you bury five stones at dawn before a long journey, you will always find your way back to the war hearth.
- Stomping your foot three times and uttering "Gruumsh" wards off bad magic.

SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION

Orcs have a written language adapted from that of the dwarves, but they aren't a literate culture and rarely keep records or write down their thoughts. When orcs need to communicate in writing, they use crude symbols to convey basic information, such as "food stored here," "danger close," or "go this way." A orc raiding party might leave such a sign in its wake, as an aid to other warriors that travel through the same area later on. Mountain guides, druids, and rangers might be familiar with many of these symbols, enabling them to keep their charges from inadvertently stumbling into a tribe's territory.

ORCS AS UNDERLINGS

With their culturally ingrained tendency to bow before superior strength, orcs can be subjugated by a powerful and charismatic individual. Evil human spellcasters and rulers in particular have a penchant for enslaving or deceiving orcs into service. A leader backed by a great military force could swoop down upon a tribe, kill its leaders, and cow the rest of the orcs into submission.

A spellcaster typically takes a more devious approach, using magic to conjure up false omens that strike fear into the tribe and make it obedient. A wizard might manipulate a few of the orcs that rank just below the war chief, using them as pawns to help overthrow the leader. The wizard validates the change in command with signs supposedly delivered by the gods (which are in truth nothing but a few well-cast illusions), and turns the tribe into a strike force eager to do the bidding of its new chief.

The survivors of a tribe scattered by defeat sometimes fall back on their fighting skills to find employment, individually or in small groups, with whoever is willing to hire them. These mercenaries, while they might pride themselves on their seeming independence, nevertheless strive to follow through on their end of a bargain, because being paid by one's employer is better than being hunted down for breaking a deal.

COLORS OF CONQUEST

Three colors have special meaning to all orcs, and they adorn their bodies, possessions, and lairs with pigments that produce those hues. Red ochre is used to represent blood, grayish-white ash to represent death, and charcoal to represent darkness.

The unwritten laws that govern the status of individual orcs within a tribe are manifested to a degree in how each orc uses these colors on itself and its personal items. For instance, the chief of one tribe might be the only one that has the right to stain its tusks with red ochre, while the warriors of another tribe rub streaks of ash into their garments to signify their safe return from a raid.

ROLEPLAYING AN ORC

Most orcs have been indoctrinated into a life of destruction and slaughter. But unlike creatures who by their very nature are evil, such as gnolls, it's possible that an orc, if raised outside its culture, could develop a limited capacity for empathy, love, and compassion.

No matter how domesticated an orc might seem, its blood lust flows just beneath the surface. With its instinctive love of battle and its desire to prove its strength, an orc trying to live within the confines of civilization is faced with a difficult task.

ORC PERSONALITY TRAITS

d6 Personality Trait

- 1 I never relinquish my weapon.
- 2 I welcome any chance to prove my battle skills.
- 3 I always appear like I am about to kill everyone around me.
- 4 I love a good brawl.
- 5 I drink the blood of monsters to consume their power.
- 6 I chant orcish war dirges during combat.

ORC IDEALS

d6 Ideal

- 1 **Strength.** Showing superior strength brings honor to Gruumsh. (Any)
- 2 **Prowess.** Killing all your enemies is the path to greatness. (Evil)
- 3 **Dominance.** I will have achieved glory when all cower before my might. (Evil)
- 4 **Intimidation.** I can get what I want from weaklings that fear me. (Evil)
- 5 **Glory.** The goals of the tribe don't concern me. Personal glory is what I crave. (Chaotic)
- 6 **Savagery.** I will not be controlled. (Chaotic)

ORC BONDS

d6 Bond

- 1 I will defend my tribe to the death.
- 2 Every serious choice I make must be decided by signs or omens from the gods.
- 3 I carry the teeth of a great warrior. They inspire me to commit great deeds in battle.
- 4 To avenge Gruumsh, I will kill every elf I see.
- 5 I will seek and destroy those who murdered my tribe.
- 6 I owe my survival to a non-orc.

ORC FLAWS

d6 Flaw

- 1 I have a calm temperament and let insults roll off my back.
- 2 I don't fear the gods and have no patience for superstitions.
- 3 I am slow to anger, but when I do become enraged I fight until my enemies are dead, no matter the cost.
- 4 I understand the value of civilization and the order that society brings.
- 5 I don't trust anyone.
- 6 I believe in living to fight another day.

ORC NAMES

Orc names don't always have meaning in the Orc language, and most noteworthy orcs are given epithets by their tribe mates.

ORC NAMES

d12	Male Name	Female Name	Epithet
1	Grutok	Kansif	The Filthy
2	Lortar	Ownka	Skull Cleaver
3	Abzug	Emen	Eye Gouger
4	Shugog	Sutha	Iron Tusk
5	Urzul	Myev	Skin Flayer
6	Ruhk	Neega	Bone Crusher
7	Mobad	Baggi	Flesh Ripper
8	Shamog	Shautha	Doom Hammer
9	Mugrub	Ovak	Elf Butcher
10	Bajok	Vola	Spine Snapper
11	Rhorog	Engong	Death Spear
12	Jahrukk	Volen	The Brutal

HALF-ORCS

The lore of humans depicts orcs as rapacious fiends, intent on coupling with other humanoids to spread their seed far and wide. In truth, orcs mate with non-orcs only when they think such a match will strengthen the tribe. When orcs encounter human who match them in prowess and ferocity, they sometimes strike an alliance that is sealed by mingling the bloodlines of the two groups.

A half-orc in an orc tribe is often just as strong as a full-blooded orc and also displays superior cunning. Thus, half-orcs are capable of gaining status in the tribe more quickly than their fellows, and it isn't unusual for a half-orc to rise to leadership of a tribe.

OROGS

Orcs believe that an orog's exceptional strength and intelligence are a gift from the goddess Luthic to ensure that her brood survives and flourishes. So, when an orog is born, a tremor goes throughout the tribe, for the event is seen as a great blessing from the goddess, but it brings tension as well.

An orog within the tribe poses a potential problem for an orc war chief: will the orog grow up to be a powerful ally or a dangerous adversary? Most war chiefs treasure their positions so highly that they would refuse to relinquish the title, even to a clearly superior creature. Thus, a chief might be tempted to kill the orog while it is still young and weak, but such an act would most certainly incur the wrath of Luthic.

To raise an orog within the tribe, from the chief's point of view, is to take a risk that the orog won't one day rise up and usurp power from the chief. Because of this sentiment, orogs are secreted away by priestesses of Luthic and raised out of the sight of the chief.

KEEPING THE BALANCE

What most war chiefs don't realize, or trust in, is the fact that orogs aren't a direct threat to their rule. By nothing more than their presence, orogs serve as a balancing force. Indoctrinated by the priestesses of Luthic, they see to it that Luthic's followers are protected from the more aggressive members of the tribe. Most orogs don't go on raids, because their main responsibility is the safety of the tribe members that remain in the lair—ensuring that the tribe remains intact even if a raid goes badly and many warriors are killed. In times of internal strife, such as after the death of the chief, orogs move in to oversee the selection of a new leader and keep the tribe from splintering due to infighting. Orog's strive not to lead their tribe, but to keep the tribe together—which is often the more difficult of the two tasks.

BREAKING THE MOLD

An orc lives on the edge of chaos and rage, and orogs are no exception. At times, an orog goes rogue and becomes a force of destruction in the tribe, seeking to fracture the group along lines of loyalty to the gods. If those who worship Luthic and those who worship Gruumsh split, the tribe can be torn apart by the schism.

At the other extreme, an orog might accept a role in battle or leadership under special circumstances. If a tribe finds itself up against formidable or unexpected resistance, the endurance and superior intellect of an orog serving as chief or battle master can be enough to win the day when a less capable leader would have failed.

TANARUKKS

A tanarukk is an abyssal creation infused with demonic power. Half demon, half orc, it wanders the world in a murderous haze. Its dimly glowing red eyes burn under thick, horn-like brows, and its tusks and claws are razor-sharp. Because the skin of tanarukks is unnaturally tough, they rarely wear armor, preferring to rush into battle unencumbered, smashing their foes with a demon-forged maul or tearing them apart.



A tanarukk is spawned when an orc tribe turns away from its gods and makes sacrifices to the demon lord Baphomet. The lords of the Abyss are always eager to claim more followers, and the violent orcs are prime candidates for corruption. A tribe pushed to the edge of destruction, its faith in its deities shattered, might beseech Baphomet to bless its next generation of warriors. In so doing, Baphomet imbues the tribe's unborn with demonic might, yielding a generation of tanarukks.

The orc deities consider such a betrayal of their worship as a crime punishable by obliteration, and orcs faithful to their gods view tanarukks as horrid blasphemies that must be attacked on sight.

On rare occasions, a non-orc that has gained control over a tribe performs a ritual to Baphomet in hopes of spawning tanarukks to serve as a squad of shock troops. Only the strongest warlords and spellcasters can keep such a force in line, meaning that often the would-be conqueror is slain by its own creations.

ORC LAIRS

An orc tribe needs a home base of sorts—a place where warriors can reconnoiter after a raid, and ideally also a site that can be easily defended to ensure the safety of the tribe's noncombatants. Orcs establish their encampments mainly in mountainous areas, around and within deep caves or large crevasses in the rock. Although they prefer such terrain for strategic purposes, they can adapt and thrive in almost any environment.

Every encampment is divided along lines of worship. Those who revere Gruumsh, Ilneval, Bahgtru, and Lu-

thic are given the best parts of the lair, while the followers of Yurtrus and Shargaas are relegated to the deep, dark recesses of the site, away from the rest of the tribe.

At the center of the camp is the tribe's war hearth. Once a war hearth is lit, the priests of Gruumsh keep it continually burning, for it represents the rage within Gruumsh's unblinking eye. The orcs converge on the hearth to celebrate victory and to feast after a kill. If a tribe moves its camp, coals from the hearth are kept glowing within shells and pots so they can be used to start the war hearth at the new encampment.

Given a choice between occupying a site on the surface and one that is wholly or partly underground, an orc chieftain typically opts for the latter. If the surface location happens to be a ruin left behind by another race, orcs are more likely to use it as a temporary campsite. The ruins of elven settlements are the exception to this rule. If orcs come across such a place, they desecrate it and leave it unfit for any sort of habitation.

A tribe uses its home base for as long as the resources in the surrounding area hold out—enough food for the foragers and hunters, and enough victims for the warriors. The orcs might have to range farther and farther from their lair as prey becomes more scarce, and after a few months or a year or two, the tribe will be forced to move on and find more fertile hunting grounds.

On occasion, a tribe finds itself in a best-of-both-worlds situation, able to take over occupancy of an underground space voluminous enough to accommodate all the factions in the tribe and within raiding distance of a steady supply of prey.

The orc stronghold depicted and described here is an example of such a place, which could suit the needs of a tribe for several years or even decades. It has several subterranean chambers, conveniently configured to provide every group of worshipers with appropriate quarters, and it is accessible from the surface through only one well-guarded passageway.

MAIN CHAMBER

The warriors that worship Gruumsh and Ilneval occupy the main area of the complex, a large cavern that has the war hearth at its center and a shrine to Ilneval along the perimeter. The focal point of the shrine is a blood-covered sword mounted on the wall.

The area also includes a pile of broken femurs that represents a shrine to Bahgtru. The worshipers of Bahgtru are mostly young, brash orc warriors, eager to prove their strength and bravery to the elders of the tribe. Even if space is available in the stronghold, they often live outside the entrance in crude bivouacs and roughshod fortifications, protecting their elders by guarding the stronghold's vulnerable spot.

Off to one side of the chamber, away from where the warriors are quartered, is the fighting pit, a sunken and fenced-off area where orcs settle their differences or engage in contests of strength.

WAR CHIEF'S QUARTERS

Adjacent to the main chamber is the room where the war chief resides, holds council, and hands out blessings or punishments from Gruumsh. The best loot and trophies of triumph are piled in this room and considered to be the property of the chief. A fire, not as large as the war hearth, burns in its center.

Next to the chief's enclosed sleeping area is a shrine to Gruumsh consisting of a crude stone effigy of He Who Watches, surrounded by bloody offerings.

CAVES FOR FOLLOWERS OF LUTHIC

Orcs who worship Luthic are sequestered in a cavern off the main chamber, where they protect the young and supervise food stores. These orcs take control of prisoners brought back from raids, using them as slave labor to dig out new living space and do other menial tasks.

Most of Luthic's faithful reside in this area, close to the whelping pens where young orcs are kept until they grow old enough to contribute to the tribe. When they're not being worked, slaves are housed in a small adjoining chamber and watched over by a group of cave bears that Luthic's worshipers keep as pets.

Many of Luthic's priestesses have their quarters in a nearby cavern that holds the tribe's shrine to Luthic. She is represented by a crude stone statue with claws covered in charcoal and a body smeared with red ochre.

CAVES FOR FOLLOWERS OF YURTRUS

Followers of Yurtrus reside on the threshold of where the deep area of the cavern system begins. They are the keepers of the dead, and the entrance to their realm is festooned with piles of bones and skulls. An altar to Yurtrus, made of stone with a hand painted in ash and tallow on it, stands in a cramped chamber apart from the main living area that is lined with skulls and bones.

CAVES FOR FOLLOWERS OF SHARGAAS

Followers of Shargaas dwell within the most remote area of the stronghold, immersed in darkness and feared by the rest of the tribe. The tribe's altar to Shargaas is a bloodstained rock.

The stronghold depicted in the map features a number of small passages that lead away from the depths of the lair and eventually provide egress to the surface. The members of the tribe's Shargaas cult, which call themselves the Red Fang of Shargaas, take advantage of these secret tunnels to raid the outside world and bring back prisoners.

The members of the Red Fang use giant, carnivorous bats as mounts, that allow them to gain silent access to any location. Those who think they can hide under cover of darkness or escape invisibly are easy marks for the Red Fang's bats, which locate their prey with high-pitched clicks and shrieks, then swoop down and snatch up their prey with razor sharp claws.

Bat riders of the Red Fang return from their raids the same way they exited—through a crack in the cliff face far away from their lair. A tunnel leads through layers of damp stone and crystallized minerals before eventually opening out into their subterranean domain. Captives are used as food for the brood of giant bats that roost in the rookery or are kept as slaves to be worked or used for barter.

TREASURE

Orcs are consummate raiders. When they attack and overwhelm, they claim as booty anything of value that they can carry—and an orc's definition of "value" can be very loose indeed.

The strongest or most dominant orcs will always claim the best loot after a successful raid, and since the pecking order in the group is almost always firmly established, there are usually no squabbles over who gets what. If the tribe's war wagon is available, it is used to transport large or especially treasured items.

Each orc warrior carries its personal loot from the raid in a sack. These are the trophies of victory that orcs brandish and boast about when they return to the den. A loot sack might contain something of demonstrable worth or usefulness, something that's edible (or used to be), or something that was acquired at great risk. In any case, once the bragging is over, the loot is eaten, put to use, or otherwise disposed of.

The Orc Trophies table provides a selection of items that might be found in an orc's loot sack.

ORC TROPHIES

d10	Trophy	d10	Trophy
1	1d12 elf ears	6	1d20 severed fingers
2	1d4 dwarf beards	7	1d8 eyeballs
3	1d6 human heads	8	Flayed elf skin
4	Skulls and bones	9	Dire wolf hide
5	Cave bear paw	10	Random trinket*

* Roll on the Trinkets table in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*.

