

Orc Rising

Created by M. Joseph Young

Test Refereed by MJY

Test Played by JDW

The orcs are revolting! Of course, the dwarfs aren't exactly cute—but that's not the point. This seemingly typical fantasy realm is built around the orcs, that staple race of disgusting evil creatures who have gone from the bane of elves and dwarfs to the weakling opponents referees use to occupy player characters when there isn't anything else handy. But perhaps the orcs aren't the evil beasts we imagine—if they look at what's really going on, the players may find themselves coming to the aid of the orcs!

World Area Bias

Levels

Tech.....5@4

Psi.....0@2

Mag7@5

Bod.....12@3

Alliance

The sides are not so clear. Certainly the orcs are primitive, dirty, uncivilized. Living still as hunter-gatherers, they have preyed on the livestock and raided the lands and supplies of the free peoples. They have even made meals of elves, dwarfs, and men at times. But the free peoples of the world have oppressed and enslaved them, conquering their lands, imprisoning their leaders, deporting and enslaving their people—the orcs have legitimate complaints.

We will look at the orcs in some detail. As to the free peoples, here we will give only the basics, and discuss a few points which will help make this setting work. There will also be an extended discussion of why these “good people” are treating the orcs as they are.

Basic Orc Culture

The orcs have long existed in relatively small tribes of hunter/gatherers which war against each other for territory and have enslaved members of rival tribes, but take great pride in themselves as fighters and hunters. But the pressures on their society from the free peoples have caused much of this to break down in unpredictable ways. Orcs are less likely to fight each other, and more likely to join against a common enemy; and as individual tribes are decimated by slaving and other interference, the survivors are absorbed by others, creating more unity, more relationships between tribes.

As hunter/gatherers, they tend to wander through the jungles to some degree. They have their tribal territories, and they will defend these, but from month to month they will live in a different area as they seek fresh game and vegetation. They don't perceive themselves as "owning" the land in the same way that elves, dwarfs, and humans do. They live on it, move through it, are sustained by it; but it isn't theirs in that sense.

Males primarily hunt, women stay closer to the camps and gather while raising the young. Having short lives (thirty to forty years is old in the jungles, and even in the better conditions of slavery they seldom reach sixty), they enter puberty fairly young (eight to ten), at which point the males join their fathers on the hunt.

Other aspects of orc culture will vary from tribe to tribe, often connected to the predominant religion of the tribe or the traditions of the tribe.

Orc Religion

Orcs have been primarily henotheists for generations: they recognize the existence of many gods with many powers and interests, but each tribe has recognized one god as the god for that tribe. However, the pressures on society from outside have caused breakdowns here as well, and different gods will be worshipped by different members of the same tribe, some orcs shifting toward polytheism, worshipping several different gods in the hope of gaining more favor from them. The referee may use whatever names he prefers, either drawn from materials in other games or books, or invented for the purpose.

Recently one anarch god has been gaining favor. He could have many names, but here will be called Sarne. Sarne's shamans preach that the orcs shouldn't seek equality, but dominance over their enemies. The free peoples must be slaughtered and enslaved, their lands taken and their homes destroyed, according to Sarne. They must be made to pay for all they have done to the orcs, and orcs must be raised to their proper place as lords of the earth. Almost half of all orcs have accepted the teachings of Sarne.

But there are other gods, even some alliance gods, worshipped by orcs; and there are many orcs who want nothing more than to be treated as equals, and to be allowed to rule their lands and keep their culture as they have for generations. There are even a few who hope for a peaceful resolution to the problems, and pray that the free peoples will see the error of their ways.

Orc Heroes

Although the stats for one each orcs are given, the referee should be acutely aware that there is variation among the orcs as much as among the other races. Of particular interest will be the orc heroes, individuals of outstanding valor and ability who rise up and do great deeds themselves, and lead others in great deeds. These are the Samsons, the Heracleses, the Gideons of the orc world, and they are very important to the setting. Basic stats are given for a few of these, but the referee should be ready to create additional orc heroes as need.

The Free Peoples

Fantasy settings are filled with humans, elves, dwarfs, and other races often called "demi-humans" (distinguishing them from "humanoids" such as orcs and goblins). The referee is welcome to include as many of these as he wishes; this material will present only these three. (If the referee wishes to expand on these, it is recommended that he follow the general concept here, building each around a basic interest and survival strategy. For example, a race of gnomes could be developed, living along the coast west of the dwarf mountains, and continuing south to border on the orc jungles. They live as fishermen, thanking Gaia for all that lives in the waters of the earth, and keep orc slaves to row boats and handle nets.)

It would not be particularly interesting to create a setting in which the good orcs are fighting against the evil free peoples. The morality of the situation is much less clear: the free peoples are essentially good, as in most fantasy realms, and what they do to the orcs they do for what they perceive as morally good reasons. They have erred in their thinking; orcs, they believe, are beneath them, less than human. The free peoples are bringing civilization to these primitive sub-humans.

There is much unity and similarity among the free peoples, although they are not the same. They are distinctly different in notable ways.

The lands of the free peoples each recognize an official church, and all worship Gaia, the Goddess of the Earth. It is an alliance faith which denies the reality of any other gods or goddesses. Yet there are denominational differences between the races. Among the mining dwarfs, Gaia is goddess of all that is *in* the earth. The agricultural elves see her as goddess of all that is *from* the earth. To men, who raise livestock, she is goddess of all that is *on* the earth—each race focusing on that which is most essential to its way of life. Still, they have more in common than not, and while theologians debate the doctrinal arguments in lengthy treatises, the laity perceives all of the free peoples as citizens of Gaian nations.

This doesn't mean that there aren't problems. The orc lands are viewed as unsettled territory, and as the free peoples move into them the boundaries of who owns which areas are equally unsettled. But although there have been skirmishes, these are usually settled diplomatically, and the kings of the free peoples regard each other as allies in the world.

There is little difference in the level of technology of the races, but there is a great deal of difference in the degree to which the society is dependent thereon. The dwarfs are the great metallurgists, and although elves and men understand the technology, they import most of their finished metal products from the dwarfs, exporting food product to them.

Elves

Of all the free peoples, the purest in thought and intent are the elves.

Although not strictly vegetarian, they have established an agrarian live style. Their lands are devoted to large degree to fields, gardens, orchards, vineyards, paddies, and bogs through which they produce fruits, vegetables, grains, berries, beans, nuts, tubers—a wealth of food from the earth. They also raise goats, mostly for milk and cheese, assorted fowl primarily for the eggs, and will have meat a couple times a year.

They live in communal villages, none owning anything of his own but all having equal ownership of everything. Together they work the fields, care for the minimal livestock (only such creatures as can be easily raised in pens, coops, and other enclosures, which is mostly poultry with the rare pigsty and goat run), build their homes, prepare meals, raise the young, and do everything their society requires. Their natural affinity for living things makes their agriculture very productive, and they have learned to compost all their waste products to feed their fields, and to irrigate from streams and from wells. Although each may have his own dwelling, many share housing, and the buildings are regarded as property of the elves universally, rather than individually. Most residents of a village are related to each other, and the elders can usually expound the family tree of the entire village. Young female elves find husbands from other villages, and young males generally move to other villages to become part of the families there. Such marriages are nearly always arranged by the parents and the elders.

Orc slaves are brought to work in the fields, and to transport produce. Although they are given sub-standard housing compared to that of their elfin masters, the elves see it as better than the caves, grass huts and skin tents which are orc homes in their native land.

Elves have better distance vision than others (focus 2@9), and above average intuition (1@6) and hand/eye (1@9) typically. There are also more elves with hand/eye in the upper second level than is typical of humans; but the average strength of elves is a tad lower, 1@4 on average with far fewer reaching level two. This supports their preference for archery in combat; all elves reach a high amateur level of ability in this before reaching adulthood, and fully a quarter of the adult population has professional levels of skill.

Their lands are east of the ranges used by men and north and east of the jungles of the orcs. As such, they trade with men, providing mostly agricultural product including some hay in exchange for cheeses, dried meats, and leather goods. They have little contact with dwarfs, but do trade for metal goods (especially tools, but also arrowheads) and jewelry with human traders who have received these things dealing with the dwarfs.

There are no "half-elves"; no elf would permit his child to marry anyone who was not an elf, and no elf would disobey his parents in selecting a spouse.

There are no shops, tradesmen, or merchants among the elves. The community elders will trade with other communities and with other races, and share the proceeds (goods, not money) with the community. Weaving, woodworking, and other simple trades are done as community efforts, with

individuals who are particularly good at these taking time off from field work to do it, or doing it more as a hobby in their spare time.

Dwarfs

The hardest of peoples are the dwarfs. They have above average strength (1@8 typical), stamina (1@10), resistance (1@7), and density (1@3 basic, increased for second level strength or stamina).

Orc slaves have perhaps the hardest labors in the dwarf camps, as they are primarily used in the mines. However, they work alongside paid dwarf laborers, and apart from compensation are treated much as equals with their co-workers; and they live in caves and tunnels comparable to the working class dwarf.

Dwarfs are the most conscious of possessions. As each male approaches marriageable age, he finds a place to build his own home, either an area of rock within the mountain into which he believes he can quarry a good-sized dwelling or a stone house built outside. His family will often help him with digging, and some dwarfs will hire help trading the cut stone to laborers who will use it to build outside the mountains. Whether a cave or a structure, each is made to be beautiful, a work of art and architecture; and female dwarfs often measure the worth of potential husbands by the quality of the home they have built. Females, although they learn most of the same skills as males, focus much on the arts, and try to impress males by demonstrating that they can produce works of beauty and value to decorate the home and trade for profit.

Dwarfs have money, minted from precious metals, and get paid for their labors; they buy and sell goods among themselves, and have a few among them who make a living as shopkeepers (an important if less honorable job). The other free peoples don't grasp the concept of coins, and do not consider them worth much in trade, so will rarely have any. In addition to quarrying stone and mining metals and gems, they have a full set of trades related to metallurgy, jewelry, glassmaking, and stonework--including sculpture and carving and other artistic skills. Some more artistic creations, especially jewelry (and most especially practical jewelry such as brooches and buckles), are traded to humans.

Nearly all of their food is imported, although they do raise some poultry and goats, keep small gardens for fresh vegetables, and have a few hardy fruit trees. Other than a few items made from goat hair, clothing is also imported (even goat skins are traded to humans, who better understand leather work). In some ways the dwarfs are the richest of people, spending far more of their resources on beauty and decor and personal comforts; yet the necessities of life such as food and clothing are the most precious in dwarf lands due to their scarcity.

Humans

Humans are not far from the norms. They run a bit high in Stamina (1@7) and Strength (1@6) due to their hard lives, and a bit low in Ed Lev (1@2) due to the limitations of their culture, but are otherwise fairly ordinary.

Although they grow some vegetables and some grains in small fields and gardens, they have become primarily ranchers, raising cattle and sheep and other livestock on open ranges, making meat the primary staple in their diets. They also produce much of leather, wool, and horn.

Orc slaves usually begin working in the fields, making and storing hay, threshing and grinding grains, picking vegetables. But those who show intelligence and a willingness to cooperate are usually moved into other tasks. Many become horsemen and footmen, assisting with the flocks and herds. Others are apprenticed as assistants in various trades. And of course there are household slaves in the villages who help with cooking and cleaning. The treatment of slaves is very much related to their position. Field workers live in community slave houses not much different from those used by the elves; they are fed inferior food but ample portions. Household slaves will usually have their own rooms in the master's house, and eat the master's food, but after he does. Those working with the herds, while considered slaves and

unable to make their own choices, are otherwise not treated much differently from human herdsmen, eating the same food at the same time, sleeping in separate but similar tents, and working much the same jobs. Of course, most (but not all) humans will be mounted and most (but not all) orcs will be on foot, and orcs never give instructions to humans but must follow the instructions of humans; but otherwise an orc footman has the same job as his human counterpart, and an orc horseman is no different from a human horseman.

Human society seems less structured and less predictable. The smallest villages on the range tend to be communal, built around one primary family who has collected the livestock and who in some sense hires all the others. In these single-ranch villages, there is a strong tendency for everyone to work together and eat together and share the profits of their labors more communally, as the primary family somewhat paternalistically cares for all of the others. In larger villages there will generally be several primary rancher families, and the others will receive more clearly defined wages in terms of immediate payments of food and supplies in exchange for their work; they will also tend to work for whichever rancher needs them at the moment, and those ranch hands who are particularly skilled will often do well for themselves by negotiating for better payment for services.

Similarly, humans tend to select their own spouses, with elaborate courtships. Unlike the elves, they decide who they will marry without consulting their elders; unlike the dwarfs, they do so on the basis of very subjective emotionalism.

Humans have many tradesmen in larger villages, including specialists in leatherwork, butchers, weavers and cloth makers, tailors, woodworkers, carvers of horn and bone, and more. Most of these tasks can be done by the majority of humans, but these tradesmen have professional skill in their areas, and so are able to produce better quality work faster; thus many humans will trade their animals to acquire goods they could not make as well themselves because it's not worth their time to try. There are also some humans who have made a specialty of trading, making runs from the dwarf borders through many human towns to the elf borders, bartering goods back and forth throughout their journeys. Even within the human lands, wool and mutton are more available in some areas and leather and beef in others, so such traders can make a good living at what they do.

Wizardry

The player will expect there to be magic in this world. He will probably be disappointed. It isn't that there is none at all, but rather that what remains is dwindling and disappearing, and the indigs attach to it no importance. If the verser asks around, he will be told that such wizards once existed, and may still; but only on an exceptional GE roll (not worse than 6, Best Hopes) will he find anyone who believes they know where a wizard has actually been seen within the past ten years. Even then, the referee should allow skill checks and GE rolls to control whether the character actually manages to find a living wizard.

Any wizards who do exist will be skeptical of anyone who wishes to learn their secrets. "It's not like science, you know. It takes years of study, great mental focus, deep understanding. You can't give up in a few years. Becoming a wizard is the work of a lifetime. Go study science; it's easier." But if the character can persuade the wizard of his determination and commitment, most wizards will be happy to have an apprentice for the few remaining years of their lives.

Because magic is fading from the world, the mag bias is dropping; but the wizards who remain do not understand this. They spend many hours pouring over ancient tomes trying to understand spells that will no longer work for indigs. Within even a few weeks, the character should get the impression that all his mentor does is read, eat, sleep, and occasionally tinker with a few things in his lab. The lab will be stocked with all kinds of strange materials intended as possible components for magic skills.

For most of the first year, the apprentice will be primarily tasked with keeping the place clean and neat and helping with the daily chores. He'll work with the cook, file books properly, dust the lab, sweep the floors, and run errands to the nearest village for supplies (usually trading a small scroll on which some magic incantation is penned, and his master will tell him which tradesman will want it). Most wizards have

well-developed skills in scrying, and so will know much of what goes on in the lives of those with whom they have dealings.

Sometime during the second year, the wizard will begin to teach the character the nature of magic. This will mean that in addition to his chores he will also have to spend several hours a day reading difficult basic writings about focusing yourself on the objective, properly performing the rituals, correctly pronouncing the words. He will learn several ancient languages at least well enough to pronounce them from characters on a page (if he wishes, he may expand this to include learning to understand and speak the language, but that's not really covered in his master's expectations). By the end of the second year, he'll be ready to begin learning magic skills.

Time flow through this should be very flexible. The first few days of chores should be played out to some degree, and then the clock sped up; the occasional errands should be played, at least at first, but then even that should be reduced to "another month passes". When most of a year has passed this way, the reading should be introduced; if the verser wishes to do more than is included in his master's expectations, the referee should carefully consider the amount of time in the day. He will have very little time, and a regular training program of any sort is out of the question unless it very closely relates to that which he is already doing (such as learning a language) or he has skills which enable him to do with less sleep than normal.

Spell teaching will also be slow. For one thing, the wizard wants to assure that his pupil isn't going to do something which will go horribly wrong. For another thing, there isn't that much magic to teach, and the wizard expects to get many years of assistance from his student which he won't get if the latter decides he's learned enough and leaves. Thus there will be mostly level one spells for the first year, maybe one or two per month. They won't include many that are particularly connected to religion (this is arcane magic). Learning to use a focus, affecting strike and damage and checks, and removing fear would be included. There would also be several protections and resistances, including spell protections, intended as safety nets for future learning. Such learning will include the bonuses for teacher and example.

He will not learn many second-level skills (curatives are rarely arcane) other than remove fatigue. Thus in the second year he will deal with third level skills. The referee may select which ones he considers appropriate.

Throughout this time, the character should be exposed to other skills, magicks beyond his present ability. He will have the usual chance to learn such a skill (treating the written materials as an example, but having no teacher). In such cases, the referee should expect botches to be very severe and potentially fatal; and if he (and his teacher) survives a botch, there should be a serious reprimand and punishments.

Be mindful that the mag bias is 7@5, so there isn't too far to go. The most difficult things his mentor is likely to be able to do will involve detects; and the most impressive probably involve lightning and manipulating energy.

The Adventure

There are many excellent places in which to start a character; but the best is just within the edge of the jungle. He should be able to hear lumbering; a group of one of the free peoples is clearing ground as part of expansion of their territory (men for range, elves for fields, dwarfs for space to build). If the character moves toward the sound, he will realize that there are creatures hidden in the trees, primitively dressed and armed with stone-tipped spears and clubs, apparently preparing to ambush the lumberjacks. The player may take whatever action he desires; however, if he is seen by the orcs, they will assume him to be an enemy and include them in their attack, unless he can by remarkable means persuade them that he is on their side.

Thereafter, if the character associates with the free peoples, the pervasive nature of the slave trade should be apparent to him; and if he is near the jungles he should also be reminded that the free peoples are

claiming and clearing the jungles which the orcs regard as their territory. If he raises these issues, the free peoples will have simple answers: enslavement rescues the orcs from their primitive existences; the land doesn't belong to anyone, as even the orcs who hunt it come from many tribal groups and are admittedly hunting beyond their own territorial boundaries; the orcs are not demihuman and need the civilizing efforts brought by conquest.

If the character somehow goes with the orcs, the divided nature of their tribes should come into focus. He should also be exposed to their various religions, and especially have a few run-ins with followers of Sarne who object to him.

From these basic ideas much conflict can develop on several levels. Tribal and interspecies wars can develop. Great debates can arise, possibly leading to charges of heresy. On the other hand, the character could settle into a non-confrontational life, finding a niche among the free peoples and building skills.

Orc Stats

The standard orc is a bit different from the average human. He's stronger and tougher, and a better fighter generally, but not as smart or as quick. Three orc heroes are also presented here, models from which others may be designed. Each is distinct; the names were selected for mnemonic purposes.

Brutus is strong and tough. He tends to use the club, a damaging weapon, but he has 3@2 expert skill with it as well as a 2@1 MSV, so he attacks six times in a minute, has an 85% bias-adjusted chance of success before defensive modifiers, and gains two damage category bonuses plus two damage points. On top of this, he has developed his own grappling weaponless combat style which can rip an opponent apart. A 2@8 SAL here gives him a 92% chance of success, four attacks per minute, and three damage category bonuses (one of which is converted to +10 damage points if not offset by penalties) on a base annoying attack. A 2@3 damage value means he divides all damage in half, tossing fractions. He's not smart, he's not quick, but he's tough. He doesn't ask others to follow him, but they are inspired to do so by his courage and strength.

Dexter is quick. He prefers the spear, and has honed his skill to 3@5 with that damaging weapon. In martial combat he has an 80% chance to hit, one damage category bonus and five damage points, and six attacks. He prefers to throw spears for an 82% chance at short range. He's quick on his feet, and has some acrobatics and tumbling skills, including a 2@4 SAL evasive tumbling: each round he may roll against his 59% chance, and if successful the RS value (the roll) is a penalty against all attacks launched at him that minute.

Brighton is better known for his leadership than his combat skills; he is a keen strategist. Still, he has low professional skills with club (2@1) and spear (2@3). This gives him 74% with the club and 76% with the spear in martial combat (2 attacks, +1DC), 77% with the thrown spear (4 attacks, +2DC). More importantly, he is particularly astute at evaluating the strengths and weaknesses both of his own people and of his opponents, and devising a strategy to take advantage of these.

The referee can devise variations on these if the game moves to an extended campaign with numerous orc uprisings.

	One Each Orc	Brutus	Dexter	Brighton	
Persuasion	1@7	2@1	2@2	2@7	
Charisma	1@2	1@2	1@4	1@6	
An Mag	1@1	1@1	1@3	1@5	
Strength	1@9	2@9	1@9	1@8	
Stamina	1@9	2@7	1@10	1@9	

Resistance	1@8	2@3	2@1	1@8	
Density	1@2	1@4	1@2	1@2	
Flexibility	1@3	1@3	1@8	1@3	
Agility	1@4	1@5	2@3	1@6	
Hand/Eye	1@7	1@9	2@10	1@7	
Intellect	1@3	1@2	1@5	1@10	
Intuition	1@6	1@6	1@7	2@5	
Ed Lev	0@10	0@10	0@10	1@1	
Will Power	1@10	2@8	2@3	2@4	
RSV	1@7	1@8	2@4	2@1	
MSV	1@7	2@1	2@2	1@10	
TV	1@4	1@5	1@7	1@8	
DV	1@7	2@3	1@9	1@8	
BRA Tech	1@6	1@6	1@7	2@5	
BRA Psi	1@10	2@8	2@3	2@7	
BRA Mag	1@6	1@6	1@7	2@5	
BRA Bod	1@10	2@9	2@3	2@4	
Bias Tech	3@	3@	3@	4@	
Bias Psi	0@	0@	0@	0@	
Bias Mag	0@	0@	0@	0@	
Bias Bod	5@	7@	6@	5@	