

Uruk-hai

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The **Uruk-hai** are fictional characters in J. R. R. Tolkien's fictional universe of Middle-earth. They are introduced in *The Lord of the Rings* as an advanced breed of orcs that serve Sauron and Saruman. The first uruks appeared out of Mordor in attacks on Gondor in T.A. 2475.^[1]

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Uruk-hai

Founded	Third Age
Founder	Sauron
Home world	Middle-earth
Base of operations	Isengard, Mordor

Terminology

The name "Uruk-hai" has the element *Uruk*, which is a Black Speech word related to *Orc*, related to the word "Urko" in Tolkien's invented language of Quenya. The element *hai* means "folk", so "Uruk-hai" is "Orc-folk". A similar term is "Olog-hai" ("troll-folk"), used for a breed of especially strong and vicious trolls capable of surviving sunlight.

Christopher Tolkien describes "Uruks" as an anglicization of "Uruk-hai" and his father used the two terms interchangeably a number of times. While "Uruk-hai" means simply "Orc-folk", the term was reserved for the soldier orcs of Mordor and Isengard. The larger orcs called the smaller breeds *snaga* ("slave").

Literature

The Uruk-hai, described as large black orcs of great strength, first appeared from Mordor about the year 2475 of the Third Age, when they briefly took Ithilien and the city of Osgiliath. These original Uruks were of Sauron's breeding, but Saruman bred his own. Saruman's are shown to be indifferent to sunlight, though whether or not these features are unique to his Uruks is open to question. All Uruks were larger and stronger than other breeds of orc and consequently looked down upon and often bullied them.

In *The Two Towers*, Aragorn observes that the fallen Uruk-hai at Amon Hen had different gear than he had seen before: swords and bows like those of men, and shields and helmets set with the white hand and S-rune of Saruman.^[2] Treebeard speculates that Saruman had crossbred Orcs and Men.^[3] These orcs, who named themselves "the fighting Uruk-hai", made up a large part of Saruman's army, together with the Dunlendings and other human enemies of Rohan.^{[4][5]} They were faster, stronger, and larger than normal orcs, and could

travel during the day without being weakened, although they still did not like it.^[3] Saruman fed them with human flesh.^[6] Saruman's Uruk-hai fought against the Rohirrim at the Battles of the Fords of Isen, at the first of which King Théoden's son Théodred was killed, and at the Battle of the Hornburg, where the vast majority of the Uruks were defeated and destroyed.^[5]

The chapter "The Uruk-hai" details some differences among the orcs. The orc party included orcs from Mordor led by Grishnákh, Saruman's "fighting Uruk-hai" from Isengard led by Uglúk, and "northerners", orcs from Moria. It was the dead Uruks from Isengard whom Aragorn found remarkable.

The Uruk-hai of Isengard were the tallest of these orcs, and had large hands and thick legs, while the orcs of Mordor are described as crook-legged. The orcs of Mordor were all long-armed and crook-legged, not as tall as the Isengarders but larger and more powerful than the orcs from Moria. The orcs of Moria in turn could see better in the dark than the Isengarders. Grishnákh from Mordor is described as "short" but "very broad". In *The Return of the King*, the orcs Shagrat and Gorbag are identified as Uruks of Mordor.

The Lord of the Rings describes several differences in the equipment and heraldry of Uruks and other orcs. Uruks and other orcs in the service of Barad-dûr used the symbol of the red Eye of Sauron. The orcs of Mordor referred to Sauron as the Great Eye, and the Red Eye was painted on their shields. In contrast, Aragorn comments that the Uruk-hai of Saruman were not equipped in the manner of other orcs at all: instead of curved scimitars, they used short broad-bladed swords; and they wore iron helms marked with the Elf-rune < which had the value of "S". It was clear the "S" stood for Saruman, considering Sauron's general desire not to have his name written or spoken. Saruman's Uruks used black shields emblazoned with a white hand, a symbol of Saruman.

The book speculates that various hybrids of Orcs and Men are under Saruman's command, including in the Shire. Some of these called "half-orcs" in *The Two Towers*, were sallow-skinned, squint-eyed and as tall as men. Merry describes them as "horrible: man-high, but with goblin-faces", thus implicitly contrasting them Saruman's Uruk-hai. An account of the first Battle of the Fords of Isen in *Unfinished Tales* clearly treats Uruk-hai and "orc-men" separately.

In *Morgoth's Ring*, Tolkien states that Saruman did interbreed orcs and men, resulting in "Man-orcs large and cunning, and Orc-men treacherous and vile." However, the relationship of the Uruk-hai, as well as half-orcs and "goblin-men", to these creatures is not made explicit.^[7]

Adaptations

In Ralph Bakshi's animated *The Lord of the Rings*, differences between Orc kinds are not noted, though there are recurring physical and costume variations.

In Peter Jackson's film trilogy, Saruman's Uruk-hai are bred from pits beneath Isengard and when the time is "right" they are dug up by lesser orcs working for Saruman, who are occasionally killed by the newborn Uruks. Jackson's depiction of the Uruks being spawned from the mud came from Tolkien's old description of orcs being "bred from the heats and slimes of the earth." It is said they were a result of cross-breeding orcs and "Goblin-men", instead of Orcs and Men. In Tolkien's writings "Goblin" is just another term for orc.

The film versions of the Uruk-hai tend to be tall, broad, burly and with long black hair. The first of them is Lurtz, an original character, who is the first of Saruman's Uruk-hai to be bred. The Uruks are also shown to use crossbows at Helm's Deep, though Tolkien does not mention the weapon in the book. Berserker Uruks were also used during the siege of Helm's Deep, both to clear the ramparts of defenders and to detonate explosive mines to breach the deeping wall. These Uruks were very tall, wore no armour and were prepared for battle (and most likely death) by donning helmets filled with the blood of their enemy.

Sauron is shown to have bred his own Uruk-hai, known as Black Uruks. They can be seen when Frodo is captured by the orcs of Cirith Ungol and his *mithril* shirt leads to a confrontation between Shagrat, a Black Uruk of Mordor, and an orc from Minas Morgul called Gorbag. Gorbag threatens to stab Shagrat if he tries to steal the shirt, but he tosses it aside and throws Gorbag down a long flight of stairs, where he falls on top of several other Uruk-hai. A huge brawl between orcs and Uruk-hai spreads all over the fortress, allowing Sam to enter the tower with ease.



A replica of an Uruk from Peter Jackson' film trilogy.

See also

- List of Middle-earth wars and battles
- Minor battles in The Lord of the Rings
- Olog-hai

References

1. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Appendix A (I,iv), "The Stewards", p. 414.
2. "And Aragorn looked on the slain, and he said: 'Here lie many that are not folk of Mordor. Some are from the North, from the Misty Mountains, if I know anything of Orcs and their kinds. And here are others strange to me. Their gear is not after the manner of Orcs at all!' Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954), *The Two Towers, The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin (published 1987), The Departure of Boromir, ISBN 0-395-08254-4
3. "It is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman's Orcs can endure it, even if they hate it. I wonder what he has done? Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil!" Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954), *The Two Towers, The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin (published 1987), Treebeard, ISBN 0-395-08254-4
4. Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954), *The Two Towers, The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin (published 1987), "The Uruk-hai, ISBN 0-395-08254-4
5. Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954), *The Two Towers, The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin (published 1987), Helm's Deep, ISBN 0-395-08254-4
6. "We are the servants of Saruman the Wise, the White Hand: the Hand that gives us man's-flesh to eat." Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954), *The Two Towers, The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin (published 1987), "The Uruk-hai", ISBN 0-395-08254-4
7. "Finally, there is a cogent point, though horrible to relate. It became clear in time that undoubted men could under the domination of Morgoth or his agents in a few generations be reduced almost to the Orc-level of mind and habits; and then they would or could be made to mate with Orcs producing new breeds, often larger and more cunning. There is no doubt that long afterwards, in the Third Age, Saruman rediscovered this, or learned of it in

lore, and in his lust for mastery committed this, his wickedest deed: the interbreeding of Orcs and Men, producing both Man-orcs large and cunning, and Orc-men treacherous and vile." Tolkien, J. R. R. (1993), Christopher Tolkien, ed., *Morgoth's Ring*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, "Myths Transformed" - Text X, ISBN 0-395-68092-1

External links

- Uruk-hai (<http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Uruk-hai>) at the Tolkien Gateway (<http://tolkiengateway.net>)

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