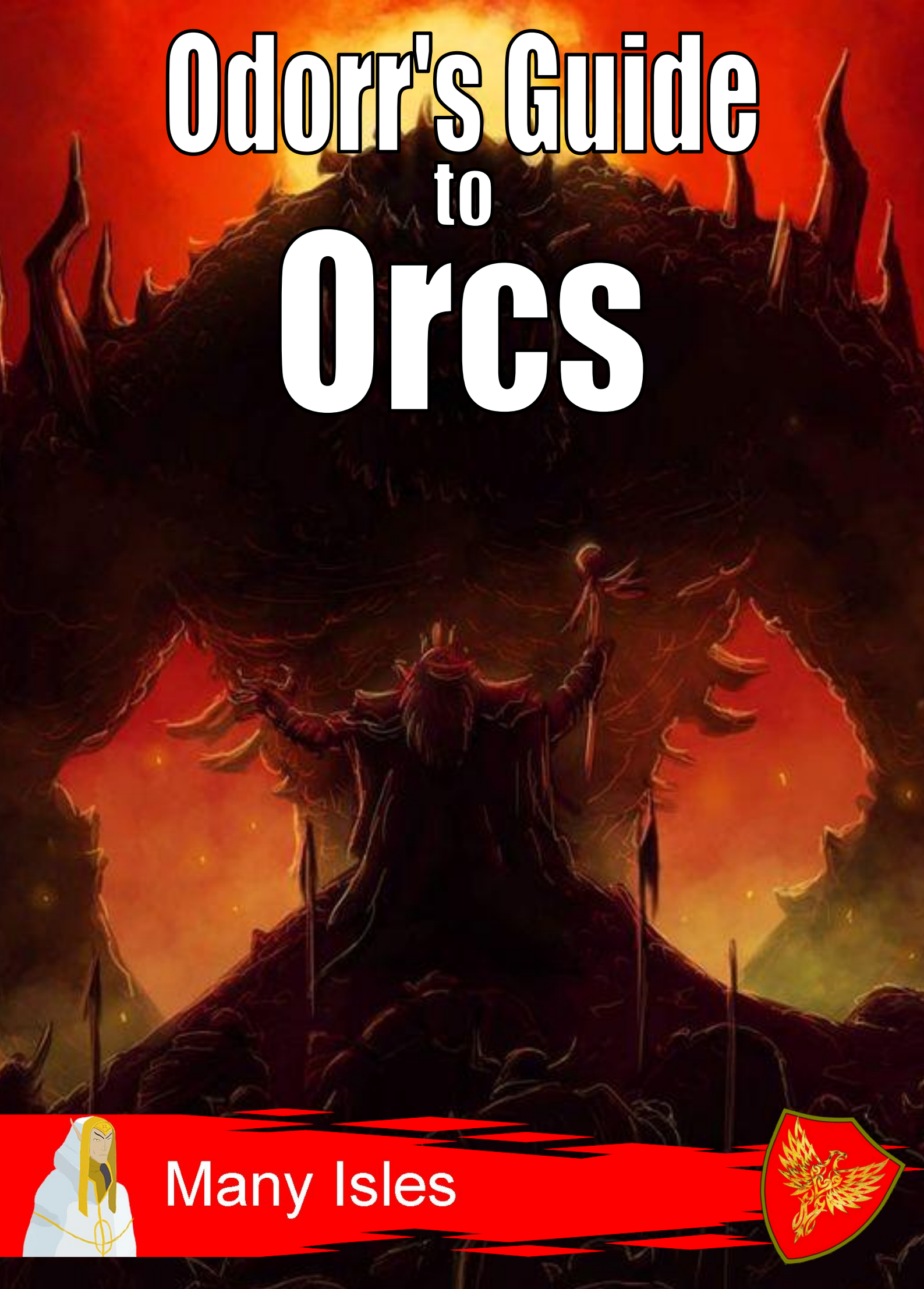
Odorr's Guide to Orcs



Many Isles

1 - Introduction

Orcs are a common sight in the Many Isles, especially so in Oshmondu, the material plane. The fear of orcish assault is just as great in an armored dwarven caravan among the high peak's rough passes as in a large humman settlement set in the middle of a vast plain.

But who are these faceless monsters? They are present from coast to coast on nearly every single island, where thousands of other races mingle in their colorful differences, whilst the whole orcish race seems to be a single black veil. Are they truly just an uniform mass of brainless, bloodthirsty brutes? Or is there more to them, might they even one day achieve civilization?

Why Orcs are Faceless

Orcs might be the greatest fantasy trope opponents out there. Everything has them, and they are truly among the most famous aspects of fantasy out there. Yet, this widespread fame seems to have melted them down into a single uniform mass of black monsters that attack the good guys.

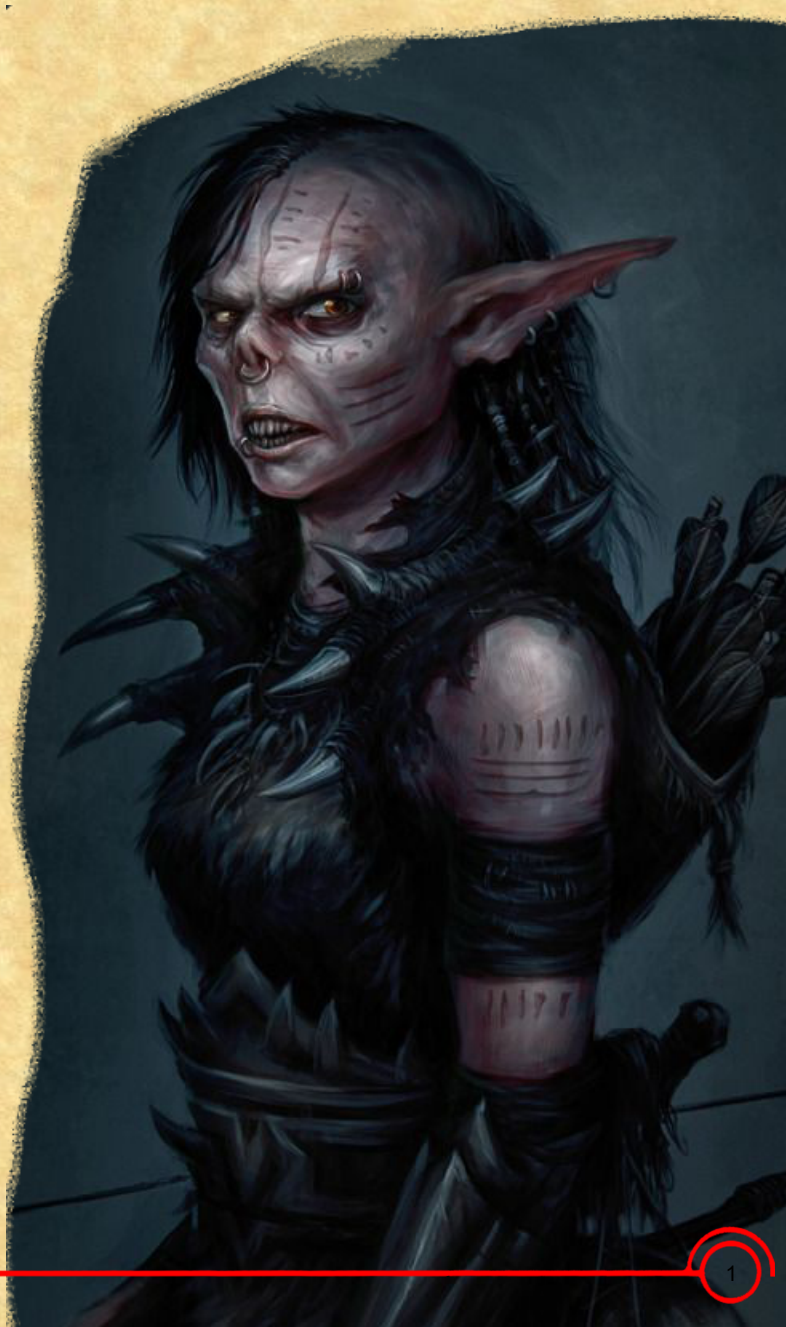
Not so in the Many Isles. The purpose of this guide, and of the orcish race in general throughout the lore, is to give a face to this often brutal race and show in what ways they, too, are a proper distinguished race trying to survive against the powerful competition of more civilized races.

Orcish History

Known history starts around 50'000 b. OW, soon after the emergence of the dwarven race. The only remaining race before them were the elves, famous for their aloofness and standing away from the world's events - and the orcs. Indeed, since the very dawn of time, when humanoids seem to have emerged, the orcs were there, before even goblinoids. This makes them contestants to the title of most ancient humanoid race.

Since their very first emergence, as naked slavering monsters roaming the wilds and attacking whatever moved, nothing much seems to have happened to them: while the elves built a grand empire and the dwarves spread underneath the world, the orcs remained brutish dwellers living off the wilds.

However, the orcs did evolve. They learned how to band together, build settlements, and sometimes, build empires.



2 - Orcish Society

Even though most inhabitants of the Many Isles would describe orcs as "dark filthy brutes attacking you out of nowhere", this race does have a life beyond raids on other humanoids.

In fact, most orcish groups usually survive on their own in the wilds. Three major categories of social structure can be formed: plains, forests and mountains tribes. These different environments are each the home of different societies, and slight racial variation can be spotted between inhabitants of these habitats.

Forests orcs are usually tough yet lean compared to their plains compatriots, with more brownish skin. Plains orcs are wide and strong, with smaller tusks than most. Their skin is black or dark grey. Mountains orcs have similar body builds to forests orcs and skin tones to plains orcs, although their eyes are almost always red contrasted to the yellow ones of the others.

Of course, each category can be a host to multiple variations mainly depending on population size, of which the most important ones were noted. Of course, the description of orcish society given in this chapter is not exhaustive, and other ways of life may exist.

All societies presented here can be found in their WorldAnvil articles.

Plains Tribes

Sometimes, there isn't anything like civilization around the territory of an orc tribe, and they have lost or are unaware of the settled lifestyle.

In order to survive, a **wandering orc tribe** is quite small; it contains two dozen beings, at best. These orcs are usually cattle herders, in most cases leading a herd of 50 to 100 badeep across the plains, from brubber tree patch to brubber tree patch. They eat almost exclusively judeep, badeep meat, and wild game. Such a travelling tribe is simply built: everyone helps everyone, the males go fight or, if bows are available to the tribe, shoot off the dangerous things, and females lead everything else. No leaders exist, as none are necessary and the tribe can happily live together. Due to the typical predomination of males (three quarters of orcish births are male), no fixed couples exist, but females choose who and when they want to have a child with, and then both usually care for the child's education until the female has a child with another orc, in which case the male alone cares for the child.

Sometimes, a group of wild orcs goes further in the technological development and becomes a **settled tribe**. For a wandering tribe to become settled, multiple factors need to play a role: either brubber trees or badeep are hard to get, game to hunt is plentiful, the soils are rich and crops readily available, and the orcs have access to good hunting equipment (bows) and farming techniques. If all these requirements are met, a wild tribe lives in a larger settlement (usually with up to a hundred orcs), sometimes living as nomads, and sometimes as fixed settlers.

In such a settled tribe, a leader is necessary: this is often the orc with the most experience, and either a powerful woman with a supportive and enforcing male at her side, or just a male orc. Also, due to the necessity of daylight in growing crops and finding game to hunt, settled orcs have a diurnal lifestyle, in contrast to all other orcish groups and to their own preferences. They still prefer using the night if they need to perform anything extraordinary, such as an assault on a rival orcish tribe.

Settled orcish society is more structured, notably into two groups: the hunters and the farmers. The hunters consist of all those with the skill necessary for hunting, whilst the farmers contain all the other orcs. Sometimes, the farmers herd cattle on the side. Together, these two groups produce sufficient foods to sustain the entire tribe, meaning, themselves. Each evening, the entire tribe comes together in the middle of the settlement and eats together. The leftovers are kept for lunch the next day.

Marital traditions are already more advanced within a settled orc village. Each hut or tent is owned by a single female orc, which typically has three males as her husbands within the same home. Any kind of engagement outside these families is socially tabooed. The children of a woman, as long as they are younger than 2, do not go to work with her, but are kept in the chieftain's hut under the care of the chieftain's family. Once a child is old enough, it joins in on the work of his mother or dads, and chooses which parent it wants to go with (usually, both hunters and farmers are represented in a single family). In this way, it is educated until it, too, gets married to a woman or inherits or builds a house/tent.

Orcish Activity

Orcs are nocturnal, meaning all the societies described here perform their activities during the night and sleep during the day. Only settled wild orcs use a diurnal lifestyle, due to the necessity of growing crops.

Forests Tribes

Orcs that live near or in areas settled by a civilized race usually make their homes hidden in forests, which is why they are called "forest" orcs. They live on raids. These creatures are more advanced technologically than plains orcs, but also have three distinctions in their development: scavenger and autonomous tribes, as well as hosts.

A **scavenger tribe** usually lies hidden within lightly settled lands, such as an expansive forest bordering wide plains of farmland. If the area were any more advanced, then they would be wiped out quickly - they aren't far along the technological ladder.

Scavenger tribes are quite small, no larger than 20-30 orcs. They use tents, either stolen or in the form of hides strapped over branches, as shelter. They change their camp regularly, usually every week, partly because the surrounding area will be raided out and because the other races might start hunting them down. They hold no guard during the day and are extremely sure of themselves, as they thrive in regions where they encounter little to no resistance. This also means that scavenger orcs are extremely selfish and prone to doing everything by themselves.

They have no leader, much like wandering wild tribes, and act on communal consent. Females are slightly less rare among their tribe than otherwise, because males are more prone to fighting and getting killed in the process, giving a one third:two thirds ratio for women. A female orc chooses her mate(s) herself, but usually doesn't have more than two or three. She lets her husbands care for their own children. Otherwise, no social structures exist, and food and loot are distributed and kept as their owners see fit.

Once night falls, the entire tribe goes to war, splitting into two to three groups. One or two males are left behind with all the children that are too young for battle. These small groups select lone houses, often farmhouses, and take all the food and useful equipment there is (they do not care for wealth or trinkets all that much, except as presents to each other). They might kill one or two of the inhabitants if they fight back, selecting older and male targets over the others, and leaving just enough food (as long as the orcs themselves aren't starving) for the raided people to survive and be raided again in a year or so's time.

If faced with any danger, such as a militia or even just a commoner mob hunting them down, scavenger tribes are prone to shattering. Any orc will flee with those he prefers and leave behind all that isn't food or useful equipment, such as armor and weapons. Thus, a group of soldiers from the Lord sent out to chase off the nasty Bloodkillers will find a group of rags (the tents) with useless trinkets and crying child orcs, and nothing else left.

An **autonomous tribe** is socially advanced, and the highest known technological advancement known for orcs. These creatures are well equipped with leather or metal armors, and metal polearms to go with this. Commonly, they lived close to powerful civilized nations for a while before those nations disappeared, leaving their wealth for the taking of the orcs. They could also have developed their advancement through other methods, such as orog intelligence joining the party, but scavenging remains is the most common way.

An autonomous tribe lives in a fixed settlement, often hidden in the woods, but sometimes in other areas as well. They are large (200-300 members) and firmly led, and have ready access to weaponry, be it through trade, mining it themselves, or a large storage of such goods. Commonly, such a tribe's huts are large clay, wood or stone buildings with thatch, wood or even tiled roofs. Surrounding that settlement is a wall, normally a wooden palisade adorned with watchtowers. In the center of this settlement lies the governing building and clerical necessities.

The tribe's government is fixed by tradition and has complete control. This might be a single powerful orc, or a group of respected elders or faction representatives governing in unison. Although their means of government are diverse, many have some aspects in common.

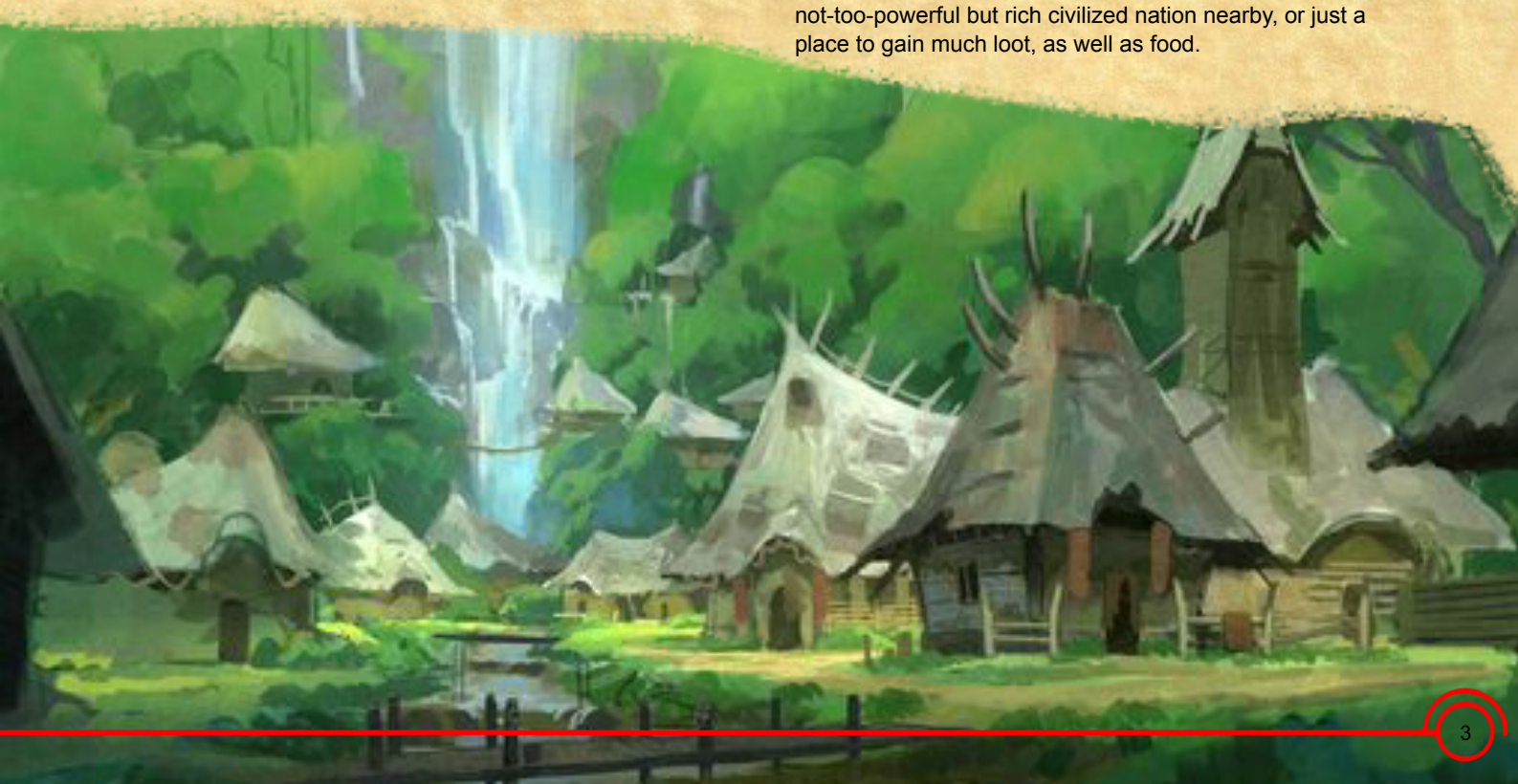
Food needs to be produced for the tribe, which is taken care of by one faction. They grow crops (which might even be domesticated) and herd cattle, occasionally hunting, too, which is quite rare, since the population is so big hunting isn't efficient enough. A second faction is usually the more specialized workers: those producing worked goods, such as tanned leather or weapons. This also includes those that mine and forge metals, or the traders that procure the advanced goods.

The last faction might sometimes be seen as nobility, sometimes only as military officers, and sometimes as militia. They are a small group of male orcs who know all the martial knowledge known to the tribe and teach some of it to those that aren't part of the military faction, in case they might be needed. These elite fighters are masters of the heavy bows, and lead the united tribe into battle if needed. They also serve as police force and passive defense.

Marital traditions may vary greatly within such autonomous groups.

Hosts are the waves of orcs that wash over civilized territory, looting all there is and running on to loot more. They are a very short-lived thing, usually surviving no longer than a dozen years or so. A host is always led by a single dominant figure, one that often has gained godly boons. The host leader has two to five lieutenants, ones that make sure that all other are aware of what the leader is saying, and from 300 to 1000 orcs under his sway.

Orcish hosts are formed by a sudden event shaking all the tribes scattered across an area, usually caused by the rise of a radj - a warlord. Under his sway, the tribes unite, afraid that he might otherwise turn against them. Another prerequisite for the tribe to form is that there should be a not-too-powerful but rich civilized nation nearby, or just a place to gain much loot, as well as food.



The host is divided into two groups: the main host (all the males and female fighters), and the second host (the female non-fighters and the children, as well as any livestock and materials needed). Every single male orc fights under the leadership of his radj. The main host washes onwards at a running pace, normally on foot, storming over any defenses of the civilized people and taking all the food, armor, and equipment available (again, they are not interested in treasure, only things of immediate value). Once they have taken an important place, or their war wagons (large carts where all the loot not carried directly is placed) are full, the main host stops in their onslaught and waits for the second host to catch up, which usually takes half a day. The males then meet with their wife (as usual, a female probably has three husbands), the united host eats a great feast before sunrise, then rests through the whole day. Once most of the foods are eaten, or the loot transferred to the second host, the main host runs off again, off to do some more looting.

Such a host dissipates as soon as there is no great places left to loot, shattering into autonomous or even wild tribes as the necessity of a huge war band lessens.

Sometimes, multiple hosts band together. In this case, each singular host is called a clan and given a name, usually that of it's leader's tribe, and the whole force named horde. Such enormous banding together is very rare and can cause enormous damage to anything that might be looted. Such a cataclysm occurred as the demon Lamik brought immense numbers of hosts under his sway - and the devastating Orc Wars followed.

Mountains Tribes

Sometimes, orc tribes don't have to sustain themselves through self-sufficiency (plains tribes) or raiding (forest tribes), but just sit in mountain caves and occasionally come out to wash over everything and anyone that is anywhere near the mountains. How these orcs eat and drink, no one knows. They might not even be true biological orcs, but some magically sustained race. Their society exists, however, and is common to all these odd mountain tribes.

At the lowest level of social magnitude lies the tribe. It consists of 10-20 orcs living together in the caves. They are usually equipped with next to nothing and live on god knows what. They have no marital tradition: they mate whenever they want, and the children taught by whoever wants to. This nonchalance in matters reproduction is replicated by every mountain orc.

Multiple tribes may band together under an influential leader, becoming a posse. This usually counts 50-100 orcs, with the more powerful ones wielding crude weaponry and maybe clothing. The leader (called poss), of course, has the best of given equipment. It is interesting to note that bows are a rarity in mountain orc groups, in contrast to the predominance of bows in other societies. Polearms, too (the secondary weapon of choice for other orcs) are quite rare for the mountain variety.

Above posses, you need a divine sign or very influential orc to rally mountain orcs. These groups of posses become hosts, carry a single clan name (chosen by its leader, the mountain radj - Radjhak), and are the size of typical hosts. These can also rally together and become hordes, although due to their much lesser equipment and odd nature, those are rare and don't have much impact besides wiping out some of the inhabitants of the mountains, such as dwarven strongholds. Mountain orc tribes aren't strong, but they're numerous.

3 - Orcish Religion

The unity of the orcish race was greaty aided by its single religion of venerating Gruum'Uruk, the orcish pantheon. This union and cooperation between the followers of the various gods led to the founding of great hosts that could wash over entire civizations in short spans of time.

However, not always are the orcish god's follower's in accordance. These minor disputes, along with exasperation of some, will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Gruum'Uruk, the Orcish Pantheon

Before the orcs there was a race of humanoids called the Oytligher, one shunned by the others and repulsed by them. Their plight was heard by Gark'Uruk, and he gave them power and hatred to destroy those that had offended them.

His sister, Frugga, gave them many children, so the fight could be carried on throughout eternity. She also swore to protect her children from magic and its horrible effects.

Later, the other races were becomming more successful thanks to their great gods of wisdom, strategy and construction, building great cities and forging great weapons against which the orcs could not match. And so they called to He Who Watches for aid, asking him to grant them sharp metal so they could fight back.

And so Grak'Uruk mated with his sister, producing a first child that was so riddled with disease and rot that her mother cried in repulsion. But this child was a god, and so Yurtrus joined the holy family of Gruum'Uruk. And yet, as rotten as she was, she could not aid the orcs in their plight, and so Grak'Uruk mated with Frugga again. Their son was thin and dark, and the others knew not what he would become.

Darag'Aas, named after his wicked red teeth, became a dark and flitting entity often despised by his father, for his stealthy ways did not fit Grak'Uruk's assertion of might.

But the orcish plight was not resolved: still, they were being crushed by other races, and their two hated new gods could not save them. Their savior turned out to be not a god, but a simle orcish warlord called Urggo. Under his leadership, many tribes banded together, founding a kingdom and starting to mine their own metals. With this new army, the orcs had a chance of defeating their many enemies, and Urggo led them to war, defeating great enemy legions. He eventually died in battle, after founding a great orcish empire. So great were his achievements that he rose to godhood at the side of Grak'Uruk, who jealously kept him to the side. But Urggo, now called Urg'Neval, was wise and knew that it was best for the orcish race to stand under the protection of an united pantheon.

Despite Urg'Neval's great efforts in teaching other orcs the ways of civilization, it had been to early and too quick for the orcish race, and the empire shattered again.

Gruum'Uruk

God	Domain
Grak'Uruk	War
Frugga	Maternity, Magic
Urg'Neval	Strategy
Darag'Aas	Darkness, Murder
Yurtrus	Death, Disease

Grak'Uruk, He Who Watches

The father of the orcish pantheon is the strongest orcish god, much like orc society is always dominated by the strongest. Next to being the father of all orcish gods, he is also the father of the orcish race as a whole.

He is the one who became patron of an ancient race, the Oytligher, and made them into his own children, the orcs. All orcs believe Grak'Uruk is above them, observing them as they strike out on the noble deeds of pillaging and killing. Every head ripped off its shoulders, every farmhouse torched is a sign to Grak'Uruk, is a proof of an orcish clan's veneration of him. So, every orc warrior must prove himself to the everwatching one.

Grak'Uruk's distinctive feature, a single unblinking eye, is therefore often drawn on a warrior's armor or his skin in the form of a large, black eye. Orcish war wagons, in which they place all the loot they gleaned from their raids, almost always have Grak'Uruk's eye painted on them, be it as prayer, as a means to scare other orcs from plundering the wagon, or of reminding the weaker-willed members of a war band that He Who Watches is watching them, and that they must prove themselves before their god. For the same reason, raiding groups often carry a banner bearing the unblinking eye.

Frugga, The Claw

Frugga is the sister and wife of Grak'Uruk. She is seen as Mother of all orcs, as well as the deity of maternity. Therefore, she is the patron of many orcish females. She is also the goddess of magic, held responsible whenever something odd happens as "the woman's foolery".

A small orcish tribe often lives in a cave complex. Beyond the outer caves and the male's dens lies Frugga's realm, the space allocated to females and the education of children. Three white or red claws are often painted or engraved into the walls, and small statuettes of female orcs are placed on imposing rocks. Women educate children over a duration of 8 years here, teaching them all the combat and survival they'll need - sometimes going outside, but often performing the lessons within. Claws of Frugga, her gifted followers, lead these women.

In a larger hosts, a single camp is typically erected, although two or three sometimes are also built. In such a main camp, the inner and half the outer part are allotted to women, whilst in multiple camps, one is given to almost exclusively women and children. Flags with Frugga's three claws show the border between male and female camp, and no children may cross it except to go into the wilderness or visit the host's leader. Here, Claws of Frugga serve as protectors, leaders and representants of the females, making sure the children and women get their fair share of food. Also, children are typically left only five or 6 years to the care of females in such hosts.

Urg'Neval, The Blade

He is the only member of Gruum'Uruk that isn't part of Grak'Uruk's family. He was once a great orc war chieftain, who attained such glory and power that he rose to godhood, joining Grak'Uruk in the endless battles.

The Blade is the god of strategy, attempting to teach the mindless brutes spawned by He Who Watches that strategy is the better part of courage. His followers are able and intelligent fighters, ones who know what and how to tell their fellow orcs so that they follow orders, and also who know how to fight, be it alone or leading a host of orcs.

Often, a Blade of Urg'Neval is second to the leader of an orish hosts, serving as tactical advisor and leading the host's flanks as its storms forward in bloodlust. A Blade always keeps a cool head, and tries to save the host whenever it gets into a difficult situation.

Urg'Neval, the Blade

Stupidly vast annoyance, unoriginal neutral

Armor Class h22, d14
Hit Points 315
Speed 40ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	HON
24 (+7)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws. Str +13, Con +11, Hon +9
Skills. Animal Handling +12, Athletics +19, Intimidation +10
Damage Resistances necrotic
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Goblinoid, Orc
Challenge 20 (25'000 xp)

Regeneration. Urg'Neval regains 20 hit points at the start of his turn as long as he didn't take fire or acid damage since the end of his last turn.
Magic Resistance. Urg'Neval has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
Legendary Resistance(3/day). If Urg'Neval fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.
Magic Weapons. His weapon attacks are magical.
Relentless (Recharges on Rest). If Urg'Neval fails on a savin throw, he can choose to succeed instead.
Indomitable Might. Urg'Neval can choose to replace his Strength check's rolled result with his Strength score.
Reactive. Urg'Neval can take an opportunity attack during each creature's turn.

Actions

Multiattack. Urg'Neval makes three attacks with his longsword.

Longsword. h+14 d+9, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20(3d10+7) slashing damage + 5(1d8) necrotic damage. On a critical hit, Urg'Neval rolls the dice three times instead of twice.

Legendary Actions

Urg'Neval can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. He cannot take the same action twice in a row, and can take one only at the end of another creature's turn. He regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Foe Smiter (1). He makes a single melee attack against a target he can reach.
Leadership(1). Three allies of his choice that can hear him can use their reactions to move up to their speed and make one melee attack.
Stomp(2). He stomps the ground. All creatures standing on it within 30 feet of him must make a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw, falling prone on a fail.

Darag'Aas, The Red Fang

He is the son of Grak'Uruk and Frugga, and the god of sneakiness and murder, which aren't very common skills within orcish society.

Followers of Darag'Aas are few and far between, as Darag'Aas himself is an outsider within Gruum'Uruk, often hated by his father. Only larger hosts or clans have a clade of Darag'Aas followers with them, and an orc gaining affection for the Red Fang usually leaves their tribe to join the larger one, so that he may be trained by other followers.

In a cave lair, Red Fangs of Darag'Aas are usually placed far within the complex, partly of their own accord but also because they are despised or feared by other orcs. There, they raise giant bats and train in the sneaky ways of their god. They are usually left out of the raiding, having to go and steal some food for themselves, living de facto outside of their tribe. For this reason, some Red Fang only tribes were formed, living in small numbers and dark, forgotten places.

Within larger hosts, the Red Fangs are used much more effectively, often under the initiative of a Blade of Urg'Neval. Living in separate camps, Red Fangs are used as air force and assassins to remove enemy leaders. To venerate Darag'Aas, an orc only has to become a Red Fang. However, drawing odd things with an enemy's blood and killing offerings in their sleep, typically other orcs, is also a common practice of showing one's affection for the god.

Yurtrus, The Bloated One

The daughter of Grak'Uruk and Frugga resembles a shambling mound of rot and vomit. She is Yurtrus, goddess of death and disease.

Hardly any orcs ever willingly choose to venerate Yurtrus. When their food rots, when their badeep fall ill, when their leader dies, it is Yurtrus' doing. Much more often, she is hated then venerated, which often results in retaliation through more disease.

Some orcish clans, such as those led by an orog or another more intelligent member of the orcish species, do pay respects to the Bloated One, hoping she will spare them of disesases and too many deaths. They usually build cairns of stones or paint white hands on cave walls. This works most of the time.

Some clans are led by especially intelligent members, or are part of a large host where someone will have recognized the utility of Yurtrus. Whenever an orc falls ill to some diesease, instead of killing it on the spot, it is brought to the deepest hole of the cave complex, or a separate, walled-off cluster in a host's camp. There, the followers of Yurtrus tend him by letting his disease grow. These shamans of Yurtrus are called Hands of Yurtrus, and are given quite some magical power. The diseased given into their care, meanwhile, are transformed into Bloated Ones of Yurtrus, and sent at enemy lines before battle to literally explode disease into their faces in an acceptable end to their existence.

Clergy of Gruum'Uruk

This part discusses how various orcs pray to their gods.

Forms of Prayer

Grak'Uruk is always venerated, no matter what orcs do. His symbol of a black eye is painted on a tribe's war banner, on the war wagon, and within their camp. The simple act of crying out in rage or attacking a creature is a prayer to him. However, more direct shamanistic connections to Grak'Uruk are achieved by his "priests", the Eyes of Grak'Uruk. They call upon the power of their god to cast destructive spells, effectively praying for him at the same time.

Frugga is venerated by the education of children. As a sign of protection, her symbol - three white claws - is occasionally drawn upon the walls of the place where newborns are kept. Her spirit is the bear, and such cave bears are often grown next to orc whelps in Frugga's realm. Her priests, Claws of Frugga, are in charge of the camp as well as the growing of the children, and often call upon the goddess's power to protec their home. In case of a magical or other powerful attack, a smaller orc tribe usually grants leadership to the Claws, hopint they will protect them from the bad magic.

Their two children's veneration is rare and often restricted to large groups led by intelligent members. Diseased orcs may be handed to the few fanatics of Yurtrus called Hands of Yurtrus for their infamous transformation into Bloated Ones, living bombs of decay. A few secular orcs may leave their tribe to learn the dark ways of Darag'Aas in secluded enclaves of Red Claws.

Urg'Neval, meanwhile, is highly praised in larger orcish groups. Small enclaves of his priests - Blades - take in promising new students and teach them in the ways of martial prowess, leadership, and sometimes even civilization. Tribes with Blades of Urg'Neval usually do very well compared to those without, often coming close to setting up a truly civilized orcish settlement.

The Dark Ways of Darag'Aas

Grak'Uruk is not one to love his children, nor any other gods for that matter. He regularly wages war with Frugga, and despises his daughter Yurtrus. He generally won't let Urg'Neval into the holy fortress, keeping him in a tent outside. But his hate is greatest for Darag'Aas, who is sneaky and murderous and the extreme opposite of what a good orc should be. If it weren't for the god's aptitude at disappearing, he would likely have had his head torn off long ago.

Similarly, those admiring the was of stealth and murder are despised in orcish tribes. In a smaller group, if an orc is attracted by Darag'Aas's ways, then he had better be silent and hide his appreciation.

Sometimes, an orc's devotion to the Red Fang is so great that he no longer can suffer the brutish, direct and wasteful way of Grak'Uruk's followers. In such a case, the orc leaves his original tribe and goes find a monastery, somewhere hidden in a thick forest or a lonely mountain.

Monasteries of Darag'Aas are large complexes, inhabited by about 50 orcs, carved out of natural caves or built as treehouses in a huge forest. They are permanent constructions and often remain at the same place for centuries, known by all surrounding tribes and circumvented by most.

A monastery is led by a Red Dagger, the greatest priest among the group. The others are "monks" at various stages of skill, learning the ways of Darag'Aas and becoming Red Fangs as they do so.

Next to serving as a home for the monks, a monastery is also a great rookery of giant bats, the traditional mounts of Red Fangs. They get their food and supplies partly through their own labor, partly through nighttime raids, and partly through supplies brought by other tribes.

In a region with a monastery, all wandering tribes will know of is location, and speak the name of Darag'Aas in fear. Much like magic, sneakiness and murder is something most orcs don't know about and are therefore afraid of. However, they are occasionally visited by a single monk atop a giant bat, requesting holy service - the delivering of supplies. The tribe then supplies the requested, usually food, out of both fear of retribution and admirance of the unknown.

Sometimes, a greater outside threat - such as a civilized army out hunting - can cause great ravages to an orcish population. Their first reaction is to wage war, hailing one-eyed banners and storming against the professional soldiers. This rarely works too well in the favor of orcs, and if they have any intelligent leaders, such as Blades of Urg'Neval, they will think of contacting the monastery.

The Red Fangs adore being asked for help by the children of the mighty Grak'Uruk, and therefore gleefully complete their requests. The very next night, the army's leaders might suddenly get murdered, and the renewed orcish onslaught against a distraught group proves devastating.

And so, although the monks are seen as extremely scary and might even be openly despised by an Eye of Grak'Uruk, all orcs still understand the underlying value of such powerful allies. They make occasional donations of food and goods, leave the monastery in peace, and don't restrain their own too much from going and joining the dark ones. A passing traveler might grow perplexed at this duality of opinions towards the hated yet prized monastery of Darag'Aas.

The Plight of the Blades

Odorr Farreach, leader of the Crossed Blades and ruler of Citadel Vodric in the Ogre-Orc Isles, quotes: "The plight of a Blade is the constant struggle against brutality, against savagery. Always, we labor hard to rise our kin; but something, somewhere, will inevitably return us to the mud." Odorr's Crossed Blades is an association of Blades of Urg'Neval that rule the whole of Vodric island, with a population of about 3'000.

The crossed blades regularly convene in Citadel Vodric, relaying their leader's decisions to the other four main enclaves on the island and keeping the small kingdom in check. Under the rule of the Crossed Blades, mines, fields, and shipyards function. Their kingdom is the main exporter of finsihed goods to all monsters in the Ogre-Orc Islands, and they acquire grand payments in food and loot.

But in addition to the island's being a great trade hub and centre of orcish civilization, Citadel Vodric serves as a great monastery where hundreds of orcs sail each year to be taught in the ways of strategy and civilization, returning to their clans to hopefully lead to further settling and farming. Odorr's goal, like that of so many Blades since the advent of Urggo as Urg'Neval so long ago, is raising the orcish race above the mud and into the ranks of civlized society.

But the enterprise is difficult, near impossible. During the Orc Wars, when orcish expansion had reached almost the entirety of Oshmondu, Odorr's great-grandfather had attempted strengthening the great empire's savage core so that it wouldn't fall again in the next ten years.

However, of the great joint effort led by hundreds of Blades to built settlements, fields and mines in the core of the orcish empire (around Balebu and the Ogre-Orc Isles), only the tiny Crossed Blades sect remained as the empire fell and the tribes scattered, reset again to their savage existence in a matter of years.

And so, the Blades believe it is a battle that might be impossible to win. Maybe Urggo had been wrong in stepping down before Grak'Uruk in the goal of preserving unity; maybe he should have slain He Who Watches and become Urg'Uruk, the new orcish god that eventually led them to salvation.

Of course, Odorr would never say this aloud, as would all Blades so well versed in wisdom. It is now too late, the course set: orcish epiphany must be achieved with their inherited brutality, in whichever way possible. It may take millenia more, but one day, the followers of Urg'Neval will succeed and the orcish race will rise to civlization.

4 - Orcish Items

Orcs have many gods, intertwined in odd and often negative relationships yet remaining as Gruum'Uruk, the orcish pantheon.

Items of Faith

To give your orcs some depth beside great backstory and religion, you have at your disposition these magic items. May your warriors be bestowed with the grand power of Gruum'Uruk!

Grak'Uruk's Favor

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

He Who Watches, God of War and Slaughter, bestows his favor on those who sacrifice in his name. It is well-known that his priests, known as the Eyes of Grak'Uruk, cut out one of their own eyes as a symbol of their devotion. Fewer people know what happens to the eye afterwards. Many simply discard it, but some more esoteric priests set the eye in metal or plant resin and fashion it into a necklace that grants them an additional boon.

The wearer of this necklace has advantage on all Insight and Religion checks.

The necklace additionally has 3 charges. The wearer can expend a charge to cast *Augury* without using a spell slot, using the necklace as the material component. The spell's cumulative chance for a random reading from multiple daily castings still applies.

The necklace regains 1d3 charges daily at dawn. If you use the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the eye withers away, and it loses all magical properties.

Frugga's Claws

Weapon, uncommon

According to orcish lore, Frugga was not allowed to wield a weapon even in self-defense. Not to be deterred, she used her claws to fight instead. Some sects that follow Frugga's teachings carry on this tradition to the present day, forging sets of artificial steel "claws" that they strap to their hands. They are deadly in combat, but incredibly unwieldy in other tasks.

While wearing Frugga's Claws, unarmed strikes deal an extra 1d6 slashing damage. The wearer also makes Intimidation checks with advantage while wearing the Claws. At the same time, however, they make Sleight of Hand checks with disadvantage while wearing the Blades.

Mantle of the Cave Bear

Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement)

Most gods, regardless of pantheon, have a sacred animal. For Grak'Uruk, it is the giant ape. For Frugga, it is the cave bear. Large, ferocious predators that are adept at hunting in complete darkness, cave bears are a dangerous foe for even the strongest warriors. Certain sects of Frugga worshippers, however, believe that hunting a cave bear is a rite of passage and a gesture of respect for the goddess' potency. If successful, these lone hunters fashion the pelt of their quarry into a cloak, and Frugga rewards them with her blessing.

The wearer gains advantage on Constitution saving throws and ability checks. Additionally, the wearer can use an action to polymorph into a cave bear once per long rest. This effect lasts for an hour, or until voluntarily dispelled as an action. If the wearer drops to 0 hit points while in bear form, they revert back to their original form, carrying over any excess damage that they took while in bear form.

The Many Isles thank you!

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