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Orkworld



Denmark
2000



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Prelude

"... a huge orc-chieftain, almost man-high, clad in black mail from head to foot, leaped into the chamber. His broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red; he wielded a great spear. With a thrust of his huge shield he turned Boromir's sword and bore him backwards, throwing him to the ground."

— from *Fellowship of the Ring* by J.R.R. Tolkien

"There ought to be a rule in war that says you have to sit down and really get to know a fella before you can take a shot at him."

— Colonel Sherman T. Potter, M*A*S*H

Along with elves, dwarves and hobbits, Professor Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* provided the fantasy genre with another race, not so beloved as their fantastic companions. They are, of course, the orcs. Terrible in their countenance, reviled in their manner, orcs are abominations before God and man. Irredeemable and monstrous, their only passions are to serve their dark lord and devour all that stands in their way.

And for almost half a century, fantasy authors followed the good professor's example, filling bookshelves with trilogies telling the epic tale of a group of stalwart heroes (usually seven in number) who go out on a quest (usually to fulfill some ancient prophecy). Before it's all over, one of them becomes a martyr, while the rest trek half-way across the world, saving all of civilization from — who else? — the evil sorcerer and his sub-human lackeys who bear a strong resemblance to the quote above.

What Professor Tolkien did fifty years ago was innovative.

Fifty years is enough time for innovation to collapse into cliché.

Jump from Middle Earth to the small offices of Alderac Entertainment Group in Ontario, California nearly three years ago. A friend of mine – I won't mention his name, but his initials are John Zinser – suggested the employees play *Dungeons & Dragons*. As a joke, I said, "Great. I'll play an orc bard!"

He laughed at me. "There's no such thing as an orc bard. Orcs are cannon fodder for heroes. Walking scenery. Speed bumps on the way to the real problem.

"Besides," he said, getting his books and dice in order. "Orcs are evil. The rules



specifically state bards can't be evil. Therefore, there's no such thing as an orc bard."

"Give me twenty-four hours," I told him. "I'll prove you wrong."

He agreed and the next day, I gave him a four-thousand-word essay on ork culture, religion, language and physiology. He read it over and smiled. "All of this to play an orc bard?"

And that's how it started. Three years later, that four-thousand-word seed sprouted this book: an anthropological study of a race that never existed. Or, at the very least, a race that existed only as a one-sided, racist caricature.

A new look at an old enemy.

How to Use This Book

Orkworld is not just a roleplaying game, it's a sourcebook on a race and culture that can be incorporated into any game where fantasy races exist. Even if your preferred world already has orcs well-defined, who's to say there can't be a secret culture of orks high up in the mountains that the more "civilized" orcs stay far away from.

This first part of this book, **Ork**, looks at ork culture, religion, philosophy and anatomy. The second part, **Stories**, contains the root of all ork storytelling, including a few of the many "Pugg Thwak" stories and the Three Great Tales that make up the core of the ork myth cycle. The third part, **Rules**, contains all the rules you'll need to play orks in *Orkworld*. It provides rules for character creation, conflict resolution and game mastering advice. The fourth part, **World**, provides information on the world that orks inhabit, especially those nasty monsters: dwarves, elves and humans. Finally, the **Appendix** contains an index, ork language glossary and a few extra goodies. Also, keep an eye out for annotation(!); you will find the endnotes at the end of each chapter.

A Brief Word on "Authorial Intent"

A friend of mine (the same one who wouldn't let me play an orc bard and therefore indirectly inspired this book) and I have the same style when it comes to buying books. We usually read through an entire book – either a roleplaying game, an adventure, or a sourcebook – and we come across one sentence that catches us off-guard. From that one single sentence, we write entire short stories or adventures, inspired by the sentiment we found.

Orkworld was written with that fact in mind. Everything in this book is modular. You can use any aspect of this book without taking anything else out with it. If you like the orks, but hate the world, leave the world behind and transplant the orks into your favorite fantasy setting. If you like the world but can't stand its inhabitants, try it the



other way. Even if you just like the few hundred words on trolls, you can snatch those killer crocs right out of here without having to touch anything else. That was my intent, and I'm stickin' to it.

Now, I know it isn't kosher to say this in many English 101 classes, but for the purposes of this little bit, it needs to be said. In a novel, the author is the final authority on his own work. He created the characters, the situations and the plot. He is the one and only Author of the book. His characters, his plots, his visions.

Unfortunately, the Author of a roleplaying game doesn't have that kind of luxury. He isn't creating an environment that only he gets to play in. Instead, he's creating an environment for *everyone*. Because of that, the rules he employs (both literary and otherwise) must be elastic enough to suit as many readers as possible. In other words, unlike Professor Tolkien, this Author isn't the final authority in *Orkworld*.

That distinguished title belongs to the Reader.

Every gaming group is different. Every gaming group has different needs. Some of them couldn't care less which game system they use. Others will convert every rule in this book to their favorite system. Which group is correct?

Both of them.

There is no Correct Way to play *Orkworld*, but there is a Right Way. If you and your friends enjoy yourselves, you're playing it the Right Way. If you're having a miserable time, you're playing it the Wrong Way. This applies not only to the rules, but to the elves, dwarves, trolls, and even the orks themselves. If you don't like something in this book, you can change it. In fact, I want you to change it. One of the greatest joys I have is walking around a game convention, watching all the different ways people play the games I've designed. Seeing how each group modified the rules just a little (sometimes a lot) to make it work better for them. Sometimes, I even find ways to make my own version of the game more enjoyable.

In the end, *Orkworld* is a shared universe. What you have in your hands right now are the rules I used to build *my Orkworld*.

I can't wait to see yours.

"Orcs" and "Orks"

As an Irishman, there's nothing more irritating than hearing my ancestors called "selts". For the record, "selts" are a basketball team and "kelts" are a race of people found in Britain and other parts of Europe.

Likewise, "orcs" are a race of non-humans who appear in the works of famous fantasy authors. "Orks," on the other hand, are an entirely different creature all together.



Septus Site Archeological Report

Date: 37,056 – Reign of the Seventh Sworn Emperor, Guardian of Terra, Sovereign of the Seven Planets

Location: Epsilon Sector

Arturus Aquinas Reporting

I don't want to sound too enthusiastic, but we may have stumbled across the find of the century. What started out as a minor outpost in the Quintus-Septus sector is, in actuality, the home of a previously uncatalogued species. The corpses are almost perfectly preserved (by the cold, I'd suspect), allowing us a great deal of opportunity for post-mortem examinations. The two bodies – a mother and a child – were found amongst many objects of war, indicating they were killed by an invading force. Also among the dig is a young human male. Auto-chemical testing indicates that both the human and the creatures are nearly six thousand years old. There are no records of such creatures in the cell banks, but considering the after-effects of the Electric Wars, I can't be surprised we've never heard of such creatures before.

However, we're in luck. Just recently, a secondary team uncovered a tomb of some kind in a nearby cave. Inside were many bodies, also killed in a similar manner. However, buried with the bodies were three journals. Most of them are unsalvagable, but electroscans have given us a hint of the story the pages once held.

The story they tell is remarkable, but considering the evidence before us, I'm certain the Imperial Inquisitors will doubt their veracity – as they did the recent discovery of the subterranean cities found in the northern mountains. Such discoveries are too valuable to us. I ask that this find be preserved and not purged as Adolfus Magnus' sites were two years ago.

Humbly yours,

Arturus Aquinas





First Journal

Only six months gone and six months left to go. I do not know if I can stand the stink much longer.

I watch them, these creatures, and my stomach cannot hold its breakfast. By the gods, I do not know how Heaven could allow such beasts to live. I do not know why the Great Father does not strike them down with his holy fury, nor do I know how they can suffer such indignity. Do they not recognize their own foulness? Their own putrescence? I cannot speculate on it too long.

When I came here, I was told we would seize treasures and return home wealthy men. Instead, we watch over beasts until reinforcements arrive. Not even a thousand-thousand treasures could make this duty worthwhile.

I watch them from the tower, watch them moving about below me like green ants, scurrying to and fro. They disgust me.

We do not need to guard these creatures. They go about their day and do not resist us. They are a defeated, conquered people. Why do we stay? I do not know.

* * *

Something –

I stood guard on the ground today with Antonius. He was also sickened by our fate and made intent to have some fun with the creatures. I smiled as I watched.

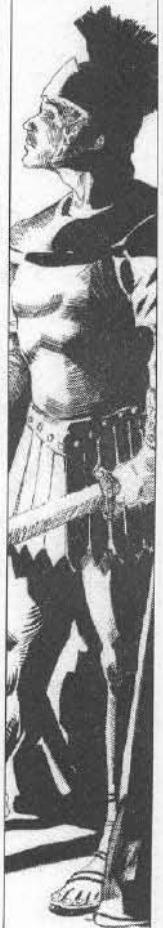
One of the women — it is so difficult to tell the men from the women — walked from one of her crude shelter to another. Antonius stepped in her way, smiling like he smiled at the whores back home. She tried to move aside but he mirrored her steps.

I laughed and my laughter drew the attention of some of the males. They looked up with their small eyes, and their large ears turned like a dog's turns when his master calls.

Antonius continued his antagonistic ways, ignoring the grumbling sounds coming from the males.

Before I could warn him, the tone of the situation turned. I watched the males grow more angry as Antonius' continued laughing. The woman was obviously confused, but as that confusion blossomed to fear, I watched the males' hands clench into fists.

I put my hand on my friend's shoulder. He shrugged me off.



One male took a tentative step forward. I tried to warn Antonius again, and as he turned to yell at me, the woman passed quickly by.

Antonius pushed me, cursed me for ruining his fun. I tried to explain, but when I did, I saw the males had returned to their duties. He laughed and said that I was too tired. Imagining things. He was still laughing as he returned to his post.

All the rest of the day, I watched the beasts. And they watched us.

Antonius now has a grudge against me. He has done everything in his power to make me start a fight with him. I cannot. It is not why I am here. I am not a soldier, only a Senator's son who thought conquering uneducated, unsophisticated beasts would bring my family the fortune we needed. Like everything else in my life, Father did not approve. Did not approve of my friends, did not approve of the woman I married, did not approve of my choice of schools. Did not approve of the son his wife died bringing into the world.

And now, here I am. Stuck in a mudhole with professional soldiers who know what I am under my false skin.

And Antonius wishes to profit from it.

I am too well-connected to challenge. He must goad me into challenging him. I will not do it. I Will Not Do It.

Antonius again. But this time, his bullying showed me something. Something I would have never believed.

He was back at his old tricks, pushing around one of the beasts' children. First, he only stood in the child's way, but then, he knocked the food from its hands, put his foot against its chest and kicked it to the ground.

The child began to cry. Antonius laughed.

Then, the creature jumped on his leg and bit a chunk of flesh straight out.

Antonius screamed. Everyone, man and creature alike, turned to look.

Antonius drew the sword from his belt. I watched the slow, inevitable motion. The creatures standing, watching as well. I saw their eyes.

I saw their eyes.





Antonius kicked the boy free from his leg. He lay on the ground, weeping, his teeth red from human blood. Antonius raised the sword above his head.

I do not know why I grabbed Antonius' arm. I do not know why I took the sword from him. I do not know why I smashed my fist into his jaw, knocking him to the ground.

But there I stood, realizing a little too late what I had done. I stood over him, his sword in my hand, his broken lip bleeding. He was unconscious from the blow.

I stood there for a long time, watching him.

The creatures still waited.

And I saw their eyes.

Antonius challenged me. I shamed him in the eyes of his commanders and friends.

I was not scheduled for duty this night. Antonius arranged with his friends for me to stand for a special eight-hour watch. Then, he announced our duel tomorrow morning, at sunrise.

Tomorrow, he will kill me.

The moon is still in the sky, looking down at the fortunate and the fated. I sit here, thinking of what I must face tomorrow.

Just a moment ago, a young creature walked up to me. I did not recognize it at first. I watched it approach, the caution in its stride and in its gaze. It stood only a little shorter than my chin. It is amazing how quickly these things grow. Its shoulders were already wider than mine.

It stopped an arm's length away, watching me for a while. Then, it placed something on the ground. It turned and ran back into the shadows.

I stood in its footsteps and found what it had left. It was a small stone with lines drawn on it in elaborate patterns. It took me a moment to realize what it was, but when I did, I laughed.

It was a good luck charm. For tomorrow.

(The following words are scribbled hastily and stained with blood.)

IAMNOT DEAD IAM NOTDEAD ILIVE



The duel came at dawn, as it was scheduled.

Antonius and his allies stood on one side of the circle while I waited alone among strangers on mine. But on the outskirts of that circle, the creatures also stood. Behind me. As I readied myself, I heard them mumble some kind of crude song. They stood perfectly still, their lips moving just slightly as they sang words I did not understand. I looked at my fellows, but they were too busy gambling and boasting to notice.

Perhaps I do have some allies after all, I thought, and almost laughed.

I placed the armor sheaths on my wrists and the breastplate on my chest. One of my comrades strapped leather thongs across my back. Then, as I picked up my sword, I remembered the good luck charm the boy had given me the previous night. I took it into my hand.

At first, the lines only made a pattern, but as I looked closer, I saw what it represented. It was a picture of one of the creatures bearing a spear and shield. I searched the crowd of creatures until I found the boy. He stood with a female and many males, mumbling the same song.

I pushed my way through the circle of males toward the boy and bowed down, showing him the stone. Then, I held forth my sword and touched the stone to the sword.

The boy looked at me with confused eyes and turned to the male standing next to him. Then, the female beside with him turned to the males and spoke.

"Thraka," she said. As the words fell from her lips, the youth ran from the crowd toward one of the huts. I watched as he ran, then turned to the female.

"I do not understand," I told her, only barely aware of the men behind me, taunting me and calling my mother names I should not write down.

The creature said it again. "Thraka."

A male stepped out then, within arms' reach. He held his left arm forward, bent at the elbow. His right hand was extended toward me, his fist squeezed as if grasping something.

"Thraka," he said.

I looked at him. At the stone. Then, I remembered.

I remembered when we fought these creatures and they stood shouting, banging their spears against their shields, making it sound as if the air was filled with thunder.





"Spear and shield," I said, imitating its posture.

The creature smiled and nodded.

He *smiled* at me.

"Thraka," he said though his gruesome grin... that somehow was not so gruesome anymore. I sensed something passing between us, like a quiet understanding with a good, old friend that only requires a single look to summon.

I said the word then. "Thraka." And like a chorus in a play from the times of old, they all repeated the word.

Just then, the boy burst from the shack, a long shaft in his arms. He fell at my feet, holding the weapon up. I looked at them for a moment, then I took the spear in my left hand. The shaft was carved with intricate detail. The beauty stunned me. Never before had I seen wood worked in such a fashion. Almost without thought, I turned from the creatures and saw the men standing, waiting to watch me die.

I did not see them. The only man I saw was Antonius.

His eyes were so full of hate, all the color was gone, only blackness remained.

As we entered the circle, I suddenly wished I had placed my money on Antonius so my wife could afford the funeral.

He faked two lunges, and I thrust my spear at both. Foolish. Now he knew my speed.

Ducking now. Spinning sideways, his shield up, tossing my spear out of his way. My lack of experience with the weapon made it easy for him. He was inside the spear, making it useless.

Three seconds and the fight was already over.

He slashed his blade at me. It was a careless swing, showing me he thought little of my abilities. I blocked his blow with the shield, but could not strike back. The rim of his shield smashed just above my right eye.

I stumbled back, blood in my eye.

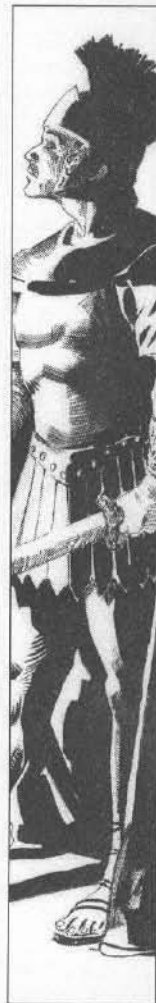
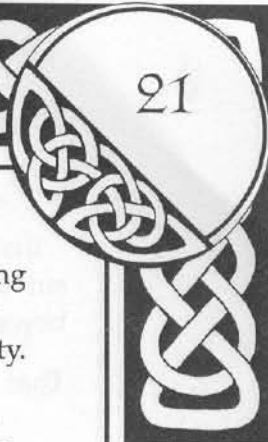
It was over. One more blow.

But he backed away, kicking dirt at me. His eyes were smiling.

Then, he attacked in earnest.

He ducked in again, and I wasn't fast enough to impede his progress. I blocked his first blow, the one directed at my legs, but his shield caught me off guard and struck me in the face.





"Struck with the same blow twice," I heard him say. "Fool!"

I fell back, waving my spear and shield blindly before me, trying to catch my fleeting balance. I felt a slash across my leg and cried out. I fell backwards into the dirt, my mouth tasting dust and sweat. Antonius stood over me, his grin turning bloodthirsty.

He raised his sword and brought it down. I lifted my shield and braced for impact. Lightning shot through my arm, up into my neck and my skull, and I knew my arm was broken. I kicked up at Antonius, my foot finding his ankle. He fell to the side and I pushed myself to my feet with my right arm.

Antonius was already standing, favoring his ankle, swinging his blade again. I parried with the shield and felt the same pain run through my arm. I screamed as my arm fell limp to my side. Antonius smiled as he readied his next blow.

Falling to one knee, I thrust the spear forward, feeling the spear glance off his shield, but continuing on its path. I felt it pierce his flesh and heard the wet sound it made. I heard his sword hit the dirt and his breath stop. Then, I felt the warmth of his blood on the hand that gripped my spear.

I looked up. Saw the disbelief in his dying eyes.

Saw the wooden shaft pierce through his spear, his breastplate and his spine.

The wooden spear.

There were no cheers from the men, only stunned silence and the sound of Antonius' body hitting the dirt. Behind me, the creatures' eyes gleamed. I fell to the ground, my breath trying to escape my body. Just about then, I began to realize the pain.

A voice above me. The sergeant demanding to know where I got the spear.

"The creatures," I said, pain blotting out the thoughts in my brain. "The creatures gave it to me."

"I thought we confiscated their weapons." Just then, through the pain that shot needles into my brain, I realized the consequences of my words.

"No!" I said, trying to rise to my feet. "Sergeant! I – the spear is – a – it's a trophy! It's mine! I took it from..."

But my words were lost. He was already barking orders. Soldiers gathered around the creatures, pushing them with spears and swords and nets. Shouting words they could not understand.

The little boy looked up at me, his eyes filled with confusion. He tried to reach out to me and a sword came down, slicing his hand. He pulled it back, holding it tight against his chest, looking up at the soldier who struck him.

"Don't you look at me that way!" he shouted. He kicked the boy, knocking him to the ground. I tried to shout, but few men who had won their wagers quickly surrounded me, congratulating me on my victory. I watched the mother and her child beyond the joyous faces.

That boy's eyes, full of confusion and fear, haunted my vision all the rest of the day.

* * *

Hours later, I lay in my tent and contemplated what the surgeon told me. I had seen other warriors who lost limbs. I saw how our people treated them. I wept like a woman at the thought of losing my arm, proving for one and all that I was no warrior.

Night crept into my tent and the air turned cool. The herbs the surgeon gave me sent me to sleep and I dreamt of my wife. Surrounded by handsome, whole men, waiting for my return? Would she love the beast that returned to her?

Then, I smelled something. Something familiar.

My eyes opened and my tent was filled with hulking, smelly figures, hidden by the shadows cast by the moon.

One of them I recognized: the large female who had spoken to me.

Her gruesome face was smiling, but not a mocking smile. It was the same smile my wife gave me before I left. The smile she wanted me to remember when I was so far away.

She took my hand in her huge claws. Her skin was coarse, but her touch was gentle.

Another one touched my face. She held something in her hand, a bone of some kind. She leaned in close and opened her mouth. I did not know what she was doing. Then, her other hand reached for my jaw and opened my lips. She placed the bone between my teeth.

Panic filled my chest. I knew what was happening. I tried to struggle, but the beasts held me fast. I tried to scream, but they wrapped a gag around my mouth.

There were more of them, holding me fast to the cot. Another approached and took my arm in her hands. She looked at me, her small eyes stern and resolute. I looked at the one who had spoken to me. Her eyes were the same. Their grips tightened in unison. I screamed, but only a muffled murmur made it through the gag.

Then, they pulled.

My arm froze. Burned. Froze again. Swords, arrows, darts and barbs shot through the muscles.





Then, they twisted.

I screamed and I screamed and I screamed.

Blackness came then. Merciful blackness. Shadows that ate my vision and my mind. I was gone.

I awoke in the morning to the sound of the surgeon's voice.

"I do not understand," he told me.

I looked to where he looked and saw my arm.

"The discoloration is fading," he said. "And the swelling has gone down." He lifted it gently and the pain was not as intense as it had been the day before.

"Can you move your fingers?" he asked me.

I tried, not knowing if I succeeded.

He nodded. "Indeed you can."

He stood and looked at me. "I do not know what has happened, but your arm is healing on its own."

I opened my mouth, to tell him of my dream, but then shut it again.

"Yes?" he asked.

I hesitated, then spoke. "I dreamt that a Goddess came to me in the night. She healed my arm and told me it would not need to be cut off."

He shook his head. "Goddess or no, you are a blessed man." He walked to the tent flap. "I will tell the sergeant. He will be pleased to hear you'll be ready for duty in a month or so."

He left, and I relaxed. My arm throbbed and ached, but the sharp pain was gone. I shut my eyes and tried to sleep.

There was something under my head. I sat up and reached for it. It was a small pouch.

It smelled like the creatures. I put it back and went to sleep.

Second Journal

"Though we sit still, the world moves."

That's what my father once told me. I'm learning that lesson well in my little tent, on my little cot, waiting for my leg to heal. The strength returns slowly, but only after many weeks. Once again, I am indebted to the creatures. Especially the one who calls himself Taldoonah.

He is small for his people and walks with a slight limp. He is what they call a "tala," a harper. I know this because in the last few weeks, I have learned Taldoonah's language. It hasn't been easy. Their tongue has no alphabet, something I just do not understand. How can any people have language, but no alphabet? My mastery of their words is rudimentary, and asking questions is difficult, but I have learned a few secrets.

They call their warriors "thraka," and the mothers of their tribe "dowmga." Their people are called "orkum," and each individual is an "ork." After watching them for many weeks, I also noticed a few curious facts. Groups of males seem to be led by a single woman. They respond to the dowmga as if she were some kind of monarch, but I do not know how she achieves this position. So many questions and I just don't have the words to ask.

I hobble about now, using a cane given to me by one of the thraka. He is a wide fellow whose hands are so big they eclipse my face. He said his name was Shanda. He bears a wicked scar across his nose and when I inquired about it, he was eager to tell me. Shanda said he earned the scar from a battle with the "shtoontee." I do not know what these creature are, but from Shanda's tale, I assume they are both deadly and multitudinous. As he continued the story, Taldoonah sat quietly behind me, whispering to me when I did not understand.

He told me the shtoontee wield swords as long as a thraka and fight with great skill. He also said they live deep in the ground, close to the gods. That last comment struck my curiosity and he explained that the gods lived on the "other side of the world," far from men.

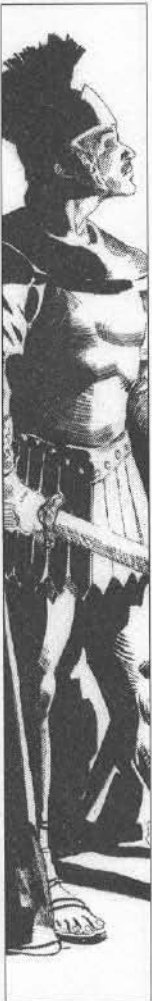
"Our Gods live in the sky," I explained. Shanda looked at me as if I was a child.

"Where?" asked Shanda. "Where in the sky?"

I told him they lived on a mountain above the clouds.

"When clouds go, mountain where it is?" Shanda asked.

I hesitated, then Shanda slammed his fist down on the ground. "Stops you story for lie to tell?" he asked, his words as sharp as swords.





I did not know how to apologize, so I closed my eyes and bowed my head. Just then, a smack hit the back of my skull. I looked up and Shanda's eyes glared at me.

"Your taking eyes from him," Taldoonah said from behind me. "Your thinking he you cannot harm."

I turned to look at the harper. "I think he can't harm me?"

I got another smack in the head and Shanda shouted something quick and curt, then rose up and left us alone.

"What did he say?" I asked.

Taldoonah smiled, almost laughing. "It is strange," he said. "I for you do not have words."

"Try," I insisted.

"Say he... you yellow have..." he paused, pointing at his head. "Inside."

"My mind?" I asked.

Taldoonah nodded. "Good. Mind. You yellow mind have."

He patted me on the shoulder and wandered off, leaving me to ponder the cryptic nature of his words.

* * *

Today, another incident with "yellow."

I limped along, stretching out the cramps in my leg, when a little ork child nearly ran into me. He spun about, shouting something I recognized from my conversation with Shanda.

The boy called me "Yellow leg."

Obviously, the orks attach the color yellow to weakness. My lame leg is yellow.

My lame mind...

Much later, in the evening, I noticed the orks gathered in a large tent to the south of the camp. I hobbled over and for a while, listened to the singing and drumming within. Then, the tarp swung back and a thraka stood before me, his face half-hidden by shadows. Still, I recognized the scar running across his nose.

We stood for a moment. Both still. Both waiting for movement. "It me," I said in his tongue. "Yellow mind."



A laugh burst from his lips. Half of it escaped his nose. "Mowgd boolah," he said. "Maloo poolah."

"Bad name," I agreed. "I need a new one."

I moved forward, but he put his hand on my chest.

"Nah thraka," he said, shaking his head. "Nah thraka."

I repeated his words. "No warrior." He nodded.

"But, I *am* a warrior."

His eyes filled with the threat of violence. His fist slammed into my jaw and I slammed into the ground. I looked up, knowing that I was not ready for the thraka if he chose to pounce.

He didn't. Instead, he stepped back, watching me. From behind him, more orks emerged into the night, all watching Shanda and I. One of them was Taldoonah. He spoke in halting Solarian.

"You he waits," he told me.

"So he can knock me back down again?"

The orks all looked at me, confused by my speech. Some of them pointed at their heads.

Taldoonah nodded. "Yes."

"Then I'll stay down, I think."

Taldoonah's eyes showed me the disappointment he felt. "Coward," he said.

Shanda looked down at me with disdain. "Mowgd," he said, almost laughing.

I put my cane against the ground and pushed myself back up to my feet. Shanda shouted something at me. Taldoonah translated. "Say he you can't your house carry."

My focus switched from the thraka to the bard. "Isn't he going to hit me again?"

Shandra followed my glance, his eyes narrowing, staring at the bard with an anger I had never seen before.

"Look at him, not me," said Taldoonah. "For you him waits."

I suddenly understood. I thought for a moment, then said, "Tell him he got his scar from a mole, not a shtoontee."

"You him tell."





He told me the words. I stood and I said them. Before I knew it, I was on the ground again. The crowd around us cheered. Shanda raised his hands and barked at them. I pushed myself back to my feet and yelled over the crowd. "How do I tell him my grandmother hits harder than he does?"

Taldoonah hesitated.

"How do I tell him?!"

Taldoonah still looked confused.

"How do I tell him my mother's mother is stronger than he is?"

My friend spoke the words and I repeated them. The crowd responded with an awful silence. Shanda looked at me, his teeth showing through his scowl. Taldoonah translated his growls. "Says he, 'dumb men'. Mothers stronger than thraka all orks know. Not pain bigger than life to the world bring." He paused. "Says he you feeble and not worth knocking down."

"Not worth...?"

The orks all turned and walked away, leaving me alone in the dark. Even Taldoonah could not meet my eye.

The next morning, I approached the tala, asking about the previous night. "Porridge head," he told me. "Shusha," he said.

"What is shusha?"

"Make me tell you what you should know. You no hand me and you."

I did not understand. *No hand?* I decided to keep our discussion to one topic at a time.

"What did I do wrong?" I asked him.

"You weak prove," he said. "Shanda no hand with mowgd brain fight."

"So I made him look bad?"

"Wah!" he nodded. "Look bad."

I started to understand. I was such a lame opponent, all Shanda could gain from fighting me was a reputation for being a bully.

"Strange," I said.

"Oolah," he agreed.



And so from that moment, I resigned myself to get rid of my new nickname.

"Thraka only name," Taldoonah said. "Thraka."

"I must become a thraka to gain a new name?" He nodded. "How?"

He shook his head. "Upchah," he told me.

"A secret?"

He nodded again. "Secret. Upchah."

I already understood their value of secrets. To them, all knowledge is a vast sea of secrets. Instead of "teacher," their own word is closer to "revealer."

"I must learn the secret," I told him.

"Deserve it," he said.

I sat with three thraka, all drinking. I drank wine. They drank something else.

One of them looked at me up and down, then said something I didn't quite understand. Another made a quick reply and the rest of them laughed.

I knew they were laughing at me, but didn't have the language to catch their meaning.

"Joke they make," a voice said behind me. I turned and saw Toodalah standing deep in the shadows.

"Them say?" I asked.

He pointed at the first one. "Him say, 'Man carry sword. Longer is spear.'" Then, he pointed to the second one who made the curt reply. "Say him, 'Man is dumb.'"

"And that's a joke?"

"That is a joke."

I looked back at them. Their eyes looked at me strangely, their lips crested with half smiles.

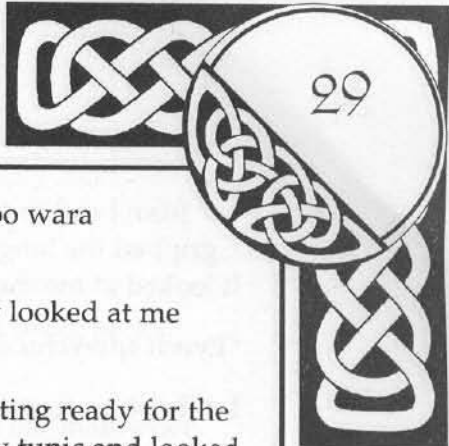
"Manoo speecha noeyegut," one of them said.

"Manoo esta doom," said the other. And they all laughed.

"Manoo wara dowermga skirtah," said one.

"Manoo esta doom," said another. And they all laughed.





I swallowed hard, took a bit of courage from my cup and said, "Manoo wara ddownmga skirtah fur ee nah feera show wata ee gut."

They were stunned into silence. Their jaws all dropped open and they looked at me with wide eyes.

One of them rose up and walked over to me. I took another drink, getting ready for the blow to my already bruised jaw – and ego. He grabbed the edge of my tunic and looked me in the eye.

Then, he pulled up my skirt and looked.

Then, he looked at me.

"Manoo esta doom?" I asked.

The thraka smiled. "Nah too doom," he said.

And we all laughed.

* * *

I was asleep when the attack came. A moonless night. Near complete blackness. It was the screaming that woke me. My mind rushed back to wakefulness, but my body was slow. I pushed forward, my leg aching.

Just then, a bloody figure burst into the tent, his sword dripping wet and his shield broken. A long gash on his arm bled openly. "What is...?"

"Shut your mouth!" he whispered.

A long silence followed, filled with the sounds of burning and dying. A herd of hooves passed by and I saw him shudder.

"They came out of nowhere," he told me. "Out of the mountains, I think." We both cringed at the sound of another war cry.

"What are they?"

"I don't know. But there are –" his words stopped. I may have heard the sound of a razor, cutting through fabric. Then, his head and shoulder fell one way while his trunk and leg fell another. I only then felt the wet, warm spray that hit my chest.

A figure stepped into the tent. It stood only to my belly, but it seemed twice as wide as myself. The sword in its hands was at least as long as me. It curved slightly upward with a single edge – the edge that I just saw cut a man in half.

I stumbled backward, falling onto my cot. The thing stepped forward. It was armored

from head to toe, its heavy helmet concealing a long, braided beard. Its hands gripped the long handle of its weapon as it took a warrior's stance. Then, it stopped. It looked at me the same way Shanda did when I wouldn't get back up. Then, it spoke.

"Eyech spreychu downburdoon," it said to me, then turned away.

I did not understand the words, but I knew what it said.

Mowgd.

I pushed myself off the bed and grabbed the sword from the floor with my good arm. Charging out of the tent, I screamed as I slammed the sword into the creature's back.

The sword broke. Like a weapon of glass, it shattered against the thing's armor.

It spun about and I fell at precisely the right moment, losing only a lock of hair to the thing's blade.

"Brodoonach!" it screamed as the sword turned effortlessly in its hands. The blade came down, but I was not there to greet it. My leg screamed, but I ignored its protests. The sword arched against the fire and darkness and I dodged again. Then, arrows slammed against its armor and shattered like my blade. Men jumped upon it, wrestling it to the ground. It took seven to haul it down. Three of them lost their lives trying.

A pair of hands lifted me and I turned to see Titus, his face covered in blood. "This way!" he shouted and pulled me into a friendly shadow.

"What's happening?" I asked.

"We don't know," he whispered. "They just won't die."

"Where are the orks?"

"The what?"

"The orks!" His face was blank. "The creatures! Where are they?"

"They all ran into the woods. They saw their opportunity and took it." He looked at me. "As should we."

"Run?"

"We're finished here, Caius. A thousand men cut down to no more than a dozen. A single night."

"But the gold!"

"We'll come back for it. Only next time, we'll be ready."





"Titus..." I started.

"There's no disgrace in leaving."

"Your father can afford such answers. Mine spent all he had so I could bring back wealth."

Titus shook his head. "Your father is probably dead, Caius. He was an old man when we left. Old men don't last long in the Senate these days. Come with us now. My father will protect you."

Just then, another battle cry cut through the night. It was unlike anything I'd ever heard before. A single beast with a thousand voices, all screaming in unison. And yet, it was also like... singing.

From the shadows we saw the creatures turn to face the sound. They readied their long swords for the beast that approached. And I could hear it approach. It pounded the ground with ten thousand feet, making the ground rumble like a storm-filled sky. The creatures turned to face the sound and it swept down upon them like an angry god.

Seven spears flew at one of the armored creatures. Most bounced off, but one found a home in its eye socket.

Two riders – on horned beasts I had never seen – flew by us with a rope between them. They pulled the rope taut at another creature's feet and it flipped onto its face. It lay there for half a moment – just long enough for a group of them to stand on its arms and legs until a tall, wide one stood on its chest and put its spear through its neck. The thing ceased its movement as the large shapes moved away, looking for another victim.

The scene played again in my head as I watched them walk away. The group of them standing on the creature's arms and legs as the giant stood on its neck. The spear that pierced the thing's armor. Where swords and arrows failed, the spear...

The spear!

"It's the orks!" I screamed, and lifted myself to my feet. "The orks are here!"

I rushed out into the light, Titus trying to hold me back. I shrugged off his grip and ran to them. I could hear myself shouting, "I'm here! I'm with you!"

"Yellow brains!" a voice shouted at me from the darkness. I turned and looked and saw Taldoonah hiding in the shadows.

"Run in the light," he told me, "you this need."

And from the shadows, he put forth a spear.

"Yes," I said, taking it into my hands. "This me need."



Taldoonah smiled. "More truth say now than ever in all life." And before I could thank him, he was gone. I turned and ran toward the thraka moving through the screams and fire.

"Thraka!" I shouted. "Thraka!"

They turned to look at me and I stopped.

Their eyes were full of blood. They did not recognize me. The tall, wide giant growled, showing me its teeth. I stood back, lifting my hands in the air.

"It's me," I said in their own tongue. "Yellow brains."

One of them put his hand on the giant's shoulder and stood forward. I looked at his face. The shadows half-hid his features from me, but I saw that familiar wide scar.

"Shanda!" I shouted above the din. "Shanda! It's me! Yellow brains!"

Shanda nodded. "Not you run?" he asked me.

"No! I'm here! I'm with you!"

He looked me up and down. "Can't carry weight," he said.

I paused, not certain of what to say. Then, I held forth the spear. "I will carry this."

Shanda looked at the spear then looked at me.

"Deserve it," he told me. A snicker came across his lips. "Yellow brains."

We ran to a small patch of darkness and ducked within. Shanda put his hand on my shoulder. "Still now," he told me. I nodded and gripped my spear. I felt the carvings under my fingers and held tighter. I felt the strength of the wood against my palms, and I held it tighter. I felt something in my blood, a sensation I'd only experienced once in my whole life. The same sensation I felt when I took the life from Antonius. It made my stomach quiver. I felt my joints shiver, but I could not stop them. All I could do was wait.

The ork next to me – the giant one – waited as well. I had never seen him before. At first I thought it was the darkness, but then I realized that his skin wasn't green, but a pitch black. He noticed my gaze and turned to look. His eyes met mine and though my instinct told me to drop my gaze, I kept it fixed on him. We stayed that way for a long time. Finally, his lips moved without sound: "Shala."

I didn't know if he was telling me his name or speaking some word I'd never heard before.

Then, he turned away, back to the fire and blood.





A sound came from around the corner: armor clanking against itself. I felt every ork around me shift his feet. We were ready. Shanda touched me softly. I looked, but did not turn my head. He touched his spear to his feet. I nodded, keeping my gaze on the creature.

It was time. As fast as a cat we moved, catching the creature by surprise. Its sword swung about, slicing one thraka's head from his shoulders. I slammed into its body, hoping to knock it to the ground, but it didn't budge. I felt the impact of another body against it. Still, it would not move.

Something slammed against my back, trying to make me let go. I didn't. The pain came again. Twice, I refused.

Another body slammed into the thing. I kicked against the ground and pushed again as it began to lose its balance. Then, I slung my spear behind its knees and pushed with my feet while I pulled with my arms. The creature hit the ground with the impact of a tree.

I kept my spear behind its legs while my own limbs entwined around the bottom half of its short body. I heard it screaming. The great black ork stood above it, his foot on the thing's neck. He ripped at the faceplate, tearing it away. Under that armor, I saw a face filled with fear. The black thraka's spear came down and entered just above the bridge of the creature's nose.

It kicked once. Twice. Then, whatever was inside of it was gone.

I got to my feet, stretching the pain in my back. I looked at Shanda, pointing at the creature. "Shtuntree?" I asked.

He nodded. "See you now. Know you now."

My arm and leg ached. Shanda grabbed my shoulder. "Run! Quick, quick! Rabbit quick!"

Again and again, we hid in the shadows, waiting for one of the creatures to come. We fought and stood together. They fought and stood alone.

And they fell alone. One after another after another. And after each victory, we'd run to a nearby shadow to wait for another opportunity. They moved quickly. My leg kept me a half-step behind them. After the third ambush, the big, black thraka looked at me with angry eyes.

"Slow, slow," he said. "Yellow legs, yellow brains. Not yellow, huh?"

I limped along side them as they moved. They did not wait. I was the last in the shadow, trying to catch my breath in the smoky night air.



I was about to speak when Shanda put his hand in my hair, ruffing it like my father did when I was a boy.

"Nah mowgd cavah," he said.

The big one agreed. "Nah mowgd cavah."

I couldn't hide my smile.

No yellow heart.

The fifth ambush went wrong. We charged, as we'd done before. I tackled the thing's legs and it didn't fall. That wasn't different. But as I slipped my spear between its legs, I felt a wet, warm splash on my back and heard one of the orks cry out. That was when I made my mistake.

I looked up.

The black ork's chest was open and bleeding. Another strike from the creature and his head nearly came away from his body. I pulled with the spear and something in my arm gave way. I lost all the strength I had and the creature pushed me down and away.

That was when the killing began.

A single slice of the thing's sword cut one of the thraka in half. The second tried to parry with his spear, but it shattered under the speed of the blade and he lost his arm. The spear of the third broke against the thing's armor and it spun about, slicing straight through the thraka's waist, making his body fall in two.

Shanda put its spear across the thing's throat and pulled. He screamed at me. I grabbed my spear and pushed myself to my feet. Shanda pulled again and the thing fell backwards – on to Shanda. I heard the thraka's breath blow out as I finally got to my feet. I rushed forward, grabbing the thing's arms, keeping the sword from drawing any more blood. I ripped it from its hands, the momentum throwing me back a step.

Shanda pushed the thing over and I made a single swing, taking the thing's head clean off its shoulders.

I fell to my knees, feeling the tears well up. Shanda pulled me to my feet. "No!" he shouted, his face only a finger's distance from mine. "No time!"

Something grabbed me from behind. The black ork held what was left of my torn and blood-soaked tunic. His hand was on his throat, his heart pumping his life from the wound. I knelt down beside him and held his head with my hands.

He couldn't speak, but his eyes talked well enough. Shanda knelt beside me. He





whispered to the dying thraka, "You we carry." The thraka almost smiled.

He died holding us tight.

By the time the sun began to glow with dawn, the fighting was over. I gave my leg and arm the rest they deserved. All around us, fires burned. The buildings we men made were all but cinders. The leather houses of the orks were also gone. Nothing stood but ash and ruin. And as I sat, I looked at the carnage that...

And that's when I realized there were no bodies. Not anywhere. Wherever I looked, not a single corpse. No man, no ork. Not a single creature's remains could I see.

Shanda sat down beside me then, drinking from a cup made of horn. It took me many moments to notice him.

"Drink?" I asked him.

He looked at me, holding the cup in his hands. He spoke very slowly, as a teacher does to a child. "Sooeeta," he said, gesturing to the cup. "Thraka drink. Child no. Downga no. Thraka."

I nodded, putting my hand on my chest. "Nah thraka," I said, a little disappointed.

Then, he handed the cup to me.

I held it, looking at him with disbelief.

"I'm not a thraka," I said again.

"Last night... you thraka."

I took the cup and looked at him. I said nothing. There are times when words ruin everything.

He nodded and I drank.

Third Journal

By noon, I learned where the bodies went. I should have suspected the truth earlier. The women were covered with earth. I simply didn't put the facts together as I learned to do in school. The ground was littered with piles of loose earth.

They were graves. Graves filled with men, orks and the stunted creatures. The ork women spent the night burying every body that fell. What I didn't understand was the ash on their faces. Another secret I have to earn.



Within hours, the orks had everything cleaned away. Only those who had seen the slaughter would even know it happened. I helped the best I could, but my leg and arm kept me on my backside. As I rested, a female approached with a large basket she carried with both hands. I rose, but she insisted I sit.

"Still," she said as she removed a sponge and a smaller bucket filled with water. She dipped the sponge into the water and began washing my feet and legs.

"What is this?" I asked her.

"Wash," she said. She pointed to a bowl of soup. "Eat." I took up the bowl and tried a sip. It was delicious.

"Good," I told her.

"Eat." I finished the bowl and set it back down, letting the warm soup settle in my stomach. The sensation always reminds me of my mother. Warm soup in my stomach on a cold, stormy day. Blankets and cheese.

I remained seated as she continued to wash my dirty, bloody body. She washed me very slowly, and I watched as the sun moved across the sky. When she was done, she tended to my wounds with a thick paste that smelled of wine. Every movement she made was deliberate. Her touch was tender and reminded me of my wife. Without warning, I was very homesick.

I thought of being home. I thought of my wife. She was beautiful. Beautiful and in love with another man. But duty required she be with me, so she ended the affair. I told her it wasn't necessary, that there were many wealthy women who kept lovers. I would be an understanding husband. She ignored me. I think that's when I learned to love her.

When I told her I was going to war, she touched my cheek and promised that she'd wait. The other soldiers assured me she'd be back in the arms of her lover in a heartbeat. I don't know. But sitting there, surrounded by blood and ash, I realized that I didn't care. She would be happy with or without me. That much I knew for certain. A widow is a wealthy woman in Solaria, especially the widow of a soldier.

"You here not," the female said, breaking the spell.

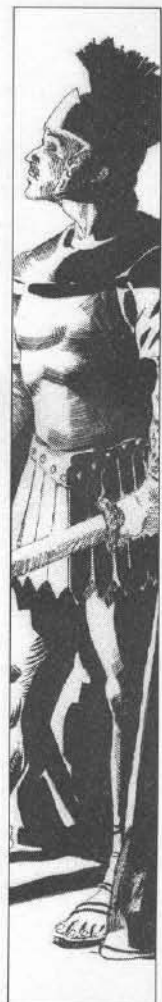
"No," I said. "Thinking of..." I suddenly realized I did not know the word I needed. I tried to explain using the words I knew, but she only smiled and shook her head.

Finally, I said, "Woman who holds me."

She smiled. "Noonandoo."

I tried the word. "Nunandoo."





She laughed and corrected me. "Noonandoo."

I echoed her laugh and she put her hand on my hand. "Manoo," she said, shaking her head. "Nah doonah wet mooee."

I shook my head. "I don't understand."

She finished dressing my wounds. "Ork," she said, touching her chest. Then, she touched my chest. "Manoo." She shook her head, leaned forward and put a small kiss on my cheek. She looked me straight in the eye and said, "Nah doonah."

She packed her basket and stood. Her eye remained on me for a moment, then she turned away and went to another thraka. Taldoonah sat down next to me, a smile on his lips and a cups in his hands. He handed me one.

"Fancy her?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Noonandoo," I told him.

"Love sick," he said.

"Married," I answered.

"What married?"

"Promised. Sworn to stay with one."

"Noonandoo," he said.

I nodded. "Close enough." And we drank.

"Where your spear?" he asked me.

I pointed to my tent. "In there."

He shook his head. "Never." He took my hand in his hand. "Close it keep. Always."

"All right." I stood, limped over to my tent and fetched my spear. When I came back, Taldoonah was gone. I looked about, called out his name, but there was no sign of him. Shanda stepped up, his own wounds clean and covered. "Someone wrong?" he asked.

"No. Just lost someone I was looking for."

He nodded. "News bring. You us listen."

I followed him back to one of the tents I helped put up in the morning. As we walked, I thought about what happened that night. I remembered the black ork and the word he spoke to me. I asked Shanda and he told me what it meant.

"Shala," he said. "Thrown out. Coward he prove." He ran his hands along his face.

"Black it shows. Courage now prove."

"So he has no home?"

"Home no."

"And he wanders?"

"Looking for..." He stopped walking and looked at me. "Word?" He pointed at one of the graves the women dug last night.

"Death?" I shut my eyes and crossed my arms. "Death?"

He nodded. "Death. Dracha."

"To prove courage?"

He nodded and continued walking. "Wah. Prove courage."

I gripped my spear with the thought of it. Wandering the wilderness, looking for death.

"Why?" I asked. "Why prove courage?"

"No one want a coward to carry."

"Carry?" He promised the thraka he'd carry him, just before he died.

"Hush," he said, lifting the leather tarp of the tent. "Time for listen, not for talk."

I followed him inside, my questions rattling around in my head.

* * *

Inside were all the surviving orks. Only half of those alive yesterday.

In the center of the group stood a tall, gray haired ork, his cloak covered with pockets and around his neck were strands of trinkets.

"Who is that?" I asked Shanda.

"Tala. Great tala wolf gathum."

We stood near the entrance and listened, Shanda translating for me.

"Evil him say. Over mountains evil came. Uh... how it say? Them it ate."

"What evil?"

"Ahlvsees."

Even though I had never heard an ork speak it before, I knew that word. I didn't need





Shanda to translate it for me.

"Say he villages ate. Gone. Soon they here come. Four days, he think. We go."

"Go?"

"Somewhere else. Mountain. Inside hide. Ahlvsees nah go. Afraid."

I knew what he was talking about. Entire towns. Gone. Entire legions. Gone. Entire cities. Gone. Buildings nothing but ash. Not a single sign of life. Food half-eaten on the tables, iron cold on the forge, poems half-written on the page.

Gone.

I heard legends from old legionnaires who swear they lived through an attack. One old man told me he saw a flying city that threw lightning. Another told me of walking bronze statues that breathed fire. Yet another told a story of a mother who fought to protect her child. She screamed as her flesh melted on her bones. They took the bones, too. And then, there were the stories of possession...

"Ahlvsees," Shanda said again.

"Elves," I said. "Yes, I know."

He looked at me. "You know?"

I nodded. "All gone. Taken. We have to go, and go quickly."

He looked at me confused, and I realized I had spoken in Solarian. "Quick, quick. Rabbit quick," I told him.

He nodded. "Quicker."

* * *

I bid my comrades goodbye. All four of them. Two of them had broken limbs. One of them was missing an eye. The last one, Titus, urged me to come with them.

"No," I said, shaking my head and pointing to the orks. "I'm going with them."

"Don't be foolish. The elves will kill you all. You know it."

"They know the terrain, Titus. They know where to hide. It's you four that the elves will find first." I looked him in the eye. "You should come with us. It's the only way."

He bit his lip. I saw the thought running through his head. Then, he dropped his gaze to his feet. "No. Not with them. We'll make it. We'll keep to the forests. They'll never find us under the trees."



"They'll find you if they want to find you, Titus," I told him.

He put his hand on my shoulder. "You as well. Better to die with your own kind, though."

I didn't need to say a word.

He nodded and dropped his hand. "Right then. May fortune go with you, Caius."

"My fortune *does* go with you." I put a small bag in his hands. "Give my gold to my wife. Tell her to be happy."

He nodded. "I will."

"May the Moiræ give us all better than we deserve."

He turned away and went back to the three who were waiting. Together, they picked up the one in the litter and carried him toward the forest I knew lay five days to the south.

I prayed the bard's estimate was wrong.

A few hours later, the orks began packing. I started to help Shanda, but he pushed me away.

"Yellow brains," he said and pointed behind me. I turned and saw a single female packing up her house. She had a child strapped to her back and she struggled with the heavy lumber.

"You nah me help. Thraka nah she has. All by shtoontee dead."

"All dead?"

He nodded. "Carry her."

I touched him on the shoulder and he went back to work.

I approached her quietly. Her child was crying as she tried to lift a heavy support. She threw it down and cursed. That's when she noticed me. That's when I recognized her.

"You washed me," I said.

She nodded. "Yellow brains slow remember."

I smiled. "Slow remember, yes." I knelt down and picked up the support and put it in her cart. "All thraka dead?" I asked.

She slapped me. I looked at her and saw the tears in her eyes. "Yellow brains!" she said. "All thraka dead and you yellow arm and yellow leg and yellow brains!"





I didn't understand and she saw it. She put her face in her hands and sat down. Then, she looked up at me.

I shrugged. "Manoo esta doom," I said.

A smile staggered to her lips, followed by a broken laugh. She stood back up and held my face in her hands. "Wah. Manno esta doom."

We went to work packing her house.

Last Journal

We last saw them two days ago. My leg and her belly won't let us go any further. Shanda kissed me. There were tears in his eyes as he turned away. They had to leave us. There's no other way.

So it's just me and Sheelahnah. We're hiding in the hills. A shallow cave is all there is to shield us from the elves. The rest of the tribe is gone. I chose to stay with her.

But what else could I do? She already carried one child, and no one knew about the second growing inside her.

They say they'll be back for us in a week. By then, the elves will have come and gone. Hopefully, they won't bother searching the caves. If Shanda's lucky, they won't bother searching the mountains.

Somehow, I don't think we'll be that lucky.

* * *

I was collecting firewood when I saw him. He stood behind a tree, his smile calling to me. I stepped forward to greet him.

"Why are you here?" I asked him.

Talloonah shrugged. "I came to see you."

"But the elves..."

He laughed. "The elves can't catch me. I've got business to attend to."

"Business? What kind of..." I stopped. He smiled.

"You're speaking Solarian," I told him.

"Or you're speaking ork," he said.



"How did you...?"

"Magic."

"Magic?"

"Ork magic. The oldest kind."

I looked at him closer and my eyes hurt, almost like looking at the sun.

"Can't do that," he said. "It's against the rules."

I shook my head and rubbed my eyes. "What rules?"

"Ork rules," he said. "The oldest kind."

He stepped out from behind a tree to just behind a large rock. "I've been watching you, Yellow Brains. Watching you with both eyes. You've been watching me with one eye shut."

I blinked again. A glare of sunlight off the creek hid him from me.

"Are you a... ghost?"

"A ghost?" he laughed. "Oh no. But I've seen my share of them. Many, many ghosts."

He jumped across the creek and stood halfway behind a bush.

"I've come here to tell you something, Yellow Brains," he said to me. "Something very important."

I moved to catch him, but when I reached the bush, he was already behind that tree where I found him first.

"What's that?" I asked.

"You're going to die," he said.

I nodded. "I know."

"But that isn't any kind of news. Everyone dies." He slipped sideways again, this time behind the rock at the front of our cave.

"How?" I asked.

"The elves," he answered. "But you're a lucky one, Yellow Brains."

"Lucky that I'm going to die?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Some die in a troll's stomach. Some die on the end of a dwarf sword."



Some die in the elf slave pits, fighting for their pleasure. Some..." he paused. "Some die in swamps, mining gold for men."

That made my stomach sink.

"But some," he said. "Some get to die protecting something important."

"Even if they don't understand it," I said.

He nodded. "Maybe those brains in your head aren't so yellow after all." He turned. "I have to go now, Yellow Brains."

Then, he turned back. "Or should I call you... Green Heart?"

I smiled. "Yellow Brains, I think."

He shrugged. "Suit yourself. Goodbye, Yellow Brains."

"Goodbye, Tooldanah."

There was the sound of thunder. We both looked up. Not a cloud in the blue, blue sky.

I looked back, but he was gone.

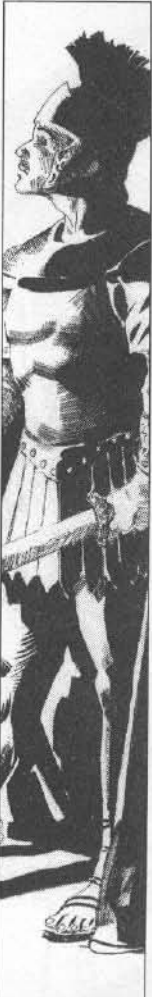
The elves will be here soon. I can hear them. I eat her soup and she smiles when I tell her how it warms me. She almost cries.

They're close.

She gives me my spear.

She gives me my spear and kisses my cheek. With tears in her eyes, she calls me thraka.

And for the first time, I know what that means.



PART ONE

Thaloo

*cul•ture: the sum total of ways of living built up by a group..
transmitted from one generation to another*
— Webster's Unabridged Dictionary

*Who are the people you call your friends? The people you always come back to
They're people who believe in something*
— Harry Chapin

Suppose aliens fell to Earth and it was your duty to explain American culture. Where do you start? With religion or politics? When do you bring up the idea of "personal space" so it makes sense in the context of everything you've already explained? Even if you do find a good starting place, every aspect of culture is so interconnected, you'd have to stop every ten seconds to explain something else. How do you explain that religion is the most important and all-encompassing aspect of many Americans' lives, while explaining the importance of the division of Church and State? Then, how do you justify irreverent God jokes?

The definition above is a starting point. How do orks *live*? Well, like the rest of us, orks live day by day, minute by minute. They live in a harsh world and they make it through because they believe that things are never as bad as they appear. They believe in power; they cannot prove, and that these powers set a plan into motion that will make all the pain of living worth it in the end.

Our word for this is "faith." The ork word is "thaloo."

Endnotes

Throughout this chapter (and the ones that follow), you'll find notations⁽¹⁾. The accompanying endnotes are at the end of each chapter.



A View of the World

Orks know the world is flat with the great sphere of the sky spinning around it. The sphere is divided into two hemispheres: the "Day-sky" and the "Night-sky." The world itself is also divided: one being the "Wakingside" (the world of mortals) and the second the "Otherside" (the world of the gods). When the Wakingside is under the Day-sky, mortals walk about and live out their lives. When the Wakingside passes under the Night-sky, mortals sleep and dream. Likewise, when the Otherside is under the Day-sky, the gods live out their own immortal lives, but when the Otherside passes under the Night-sky, they sleep and dream.

On the edge of the world, giant monsters live in boiling seas, devouring anyone who tries to pass them on the way to the other side. The only way to travel safely to the other side of the world is through caves. ¹

The Pantheon

Ork religion is polytheistic with a pantheon of four gods. Chief among these is the Great Mother, Keethdownmga. The other three are her sons: Bashthraka, Gowthdukah and Pugg.

Keethdownmga

Keethdownmga, the Great Mother, appears as a large, full-bodied female ork. Statues portray her with wide hips and many, many breasts. For orks, the miracle of birth is just that: a miracle. Orks see no connection between the sex act and pregnancy. Instead, they view pregnancy as a gift from Keethdownmga. An ork mother isn't giving birth, she's a vessel for Keethdownmga bringing a child into the world. This is dangerous, for orks and gods must never touch. This is why the birth process is a painful, bloody affair. It is also why mothers are the bravest, most holy orks of all; quite simply, without them, the race would die. Only they are worthy enough to touch the divine.

Keethdownmga appears in only a few of the ork tales, and even then, she almost never takes an active role. However, her handmaiden-warriors are very popular subjects for ork bards. They are called *dayla* (the Mother's Daughters) and their chief is Shela, a beautiful ork maiden (*downgaday*; "one who has not yet given child") who accompanies the gods on many of their adventures.

Bashthraka

Storms roll across the sky because he is angry. When he fights, the skies fill with pools of his black blood. When the orks hear thunder, they smile, for he is slamming his spear against his shield, preparing to make some poor fool die.

He is Bashthraka the Thunderer. And he is the god of war.





Bashthraka appears as a giant ork with wide shoulders, thick hands and a huge, screaming mouth. He wears a patch over one eye, which he lost during the first ork battle, when he came screaming out of his Mother's womb. His spear is called *Throondoom* and it was made from a branch of the tree of pain as was his shield *Coombadoom*. When he throws his spear, it never misses, and his shield protects him from any blade.

Bashthraka rides a great reindeer — the *first* reindeer — named *Balnodun*. It stands as tall as three orks and its eyes and mouth are full of fire. It is said that when the ground shakes, it is Bashthraka and Balnodun riding on the gods' side of the world.

Bashthraka's behavior often gets the other ork gods into a great deal of trouble. He is an angry, loud, rude and lusty ork who is too powerful for his own good. However, there's no doubt whose side you would want to be on if Bashthraka came to a battle.

Gowthdukah

Gowthdukah is taller even than his brother Bashthraka, but slender as a twig. Called The Silent One, for he never speaks, he gave up his tongue to the Well of Wisdom in exchange for all the secrets in the world. Now, he is the wisest of all the orks, but he only shares his knowledge with those who prove themselves worthy to find it for themselves. However, such knowledge is too much for any mortal ork, and many go mad with such power in their minds. In order to share the information he found, Gowthdukah created the runes (*bonay*: "holy stones"). Only those who understand the world's deepest secrets understand the runes, and once an ork has gained that knowledge, madness is certain to follow.

Gowthdukah appears in only a few stories. He is usually in the background, watching silently, recording all that he sees.

Pugg

Of all the Children of Keethdownga, Pugg is the orks' favorite. He is smaller than his brothers, only coming up to Bashthraka's waist. He walks with a limp; Bashthraka broke Pugg's foot when he stole Bashthraka's spear. Pugg never wears any weapons, only a leather cap on his head. His eyes and ears are larger than normal.

"WA!" & "SPUH!"

Two exclamations hold special significance to orks. The first is "Wa!," which best translates as "awe," "wonder" and "surprise." (It also means "courage", but when spoken loudly, it carries this connotation.) "Spuh," on the other hand, means essentially the same thing, except from a negative point of view.

An ork says "Wa!" when he's pleasantly surprised or overwhelmed with emotion. The louder the "Wa!," the greater the emotion. An ork says "Spuh!" when he hits his thumb with a hammer or realizes that the troll he just escaped was the runt of the litter...





the "Otherside" (the world of the gods). When the Wakingside is under the Day-sky, mortals walk about and live out their lives. When the Wakingside passes under the Night-sky, mortals sleep and dream. Likewise, when the Otherside is under the Day-sky, the gods live out their own immortal lives, but when the Otherside passes under the Night-sky, they sleep and dream.

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While he is smaller than Bashthraka and not as knowledgeable as Gowthdukah, Pugg is clever. He is a master thief and trickster and the protagonist in most ork stories. Pugg is usually the one who fixes the trouble Bashthraka makes.

While crows are associated with Gowthdukah and reindeer with Bashthraka, Pugg's allies are foxes. He often appears in a coat of fox furs, surrounded by the creatures.

There are many stories of orks who come across a wandering stranger and treat him poorly, only to discover that the stranger was, in fact, little Pugg out looking to make mischief. Those who treat him well are rewarded, and those who don't are punished. These stories — called "Wandering Pugg" stories, or *Suchee Pugg* — are the chief reason for ork hospitality being what it is.





Worship

Orks do not pray, build shrines or make sacrifices. The ork pantheon lives on the other side of the world, isolated from contact with their followers. They cannot hear prayers, do not see shrines and cannot accept sacrifices.

However, the ork pantheon has been known to visit the Wakingworld from time to time, which influences orks' behavior around strangers. Any ork you meet on the road *could be* Pugg. A lone downmga may, in fact, be the Great Mother herself. Orks treat all strangers with hospitality and kindness. Those who don't are just asking for Trouble.

Bodalay

The only method orks have to directly communicate with their deities is through a *bodalay* ("shaman"). Bodalay are orks who have one foot in each world. They read signs and omens and visit the Otherworld in their dreams.

An ork never chooses to be a bodalay. Children who show potential are taken from their household and brought to the mountains where they're tested and taught the sacred ways of the bodalay, including reading omens, interpreting dreams and use of *bonaloo* (see below).

Bodalay do not live in villages, but in mountain caves, isolated from ork culture. They either live alone or with an apprentice who inherits the cave after his master dies.

When a young ork is taken away from his family to become a bodalay, his master gives him a new name: *taltrup* ("dumb one"). The taltrup calls his master *eeniltroo*, which means "he who knows the path." A taltrup cleans his master's home, makes his master's food and does whatever else his master requires. This usually means going deep into the master's cave to find small mushrooms called bonaloo.

Bodalay use bonaloo to gain visions from the Otherworld. The ritual begins with *soola*, which means "smoking the cave." The bodalay burns the leaves of the *toodana* plant (also acquired by the taltrup), filling the cave with smoke. Then, he eats the meat of the bonaloo and waits for a vision to come. Only the most powerful bodalay dare to eat more than one baloo. They provide potent visions that have been known to drive a bodalay mad, sometimes even kill him.

After exposing himself to the toodana smoke and ingesting bonaloo, the bodalay's spirit can wander to the Otherworld and commune with the gods. For other orks, dreams are one of two ways to visit to the Otherworld (the second methods involves descending through the center of the world through a vast cave somewhere high in the mountains).

A dreaming ork's spirit is sleepy (the spirit and body are bound, after all) and not entirely in control of his actions. A bodalay, however, is capable of traveling in the



Otherworld completely aware and in control of his actions. One of a bodalay's duties is to guard dreaming orks from monsters on the Otherside.

Virtues

Thaloo is more than just a way of worshiping gods, it is also a code of ethics, a way of teaching young orks how to behave in society.

Ork

What does it mean to be "human?" What does it mean to be "humane?" These questions are no easier to answer than "What does it mean to be an ork?"

The word "ork" has many meanings for the people it describes. It is a non-gendered greeting, a noun, an adjective and an adverb. In short, anything that has qualities an ork admires is considered to be "ork." A sword may be ork. A good drink may be ork, and even some humans have been considered ork, although these are few and far between.

Occasionally, ork children are born with a rare disease that causes their skin to turn a pale color that, coincidentally, is quite similar to the skin of the humans, dwarves and elves. The word for this color is *mowgd*. Mowgd children usually die within a few days; they are simply not strong enough to survive. Therefore, in an ork's eyes, to be mowgd is to be weak. When an ork acts "un-ork," he acts mowgd. However, orks associate his weakness with a particular body part. To have mowgd hands means you have shaky hands, to have a mowgd tongue means you never keep your promises and to have mowgd eyes is to have bad eyesight. Bullies have mowgd spleens. However, one of the worst insults an ork can throw is to say that someone has "mowgd feet." In other words, they are cowards who run from a fight. Orks never run from a fight. They either charge into it with battle fury or they slowly turn their backs and walk away.

A World of Troubles

If you shake the Tree of Troubles, its fruit will fall.

Just as it rains, so is there *Troola*. Just as it snows, so is there *Troola*. "Trouble" is an active element in ork life; an undeniable, irresistible power that cannot be avoided or bargained with. Even the gods are subject to its whims.

Orks believe that everyone is born with their own pocket of Trouble, and no matter how we try to avoid it, it will always catch up with us. In fact, avoiding Trouble is the *worst* thing an ork can do. As the ork tales show, the more one avoids his Troubles, the harder they hit him in the end.

Orks born with only a little Trouble never have to make difficult decisions, or face the uncertain chaos of combat. They usually live out full, healthy, boring lives. On the other



hand, orks who are born with a good deal of Trouble always find themselves on the wrong end of a spear, face grueling, heart-wrenching decisions and die on a battlefield, surrounded by the sounds of spears and swords crashing. That's why orks love to show scars: each is a badge of victory, evidence of triumph over their Trouble. But sooner or later, an ork grows old and he is unable to keep up with his Trouble.

At first glance, Trouble – "fortunate misfortune" – can be a difficult concept. Trouble is a temporal testing ground, and like steel, an ork's soul is made stronger by Trouble's forge. Orks believe that everyone is born with just enough Trouble; not too much and not too little. If an ork is strong, clever and wise, he can overcome any obstacle. If he is dull, weak or foolish, his Troubles will overcome him. This is the nature of Trouble. It is not evil or wicked, it simply *is*. It's as natural as everything else in the world. If an ork lives up to his potential, he will conquer his Troubles. If he is lazy, his Troubles will have him for lunch.

Bringing on Trouble

"When you invite in Trouble, it gets to stay."

Orks do not boast about overcoming Trouble, they're modest about it. Orks are almost fanatical about humility. An ork *never* brags about his own accomplishments (except Bashthraka, a character flaw we'll discover later). Instead, he allows others to take up that task for him. As one ork speaks of another's courage and wit, the subject of the tale constantly shakes his head, interrupting with an occasional "He's exaggerating. I'd *never* be able to strangle a troll by myself!" or "It was a lucky shot. I doubt I would ever be able to do that again."

Immodesty, on the other hand, is a key ingredient to inviting *more* Trouble. An immodest ork announces to the world, "I am too great for my Trouble! I certainly need more!" And if an ork invites too much Trouble, it spreads itself to those around him, infecting them with unwanted (and unwarranted) misfortune.

"Are you looking for Trouble?"

But, in a way, orks *do* want more Trouble. After all, Trouble is the key to glory. An ork cannot gain glory if he does not have Trouble to overcome. This is why some orks go out of their way to look for Trouble. They start fights with bigger and stronger opponents; they go out into the woods with a spear and a shield, looking for trolls, dwarves and humans; or they simply call out to Pugg "You can't fool me! I'm the cleverest ork in the world!"

Ork stories are full of vainglorious orks who go out of their way to look for Trouble. *Almost* all of these tales are tragedies... but not every one. The lesson here is: "Don't go looking for trouble; it'll find you soon enough."

Talking to Trouble

Orks are always cursing their Troubles, a practice that lets Trouble know that they're

paying attention. The difference between a complaint and a curse is a fine but important distinction. An ork who curses his Troubles is acknowledging their power, but not relenting to it. An ork who whines about his Troubles is showing them that they're getting to him, thus inviting other Troubles to help overwhelm this weak-willed ork.

On the other hand, another common practice is mocking one's Trouble. Humans have often commented that orks seem to talk to themselves, when in fact, they're talking to their Trouble.

The Problem with Trouble

Don't get the wrong impression here. There is no "right way" to deal with Trouble. Ork bards tell stories for the express purpose of showing how others carried their Trouble. It's a life-long lesson to learn, a question even Gowthdukah doesn't know the answer to.

Nearly every tala in the world has his own opinions on Trouble and how to carry it (even Gowthdukah is still puzzled by its intricacies). They spend their entire lives telling tales of thraka and their Troubles, and a few try to express the insight they've gained in their stories. The great Raven Tribe tala Boolashtoon tells the story of a tribe torn apart by its Troubles. His story, "It Isn't Mine to Carry" tells how a household of the Falcon Tribe saw Trouble as an individual's responsibility. One by one, each thraka fell under the weight of his own Troubles, refusing to help anyone else carry theirs. In the end, if one – only one – thraka offered to carry another thraka's Trouble, the entire tribe would have been saved. Boolashtoon's lesson is simple: If you don't help your brothers carry their Trouble, no one will be there to help you carry yours.

On the other hand, Teeldoolash of the Bear Tribe favors a story of a small ork who gets everyone else to carry his Trouble for him. "I'm so small," he says. "Who will help me carry my Trouble?" Of course, because he never learns how to carry his own Trouble, his shoulders slump and his chest is shallow and his legs are weak. He's done in by those who loved him because they wouldn't let him carry his own Trouble.

Lohda

The ork verb "to carry," *lohda* is an important element of ork culture. Orks are migratory, always on the move. Therefore, an ork only owns what he can carry. Anything else would slow him down, and thus, slow down the rest of the tribe.

This concept is not only physical, but spiritual as well. It has been said that an ork must carry every word he speaks. In other words, an ork "owns" everything he says, or is responsible for all of his promises. Also, orks aren't asked how old they are, they're asked, "How many seasons do you carry?"





Another thing an ork has to carry – other than his house, his promises and his years – is his Trouble. How an ork carries his Trouble is almost as important as the amount of Trouble he has on his shoulders. An ork who carries only a little Trouble but complains about it all the time has mowgd shoulders. On the other hand, an ork who carries a whole lot of Trouble but never mentions it is an ork for whom the tala sing.

Domdha

"Who is more foolish? The fool or the downga who let him grow up that way?"

Above all other virtues, orks value domdha, a word that best translates as "craftiness." An ork who is domdha is witty, clever and cunning. He applies his wits in many trades – carpenter, blacksmith, thraka — and always seeks to challenge his abilities. Orks view domdha as a gift; not all orks have it.

Those orks who think they have it are called *irika*, a word that best translates to "foolish pride." Orks do their best to teach their children the difference between domdha and irika and laugh at races who do not.

Keerisboon

The ork word *keerisboon* means "laughing without a spear." The phrase comes from an old ork hero who got himself good and drunk and wandered into the woods without his spear and shield. When he awoke in a canyon full of wolves, he saw his folly, laughed out loud and walked all the way home without showing a single moment of fear.

It is perfectly acceptable to *feel* fear, but not to show it, especially in battle. Orks charge into battle, shouting war cries and singing songs with joy on their lips. "To show fear is to give fear," is an old ork proverb. After all, isn't it easier to be strong when those around you stand as tall and proud as trees? When those who fight beside you look as if they're about to fall at any moment, how firm will you stand?

Mother's Milk

Ork milk is potent with nearly 40% more fat than human milk. If ork infants are unable to feed on mother's milk, downga use reindeer milk as a substitute.

Fana/Fanu

Fana is the ork word for "hand," but fana can also be translated to mean "strategy," "standing," "position," "favor" and "advantage." In truth, it means all of this and more.

To *fanu* ("have hand") is to have advantage in a situation. To fanu also means to have



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One by one, all the children are taken...



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favor in one's tribe or household. To fanu means to have good position downwind on a deer next to a loud brook. To fanu also means that you've arranged to not spend the night alone tonight.

Each ork holds a certain amount of fana. The higher his fana, the more influence he brings to his household. The more fana his household has, the more predominance it has over the rest of the tribe. In short, fana is the key to ork politics, as we will discover later.

Shusha

"Shusha" best translates as "knowing what you shouldn't have to be told." An example of shusha in our own culture is knowing that you should stand six to ten feet behind the person at the ATM. This rule isn't written down anywhere; everyone just knows it. What's more, breaking shusha is a double faux-pas because now someone has to tell you not to break the rule, and so you've forced them into embarrassing themselves. If you ever see behavior that makes you want to say, "You should know better than that!" you're watching someone who has no sense of shusha. This person has "dowoomdha" or "yellow wits."

Thwak

Finally, we have a word that can be translated as "ruse," "puzzle," "con," "riddle" and "trick." The word is thwak, and it probably best translates as "Gotcha!"

Whenever you've been outsmarted, you've been thwaked (or, *thwaku*: "to be tricked"). Whenever you've been swindled, you've been thwaked. Whenever someone beats you in a game of chess, you've been thwaked. To defeat an opponent, not through physical ability, but by resources and cunning is a thwak, and it is the highest compliment a friend or loved one can give. Orks only thwak those they care about or admire. After all, tricking your betters is a surefire way to gain a reputation for yourself. So, if someone does thwak you, it's because they respect you.

Stealing

"If you can't keep it, it never belonged to you."

But thwak has another meaning; it is also the verb "to steal." Orks steal from each other all the time; the concept of "property," as we understand it, doesn't apply in ork culture. From an ork's point of view, possession is ten tenths of the law. Once you've lost something, it's no longer yours. However, there's nothing to keep you from thwaking it back...



Motherhood & Birth

As mentioned above, the ork word for "maiden" is *dayla*. In ork terms, a maiden is a woman who has not yet become pregnant. As soon as she shows signs of pregnancy, she must undergo the *dowmshay*: Ritual of Motherhood. When a female ork becomes pregnant, she is no longer a maiden, but a *seethoo*, or "expectant mother."

During the day, the *seethoo* cannot be touched by any ork that is not a *dowmga*. It is believed that the *seethoo* is actually between the real world and the spirit world while she is pregnant, a place that is dangerous to mortal orks. A *seethoo* also wears a veil over her face so no ork may look into her eyes. While she is pregnant, she is a vessel for incredible power that could burn an ork alive.

The gestation period is five months. Every night, *dowmga* take the *seethoo* into the woods and teach her *dowmshay*: "mother's wisdom." They teach her how to care for children, what to feed them and how to cure ills. This wisdom is not imparted upon any ork but those expecting children.

At the end of the five months, *dowmga* take the *seethoo* out into the woods where they assist in the delivery. Only daughter warriors are allowed near the site, although they cannot view it. They stand guard on the fringes and prevent any interference.

Dowmga instruct the *seethoo* to make as little noise as possible while a *thudowmga*, or "false mother," lies nearby, screaming and crying as loud as she can while *pretending* to give birth. It is believed that the *thudowmga* distracts any wandering Trouble from the *seethoo*. A trusted friend, or even the mother of the *seethoo* takes the role of the *thudowmga*; a dangerous position considering she is actually *trying* to get into Trouble.

If complications arise during birth, orks can cut the baby from the *seethoo*'s womb. The procedure is very risky (about a 65% chance of killing the mother and/or the baby).

Infants weigh six to eight pounds, measuring ten to twelve inches long. Mothers bear a single child. Twins and triplets are very rare. If the *seethoo* survives the birth, she is declared a *dowmga*. If she does not, she is brought back to the village for death rites (see *Death*, below).

The new *dowmga* names a daughter. The grandmother or a sister names the child if the mother did not survive. The first-born daughter is always named after the *dowmga* who birthed her, even if she died during the birth. A son is carried back to the tribe and the new *dowmga* chooses a male to name him. The male usually names the child after himself or a friend.

Transformation

Somewhere between the ages of seven and nine, a child reaches the proper age for the





Gooleeala, or Rite of Transformation. Until an ork survives *Gooleeala*, it is either a *plahn* (son) or daughter (*flahn*), not yet an adult and not responsible for their actions. They are not told of the *Gooleeala*.

Mothers let their village bard know when a child is ready. *Gooleeala* always takes place on *Bakharala*, the longest night of the year. The bards of many villages gather together and prepare for the ritual. They paint their skin black and wear large masks made from oak and go from village to village, collecting children for the *Gooleeala*.

Ork children already know that *Goosha* (a word that best translates as “boogey man”) walk the world on the longest night of the year, and when the bards come with their black skin and terrifying masks, the children run to their downmgas for protection. The bards burst into each home and rip the children from their mothers. The mother pretends to protect her child, but the *Goosha* are too strong for her. One by one, all the children are taken away from their village and into the darkness.

The ritual takes place in a mountain cave prepared by the bards. The children are taken deep into the cave where sunlight cannot reach them and given *tilta*, a meal made from mushrooms that have powerful psychedelic effects on the ork nervous system. They are then told that they must keep each other awake. If even *one* of them falls asleep, *all* of them will be killed.

For the rest of the night, the children sit in absolute darkness with the horrors of their imaginations come to life, coupled with the looming threat of death if they fall asleep. The bards watch them carefully, not only to see if they stay awake, but also to see if any of the children suffer a vision — evidence that the child has the potential to become a bard. The experience either binds the group together or tears them apart.

If, by the third morning, the children are still awake, the bards emerge from the darkness. One of them has covered his hair in animal fat and set it on fire; the only source of light in the cave. The shadows play off the walls, showing paintings of stories. Some of these stories, the children already know. Others are stories they hear for the first time. Finally, the ork with the flaming head (*taltoomo*; “the flaming one”) tells the children they must now find their way out of the cave. If they do not, they will die there. Then, the bards disappear and watch the children from the darkness.

THE EATING PRAYER

This is my brother's blood

This is his courage

This is his pain

This is his love

This is my brother's flesh

This is his strength

This is his need

This is his burden

These things are now mine

His strength is my strength

His courage is my courage

His pain is now my pain

Rest now, brother —

I will carry your weight



By the age of seven, all orks know how to make fire. The bards leave enough resources for the children to do so. If the children panic, they won't find the sticks, tinder and flint they need, and they will die. Most children make their way out of the cave, but those who do not didn't have the strength to become thraka anyway.

When they make their way out, the bards emerge from the cave, remove their masks and congratulate the children, for they are children no more. They are orks.

The bards and new orks go out into the woods and perform the next step in the ritual: scarification. Because they are no longer children, orks receive their adult names. They do not choose these names themselves, but are given a name by those who went through the Gooleeala with them. That name is then tattooed on the ork's body before they are re-introduced to the tribe and given to a dowmga with whom they establish a new household within the tribe.

Noodeema & Dracha

The ork word for death is *dracha*. But before we talk about death, let's spend a moment or two talking about the Otherside, a place orks call *Noodeema*.

Orks believe the world is flat and the gods live on the other side of the world. Thus, earthquakes are Bashthraka riding on his reindeer, the sun rises from the Otherworld every day and falls back down into it every night and the deeper you go into the ground, the closer you get to the land of the gods. Trees grow up from the ground because they gain nourishment from the Otherside and creatures who dig deep holes in the earth can actually travel between both worlds, bringing messages and news. With that in mind, let's talk about death and the soul.

Because an ork's soul is made of spirit-stuff, it wants to return to where it belongs; it is the body that keeps it here in the material world. When a body dies, it no longer has the strength to hold on to the spirit, and it departs quickly. Orks believe it is the soul that keeps a body warm, so when a body gets cold, it is because the soul has left the body.

Orks also believe that a great toad named Gorlam awaits them at the gates of the Otherside. The gods of the other races — humans, dwarves, elves and halflings — put Gorlam there after Pugg tricked them out of the Afterlife (see *Stories* for more). Gorlam eats any ork that tries to enter the Otherworld. No ork has yet defeated him.

When an ork dies, his tribe does everything possible to keep his body warm (thus keeping the soul here in the material world); the usual technique is burying it with hot coals. Then, the tribe performs an elaborate ritual over the body using herbs and other plants. Finally, in order to keep the soul from passing on to Gorlam, the tribe devours the warm body. Orks believe this passes the soul on to those who eat the flesh of their fallen friend, taking on his virtues, vices and aspects of his personality, depending on which part of the anatomy was eaten.





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... so can the gods of monsters visit him.



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The immediate household usually performs the ritual of dracha, although friends from other households are sometimes invited. The body — called the *drachan* — is divided up, depending on who was closest to the deceased.

Lineage & Boasting

Cannibalism changes another important element of ork culture: lineage. Orks don't believe that virtues are passed down from father-to-son (obviously, because they don't know what a "father" is) or even mother-to-child. Children come from Keethdownmga the way she made them. So, instead of boasting "I am the son of..." or "My grandfather was..." orks boast of *who they ate*. "The blood of Booealdah runs in my veins!" is a common boast, as is "I do not stand alone — the heart of Szalzhotha stands with me." This is not considered a way to attract Trouble, as it shos respect for the honored dead.

Fallen Enemies

After battle, orks always spend time to bury the bodies of their fallen enemies. They dig deep trenches, fill them with red-hot coals and bury the corpses on top of the coals. If the enemies were orks, they spend the rest of the night eating their conquests. If they are humans, dwarves or elves, they leave them in the ground. That way, the bodies stay warm and the soul within will not go to the Afterlife.

If orks don't have time to bury their enemies, they leave them out for the birds to eat. That way, they *still* don't make it to the Afterlife, but instead, rest in the bellies of crows.

Ghosts

Sometimes, an ork's death is so violent that his soul is *doowampa* ("knocked stupid"); it doesn't realize that it's dead. The soul wanders the site of it's body's death, haunting the spot until it's told that it must move on.

Orks can't see ghosts, but they can smell them; they smell like rotting flesh and worms. Whenever orks smell such a stink and cannot find a source, they call upon a shaman to help the ghost find peace. A shaman can communicate with ghosts, but only while dreaming. It is a dangerous undertaking, for the ghost can harm the bodalay's spirit while he dreams.

Black Magic

Ork black magic is called *doodom*. Those who practice it are called *doomla* ("witch"). Witches are mad downmga who live far away from other orks. Downmga warn their children to stay far away from the woods, and never go off with any orks they do not know. (However, unlike humans, orks have the capacity to "know" strangers they've never met. You'll learn more about that in **Anatomy**, below.)

Doomla are capable of many strange magics, all empowered by the body parts of children. Listed below are some of the more spectacular powers doomla are known to





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_ thaloo is philosophy and chochum is knowledge.



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have.

Flying

Doomla fly by mixing the stomachs of children into a gruel and smearing it on their feet. This gives them the power of flight until the next sunrise.

Scrying

Doomla can see the future with a pair of eyes from a small child.

Glamour

Doomla can change their appearance by wearing a necklace of teeth.

Invisibility

Doomla can make themselves invisible by cutting out a crow's heart with a knife made from a child's bone, then eating a bite of the heart and burying the rest. As long as it's buried, the doomla will remain invisible.

False Love

To make an ork fall in love, doomla mix milk, honey and ten pinches of mandrake on a virgin plate (a plate that's never been used). Then, they burn the mixture while speaking the target's name over and over again. The ritual usually takes three nights to complete.

Hatred Between Lovers

To cause hatred between lovers, the doomla takes a handful of child's entrails and mixes them with the dirt of a man's grave. Then, while walking between them, she shakes out the dirt, whispering the lovers' names. Again, this ritual must be done three times on three different nights to be effective.

Dead Hand

A hand cut from a living child, then preserved in his blood gives a witch great power. She can command any ork who drinks from a cup the hand has touched, cause infertility in dower and blind anyone's eyes the hand touches.

Thwarting the Doomla

Doomla cannot cross running water, nor can they enter any household without being invited in. The only thing that can kill a doomla is a spear from a rowan tree that was struck by lightning. The branch used to make the spear must be from a limb that has not touched the ground. Orks can also keep themselves safe from doomla by cutting ten blades of yarrow, throwing one into a river and putting the rest in their right boot.

Dreaming

As mentioned earlier, dreaming is an important part of an ork's life. In fact, children are taught that their "dream life" is just as important as their waking life. An ork's dreams



are voyages to the Otherworld, where he encounters threats and dangers just as real as the monsters he encounters during the daytime. However, dreaming is just like every other skill that requires practice and patience to master. As an ork grows in experience, he gains greater control over his dream life.

An ork does not walk through the Otherworld in his body (although that is also possible). Instead, it's his spirit that travels through the Otherworld. But unlike the immaterial spirits that visit the Wakingworld, an ork's spirit is *very* tangible. The ork word for his spirit as it walks through the Otherworld is *tangodo* ("walking spirit").

When they visit the Otherworld, orks can also visit the gods. However, because most orks' dreaming is unskilled, they gain little from the visit. Instead of waking with clear visions of his nocturnal journey, an ork is left with only vague impressions and half-understood visions. Thraka can do little to help a fellow ork gain control of his tangodo; that's something he has to learn on his own. However, sometimes it requires a trained dreamer – usually a shaman – to interpret an ork's dreams.

The Otherworld is not always a safe place for ork dreamers. The Otherworld is populated with all sorts of horrors, including demons, monsters and spirits of departed dwarf, elf and human heroes. Also, just as an ork can visit the ork gods, so can the gods that monsters worship visit him.





PART TWO

Chochum

Chochum is the ork verb "to live." While Thaloo teaches orks ideals, chochum is the knowledge they need to make certain food gets on the table each night. In other words, thaloo is philosophy and chochum is knowledge.

Orkus

When orks speak of themselves as a race, they use the word *orkus*. The word for a household of orks is *orkum*. The term for a tribe is *gathum*. There are approximately seventy-two tribes in Ghurtha. Each *gathum* is made up of a number of households.

*"If bees did not guard
it so well, all the world
would eat nothing
else."*

— *Tooltolay, tala of
the Porcupine Tribe*

Typical Orkum (Household)

A tribe always begins with one household. A household has one *dowmga*. Two *dowmga* in a household brings bad luck; too much Trouble in one place. The *dowmga* has a number of warriors to protect her. A small household could have as few as five *thraka*, a medium household as many as fifteen and a large household as many as thirty. Again, too many *thraka* is asking for Trouble to come for a visit. The *dowmga* also has a retinue of warrior-maidens to protect her. The number of *dowmgaday* depends on the size of the household, but is usually one tenth the number of *thraka*.

All orks sleep in the household around a fire. At least one *thraka* stays awake to keep the fire burning and to listen for predators. Larger households keep watch in shifts. The *thraka* spend most of the day hunting food and the catch they return with goes to feed the entire tribe (see *Typical Gathum*, below). The *thraka* who stay behind guard the *dowmga* from dangers. *Dowmga* spend the day working in the household. They stitch new clothes, repair old ones, and tend to infants. However, *dowmga* also mend the household (carpentry), repair and make new weapons (smithing) and prepare any food the *thraka* return with. In matters of authority and dispute, the *dowmga* always has final word. Quarreling with a *dowmga* is not permitted and obedient *thraka* will thrash





any ork who tries it.

The household is built to be portable. Each ork carries his own share of the household. Larger households have carts to help carry the load, a modern convention that many tribes look down upon: "If you can't carry it on your back, it's too big."

Typical Gathum (Tribe)

An ork tribe is made up of any number of households. A small gathum can have as many as five households, while the largest gathum (just twenty miles from the Solarian Empire) claims twenty-seven orkum. The most powerful (usually the largest) orkum in a gathum is called the *bashorkum* ("great household"). The downmga of the bashorkum is called *bashdownmga*. As with individual orkum, a bashdownmga's word is final.

Every gathum also has at least one *tala* (the best translation is "the one who remembers" or "bard"). Tala help maintain the gathum's history and advise the bashdownmga on matters of legal precedent. It is important for a bashdownmga to deal with similar matters in a similar way, to maintain an atmosphere of continuity and fairness. Treating one ork differently than another shows favoritism, something a bashdownmga cannot afford to do. The tala is also responsible for teaching children necessary stories, preparing them for adulthood. Finally, tala serve as messengers between the disparate gathum. During battle, many tala gather to watch and record the event. Striking a tala during battle is asking for a lot of Trouble.

Food

As we'll see later (in *Anatomy*), ork digestive systems are capable of devouring almost anything. Despite that fact, the gathering, preparing and eating of food is a highly ritualized affair. Orks don't go out for fast food, nor do they snack. They share everything in a great feast, making sure that everyone in the gathum is well-fed.

Dunta & Shoona

Dunta is the ork word for "hunting." Only thraka may dunta, and they do so in households. Each orkum goes out into the wilderness and brings home a prize: a *shoona*. The type of shoona brought home brings an orkum different glory. The orkum reveal their shoona one by one, hoping to out-do the household before them. Simple prizes such as berries and tree bark are easy captures, while orks who bring home reindeer and elk are regarded highly.

Gayla

When all the shoona are revealed, they are not brought back to their respective households. Instead, each of the downmga make a claim to each shoona. Some downmga are experts in preparing meats, while others prefer vegetable dishes. Each downmga has



a claim to a certain shoona, and rarely do they argue about where the shoona should go. In larger gathum, the bashdownmga decides where the shoona go. When all the cooking is done, the food is placed in the center of the gathum and all partake of the *gayla* ("feast").

Sooeeta – The Elixir of the Gods

The highest prize of all, the prize that brings a cheer to every ork's throat, is when an orkum brings home *sooeeta*: known to us humans as "honey." Orks *love* honey and have dozens of different ways to prepare it. Of course, orks can only get sooeeta during the short-lived summer months, so they cherish it while they can.

Capturing honey is a difficult affair considering it can only be found in bee hives. Orks who find and capture honey usually return with a fair number of stings: the sign of a true warrior. Of course, returning with honey *without* stings is the sign of a *clever* warrior.

Orks use honey for almost everything. They use it as a dipping sauce, ferment it into mead, baste meat with it and use it in stuffings.

Orks' fascination with honey is an ancient one. An old story tells how the other gods ate it to keep themselves young, and how Pugg stole it and gave it to the bees to guard. Of course, Pugg later taught his brothers how to steal it from the bees.

Hunting honey is no small affair. The ork word for "bee" is *zoom*. Zoom are a little larger than the average honey bee and do not have traditional stingers. Instead, they have tiny talons on their forefeet and razor-sharp pincers envenomed with a painful, but non-lethal, poison. Instead of stinging their prey, zoom know to strike in the tender, wet portions of the anatomy: the eyes, mouth, nose and ears. They latch on to the flesh and rip at it with their poison talons. The venom is painful and bites swell up for weeks on end. More importantly, enough bites cause a brief paralysis, which can be deadly. While zoom bites are not fatal, they are debilitating; many orks have gone blind, deaf and lost vocal chords while collecting honey.

The honey zoom make is dark and very sweet. In addition to its unique flavor, sooeeta is a powerful aphrodisiac. Orks who partake of a little honey are suddenly bursting with energy, ready to climb the highest mountain, swim the deepest sea. Those who ingest a great deal of it suffer from powerful visions. Those who ingest too much face the risk of death.

Because of these reasons, sooeeta is a holy food for the orks. When an ork baby is born, the mother touches his lips and tongue with a drop of honey. That is the last time he tastes honey until he proves himself worthy to be called "*thraka*," and then he partakes of the holiest of drinks: *bala*.





Bala: The Warrior's Drinkⁱⁱ

Bala is made from sooeeta added to fresh, boiled spring water.ⁱⁱⁱ A typical batch of bala is made from one gallon of water and four cups of honey, with nutmeg and various berries thrown in for additional flavoring (the exact recipe varies with each downmga). The solution is then mixed thoroughly and placed in containers for storage. The containers are not air-tight (or they would explode). After forty days, the bala is boiled once more and served hot.

Bala is drunk from *baladrún*, or "horn goblets." Orks fashion cups from the horns of bulls and other animals, all of which are very difficult to drink from. It takes a bit of practice for a young ork to drink from a baladrún without spilling; another step on the road to adulthood.

Just as bala fills an ork's stomach, so it fills his heart. At the very least, bala makes orks lightheaded and friendly. As they imbibe even more, it makes them loud and boisterous. A few more cups, and an ork feels he can do anything. But this effect is not unique in the world, which is why the ork word for bala's effects, *tlanda* ("foolhardy brave"), is very similar to the ork word for "heroic story."

Tlalan

Tlalan is the word for a story about an ork saved by serendipity rather than his own cunning. Just as bala can make an ork *tlanda*, so can stories. Hearing the tales of brave orks long ago can stir an ork's romantic feelings about his own abilities. "If Thaboo can kill seventy humans in one day, then so can I!" is a common phrase used by orks who mock those under the thrall of bala. Others may say "Trouble blinked" or "Trouble was looking the other way," to explain an unlikely victory, but it all comes down to the fact the ork in the story got lucky, and one can never count on luck; an ork can only rely on his own cunning, strength and fortitude.

Other Uses of Sooeeta

Orks use sooeeta in almost everything. Honeybread is made with rye, flour, honey and spices. Thraka carry it with them when hunting; they believe it gives them a burst of energy just before they need it. Downmga also use honey in stuffing, mixing it with chopped cheese, offal, berries and onions. Another drink, *doolan*, is made from boiling milk and honey together. The milk is curdled and slightly fermented honey is added. Then, it is poured into a bowl full of fruits and served hot. Finally, orks use honey as a dipping sauce for fruits and vegetables. Some ork tribes see this as a waste of good sooeeta, but the larger tribes – those who have enough thraka to capture large amounts of honey – care little for what smaller gathum think of their excesses.

Meat

Orks believe that partaking of the flesh of any animal is consuming its spirit, and are very particular about the meat they eat. Orks hunt auroch, bear, bison, deer, elk, fox,

goat, hare, lynx, marten, ox, peacock, pig, reindeer, whooper swan, and wild pig.

The most important parts of the meat – the spleen, loins, liver and marrow – are eaten immediately by the hunters. The rest of the carcass is treated with a sauce prepared by the downmga (consisting of herbs, spices and sometimes honey) and hung for a day.^{iv}

Orks cook larger animals on a spit, sometimes frying and roasting food as well. Using copper or bronze plates held over the fire, they use animal fat, butter and oil (sunflower, cottonseed, beechnut, etc.). For roasting, orks use a tool called a *shotala*, which consists of two plates on a hinge and a long handle. The meat is placed between the two plates and the shotala is buried in a pit of coals where the heat and juices roast it golden brown.

Fruits & Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables serve a dual purpose in the ork diet. (Orks eat them like candy, usually taking them right off the branch/vine.) Otherwise, they're used as flavor in a downmga's cooking. The most typical fruits and vegetables in an ork diet include apples, beans, blackberries, cabbages, celery, cherries, elderberries, hazelnuts, limes, onions, peas, plums, raspberries, and strawberries.

Bread

Orks bake bread from rye, wheat or barley (although sometimes the three are combined for experimental flavors). The ingredients are mixed together in a wooden bowl along with fresh spring water and oil. When they have them, downmga also add honey or peas to the mix. They knead the bread in wooden bowls, then put the ingredients into a pottery mold and add leaven to make the bread rise. The mold is then placed in a shotala (see above) and baked under hot coals. Ork bread must be eaten quickly, for it gets hard within a day.

Soups & Stews

Orks are very fond of soups and stews, and during the winter, they make up almost 70% of the ork diet (there's almost no soup in the summertime because the pots are too heavy to carry with them). When thraka return from a hunt, downmga mix everything together in a large pot. The cauldrons are usually made of soapstone or pottery and suspended from a tripod made from bronze, copper, bone or wood. Downmga let the stew simmer for many hours, knowing that the longer it sits, the better it will taste.

There are three important ingredients for soups: celery, carrots and onions. When these three ingredients are boiled together, they form the broth that gives a soup its flavor. Downmga experiment with different combinations of the three, and sometimes replace them all together (most often with cabbage). Downmga also know that any meat stew requires boiled bones for the best flavor. They boil the bones (with meat still attached) in a separate pot, then remove the bones and pour together the soup base and the "bone stew." Then, the meat is separated from the bones and put back into the stew. This

makes the broth thick with both texture and flavor and is an essential step in cooking an ork meal.

Seasonings

Salt

Every organic creature requires salt. Orks need approximately eight grams a day to maintain health and happiness (ten grams on particularly hot days and even more on active days). Fortunately, the ork diet accommodates this (fifteen a day) from the foods they eat *before* they start seasoning.

If orks were closer to the ocean, they'd be able to "mine the sea for salt." Instead, orks find salt within the earth.^V Delving into caves, hunting for salt, is a dangerous activity, but one worth its weight in fana. Salt also bursts from the earth in "salt mounds." This is a far less dangerous source of salt, but also far less common. Orks make a habit of spending at least a small amount of time near a salt mound or mine to gather the mineral.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is a white-flowered shrub whose bark may be ground into the familiar spice. The younger the bark is (indicated by a pale coloring), the sweeter the spice.

Pepper

Pepper comes from a flowery, leafy climbing vine. The seeds of the white flowers grow into berries which must be plucked before they mature (reach their red coloring). The berries are soaked and the seeds removed to make pepper seasoning. If the berries are left to ripen, then crushed and dried, it produces a more powerful, black pepper.

Poola: Desperate Food

And finally, there is *poola*, the ork word for "desperate food." It's been mentioned that orks can eat nearly anything organic, including tree bark, acorns, grass and even their own feces. More importantly, because of their unique digestive tracts, orks also gain sustenance from such meals.

Anything from the above examples is considered *poola*. While an ork *can* eat it, he often tries to avoid it at all costs.

Eating

While eating, orks use one bowl, one spoon and one knife. They sit in a large circle around the prepared meals and the downmga all eat first – starting with the highest fana down, of course. The thraka eat next and finally, the children.



CULTURE

Tribes are growing and the land isn't.



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An ork fills his bowl with one food at a time. In other words, he does not mix all the courses together, but cleans his bowl of his selected meal, then tries something else. It is also considered courteous to make sure the ork sitting to your left has had enough to eat. Orks regularly empty their meal into another ork's bowl if they have something the ork on their left wants — which frees up their bowl so they can fetch something else.

Spilling food is the height of bad manners; nothing should ever be wasted.

While belching and farting are viewed as part of the digestion process, they are not proper while eating.

If an ork eats much of a household's meal, it is a compliment. If he eats only a little, it is an offense. To eat nothing at all of a household's meal is an insult and worthy of a fight to settle the matter.

After the meal, as the orks remove themselves to clean their bowls, it is considered wise to compliment each and every cook on the meal they made. An ork who compliments a cook over another one ("The roast was the finest I've ever tasted") is bad form. Such comments should be reserved for private conversation.

Village Life

An ork's life is not stationary; he's always on the move. Orks are not nomadic (a tribe that has no permanent abode), but migratory (periodically moving from one place to another). Tribes observe a set pattern of movement as they follow the seasons and the animals they hunt. Each tribe has a different pattern, moving through areas that fill their own unique needs.

Ork tribes move across the countryside, stopping at *eetalday* ("resting places") where more permanent structures are left behind by previous visits. Each year, the orks repair standing structures and build new ones to house the ever-growing tribe.

A quick look at the Migratory Map (found in the **World** chapter) shows the yearly movements of the largest ork tribes. The map also shows the locations of the major *eetalday*. While each tribe is different (depending on its size), an ork village can be broken down and built with minimal time and effort and each household can be carried by the orks of that household.

When it comes time to move, orks tear down their households and pack them up for travel. They leave behind the frames of the larger structures, however and the shallow pits where they pitched their tents. They also leave behind a large stone called a *kho*. The *kho* is a kind of record kept by the bards of the tribe. It tells of the tribe's experiences and also tells other tribes of the benefits and dangers of the area.





The Eetalday

When building a permanent winter structure, orks pile up earth and stones, elevating the area around four to six feet above ground level. The area is then surrounded by poles and pikes, usually between eight and ten feet tall, making a rough wall that encircles the eetalday. The total height is between fourteen and twenty feet. The wall has a single entrance, perpetually guarded by thraka. Smaller eetalday range between one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty feet in diameter. Larger eetalday can stretch as wide as three hundred feet in diameter.

Within the wall, orks build their households.

Small households range from twenty to thirty feet in diameter, while larger households can range anywhere from fifty to seventy-five feet. They look like large teepees, the walls made from animal hide stitched together with twine made from animal (and ork) tendons. The household is built on a slight depression to help insulate the structure from the weather. Further heating comes from the central hearth and the body heat of the animals kept inside. When available, orks pave the floors of their households with clay.

As the orks move from eetalday to eetalday, they rely on these structures for shelter. They're arranged in a precise pattern to allow for the best defense against attackers. When they arrive at an eetalday, they begin to re-build the more permanent structures they carry with them from their last resting place. These buildings are much larger and are made from timber, bound together with wooden or bronze nails. Usually, only skeletons of the buildings are left behind. A tribe always designates one site as its *dooladay* ("winter home") where the tribe spends eight months of the (12-month) year. The dooladay is the largest of ork settlements and contains the most permanent structures. Forced into isolation for eight months, orks do the majority of their long-term work in the dooladay. Downmga stitch and sew, forge the metal for new weapons and armor and set aside meads for fermentation. Dooladay also contain subterranean chambers and tunnels, used to store food and hide children and downmga in case of attack.

Dooladay are also where the majority of ork pregnancies begin. The first night the orks set up the settlement, the entire tribe chooses partners for their long winter stay.

Orks do their best to carry as much of their village as possible. Leaving behind a forge or a kiln is inviting another tribe to steal it. However, a few eetalday have permanent forges, kilns and ovens that orks do not remove. These are the largest eetalday, places that are shared by the entire race. These eetalday - called *taldoolay* - are the closest orks come to cities.



The Ork City

There are three taldooley in the world. These places are sacred to orks, where great and mighty heroes fought, bled and died. Three times a year – once for each *taldooley* – all ork tribes meet, set up households, cook, eat, drink, tell stories and resolve old conflicts. In short, at the taldooley, orks celebrate the fact that they are orks; something no one else in the world can do.

It's also at these gatherings that orks take the time to trade. Downmga trade the fine garments they've spent the year making while thraka exchange winnings from battlefields. Orks will trade just about anything, although in recent years, the most valuable commodity is iron. Weapons and tools made of iron are always in demand, they always fetch a high price.

The taldooley is also the place where young orks are tested, to see if they have the mettle to become adults. A cave just north of the camp serves as the testing ground for potential thraka.

Battles for Territory

It's a fact: the tribes are growing and the land isn't. In fact, with elves, humans and dwarves advancing on ork territory, there's less land every year. Less land means less territory to share. Pack enough bodies into a tight space and you've got conflict. And that's exactly what land wars are all about.

More than ever, tribes fight other tribes over ownership of eetalday. As the wars continue, large gathums get larger and small gathums begin to disappear.





PART THREE

Ganala

The word for ork law is *ganala*. It means "this is the way." All the tribes have different laws, prescribed by the precedent of previous decisions, making ork law difficult to discuss as a single entity. An ork who wanders into a different gathum is literally walking into a new set of laws. However, there are parallels, drawn from the very first gathum.

Household Standing

Ork politics are tricky. There is no official means of determining who the bashorkum is, making the transfer of power a muddy and sometimes bloody affair.

Usually, the largest household in a tribe is the bashorkum. While downmga settle matters within a household, the bashdownmga settles affairs *between* households and within the tribe. Because they boast so many warriors, no one questions their authority. However, sometimes a charismatic downmga can win smaller orkums on her side, thus bringing authority into question.

The matter is handled with great shusha ("tact"). Once a month, all households gather to resolve any arguments. This gathering is called a *tooanda*. Individual orks do not bring cases before a bashdownmga, the downmga of each orkum comes before her to make the case, and she decides a settlement. The bashdownmga must consider the power of each household before making her decisions. Unpopular decisions may lead to derision within the gathum, which could lead to her own household losing favor.

It is during a *tooanda* that the question of authority may rise. After the bashdownmga makes a decision, the downmga of another house may rise and ask what a third downmga thinks, implying she would prefer to hear the opinion of the third downmga, rather than the bashdownmga.

This is a tense time, for now all other downmga must consider which household they support. If enough downmga support the challenger, the authority in the tribe changes. If not enough households support the challenger, the matter is dead and the challenging



household loses great favor.

If enough households *do* support a change of authority, the bashdownmga usually surrenders with silent dignity. If she does not, the affair can turn into a bloodbath. An entire tribe can be thrown into conflict over the right to rule, leaving a smaller, weaker gathum, ripe for conquering by other land-hungry tribes.

Punishment

Punishment for committing crimes depends on the precedent set by the bashdownmga. Typical punishments are found below.

Tanee

This is the most typical punishment. An ork is placed in the middle of a circle and beaten with the blunt ends of spears until the bashdownmga commands the thraka to stop. After such a caning, the offending ork is shunned by the rest of the gathum until his bruises have healed ("Keethdownmga has forgiven you, so shall we"). Then, he is reintroduced into the gathum, but is given a new name by the bashdownmga or the ork he offended.

Shoola

In some instances a bashdownmga calls for *shoola* ("great shun"). When an ork falls under shoola, he is tattooed from head to foot with black marks. Then, he's cast out of the tribe, never to return. (Shoola is sometimes used as a political tool to remove an ork from a tribe, particularly a powerful ork from a rival household.)

Shoola wander the countryside, looking for a way to regain their status. Of course, they can *never* rejoin their own tribe, but sometimes, another tribe may take them in if they prove themselves worthy. Tribes demand the shoola bring back the head of a local troll terrorizing the area or some such act of foolish courage. Then, the shoola may sit on the edge of the village and eat whatever scraps are thrown to him. When he proves himself again, he may stay within the village, but does not yet join a household. When he proves himself again, perhaps some sympathetic downmga will offer him a place by her fire.

Gunbloo

Gunbloo — drowning — is reserved only for terrible crimes; usually those that involve taking another life. The ork is bound and taken to a river or lake, thrown in for a count of ten and brought back up. He's allowed to catch his breath, then thrown in again for a count of twenty. This continues, always adding ten to the count, until the ork is dead. He is then buried with coals.

Shanda

Shanda is reserved only for those who practice black magic or commit crimes so

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"Love Sick"



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grievous orks fear supernatural retribution from the criminal. A pit is dug and filled with fire. The offender is tied over the fire, then another fire is built over him. The fire continues until there is nothing but bones. Then, the bones are crushed down into dust, mixed with holy herbs and devoured by a special shaman called a *shandadan* or "evil eater." It is believed the holy soul of the shandadan can keep the evil soul of the shanda in check.

Thwaku

Orks do not understand the concept of property. If an ork successfully steals from another ork, he has no right to ask for the stolen item to be returned. Instead, he is expected to steal it back. An ork who instead decides to take an item back by force is demonstrating a severe lack of wit and finds no sympathy from his fellow orks. If he is not clever enough to steal an item back, he should simply give up on it and never mention the matter again. Orks who dwell on being thwaku are regarded as *coonoo*, a word inspired by the sound baby orks make when they cry.

There are rules about thwaku, however. Stealing another ork's thraka (spear and shield) is a serious offense. To take away another ork's thraka is taking away his ability to defend the tribe. In essence, this is saying that he cannot defend the tribe at all and doesn't deserve to be called thraka. Stealing thraka is tantamount to a duel (see below).

Giving back something that was stolen is another sign of offense. It says, "Since you were too weak to steal this back, I'm returning it to you out of pity." Again, orks rarely give back a thwak unless they *want* to get into a fight.

Banta

A *banta* is a formal duel between two orks. Only a tribe's bashdownmga can authorize a banta, and orks who take justice into their own hands face harsh penalties.

The two orks face each other in a circle. Each ork is given one spear and three shields. At this time, the orks are only allowed to strike their opponent's shield. The combatants fight, each trying to break his opponent's shield. As soon as an ork loses all three of his shields, his opponent is allowed to make strikes against him.

Banta may be fought to first blood or to the death. Whatever the outcome, the households of both parties are forbidden to speak of the matter again. To do so would show *dowoomda* and cause the household to lose great fana.

Doon

"Treacherous death" is the best way to translate the ork word *doon*. It is the act of killing another ork outside a formal duel (or cheating during a duel). Those who commit doon are *dadoon*, "back-stabbers." Each tribe has its own way of punishing doon, but most include some sort of painful death. Some orks drown dadoon, some hang them by the neck and others beat them to death with the blunt ends of spears.



Counting

The standard unit in ork counting is the "handful" (five). Two handfuls (ten) are a "load." Orks generally don't need to count higher than a load.

The individual numbers are counted out on the hand, starting with the thumb, and are listed to the right.

Measurement

Orks measure liquids, powders and other materials in "fingers" (approximately three ounces). As with **Counting**, above, five fingers makes a hand and ten fingers is a load.

Calendar

The orks' measurement of time begins with the day (in other words, they do not recognize hours, minutes or seconds). For orks, a day is as long as the sun is in the sky. An ork month is the time between full moons. The ork year breaks down into six seasons (listed below along with our own counterpart months for reference). Each season is approximately 60 days, making the Ork year approximately 360 days.

Bear (March – May)

The season of the bear is the season of spring, when the snows melt away and all that's dead comes back to life. This is the beginning of the ork year. The season is named after the bear because this is when the bear rises from its great magical death-slumber.^{vi}

Hawk (June – July)

"His eyes are cunning and his talons are wise," goes an old ork poem. The hawk is a hunter, flying on his great wings in search of small animals to feed to his children. The season of the hawk is the closest orks come to summer months.

Raven (August – September)

As the world prepares to enter its deep sleep, the sky fills with ravens, flying southward to avoid the cold. "Even Bashthraha hates the cold," many tala tell the children of their tribes as they watch his messengers flee the freezing world.

Wolf (October – November)

Wolves are particularly active in this season, when the cold has settled in and the whole

Winning Her Spleen

Orks believe the spleen, rather than the heart, is the source of all emotion. You'll find out why along with a whole lot more about ork anatomy in Part Five.



world begins to freeze. Orks regard wolves with a strange kind of reverence, understand their culture and call them brothers. There are many wolf tribes, showing the orks' deep respect for these creatures.

Reindeer (November – December)

The season of the reindeer is the season of movement to the winter home. Orks use reindeer to move heavy households, and without them, many tribes would be lost in the "light winter season" of the reindeer.

White Hare (January – February)

The "dark winter season," when one must be wily as a hare, is the most dangerous time of all. Tribes without winter homes are likely to freeze to death, and the fiercest predators (wolves, in particular) are hunting for food.

Holidays

Orks do not celebrate holidays, but rather, "holy places." In other words, a tribe doesn't celebrate the day it wins a victory, but when it returns to the place *where* the victory was won, holding a great party with music, food and drinking.

Likewise, an ork doesn't celebrate his birth on a specific day, but rather, whenever he is at the place he was born, along with all the other orks who were born there.

Hygiene

Orks bathe as regularly as they can (not easy for a migratory race). They use soap made from lye and animal fat, and small buckets of water. An ork puts fat in his hair to give it shape and keep it out of his face. Dowmga clean their children and teach them to clean themselves, bathing their adult thraka children a final time when they first go to war.

Orks also trim their hair, moustaches and beards. Ork women wash their hair at least once a week (if they can). Orks handle toiletry in isolated areas and bury it when they're done.

Doona & Noona

If there is an ork word for "love," it is *noona*. But before we can discuss the ork concept of love, we have to talk about another issue.

Because orks do not recognize any connection between sex and childbirth, as far as orks are concerned, babies come from Keethdowmga. The goddess puts babies into the female orks when they are ready. Because of this, orks do not recognize that sex – specifically sex between a male and female – is the only way to make babies. This means orks have no taboos when it comes to homosexuality or bisexuality.

Both male-male and female-female sex is permitted in ork culture. The word *doona*

("sexual intercourse") is not gender specific. Orks copulate freely with any partner they are attracted to. However, there are some orks who choose to be monogamous. Overcome with powerful emotions and a binding loyalty, these orks are said to be *noona*. Those who have fallen under the spell of *noona* are called *noonandoo*, or "love sick."

The Ordeal of Love

Orks have mixed emotions about love, but one thing is certain: they understand that *noona*, like Trouble, is an ordeal. Those who are strong enough to endure it grow stronger by its testings. Those who are not strong enough are destroyed by it. It can raise an ork's heart high above the clouds one moment, and the next, bury it deep in the cold ground. An ork in love – *dandoonda* – must prove that he's strong enough to withstand *vroonda*: the ordeal of love.

It's all a highly ritualized process. When an ork feels the pangs of *dandoonda*, he must not allow his eagerness to get the better of him. After all, his *noona* may be trying to trick him into doing something foolish. So, when he first feels *noonandoo* sneak into his heart, he spends a while trying to get it out of his system. The *dandoonda* puts a braid in his hair just behind his right ear (the one closest to his spleen) to notify his fellows that he's *dandoonda*. This braid is called a *bandoona*, or a "love braid." While he wears the *bandoona*, he eats nothing but *poolah*. He may not wash and he cannot carry any weapons or sleep under a roof. All of this has a purpose: it's to notify the object of his affections – his *dandoona* – that he's willing to do anything to win her spleen.

While he wears a *bandoona*, a *noonandoo* not only subjects himself to torturous treatment, but also puts himself in line for beatings from his fellow orks as the tribe's *thraka* mock him for his foolishness and beat him with the blunt ends of their spears. They tell him that they'll stop if he denounces his *dandoona*; the abuse will cease. Of course, a true *noonandoo* never relents.

All of this abuse (self-inflicted and otherwise) is to prove a *noonandoo*'s devotion. Some *thraka* take advantage of a *noonandoo* to act on previous vendettas, but this is seen as a serious breach of etiquette and punished severely.

As the *dandoona* continues his self-torment, *thraka* approach him, asking if they might be the object of his affection. Sooner or later, the right *thraka* asks the right question, and the *noonandoo*'s secret is revealed. Then, it's up to the *dandoona* to accept or reject the *noonandoo*'s as her lover. However, she can also demand further tribute to make sure the *noonandoo* is true in his claims of love (thus earning her the title *eeyandro*, or "merciless").





Art

Ork art consists of ornamentation of practical items. Most are intricately detailed weapons and tools, usually depicting stories and /or totem animals. Almost every ork knows how to carve wood, and one look at an orkum's tools and weapons shows the devotion and dedication orks put into their work.

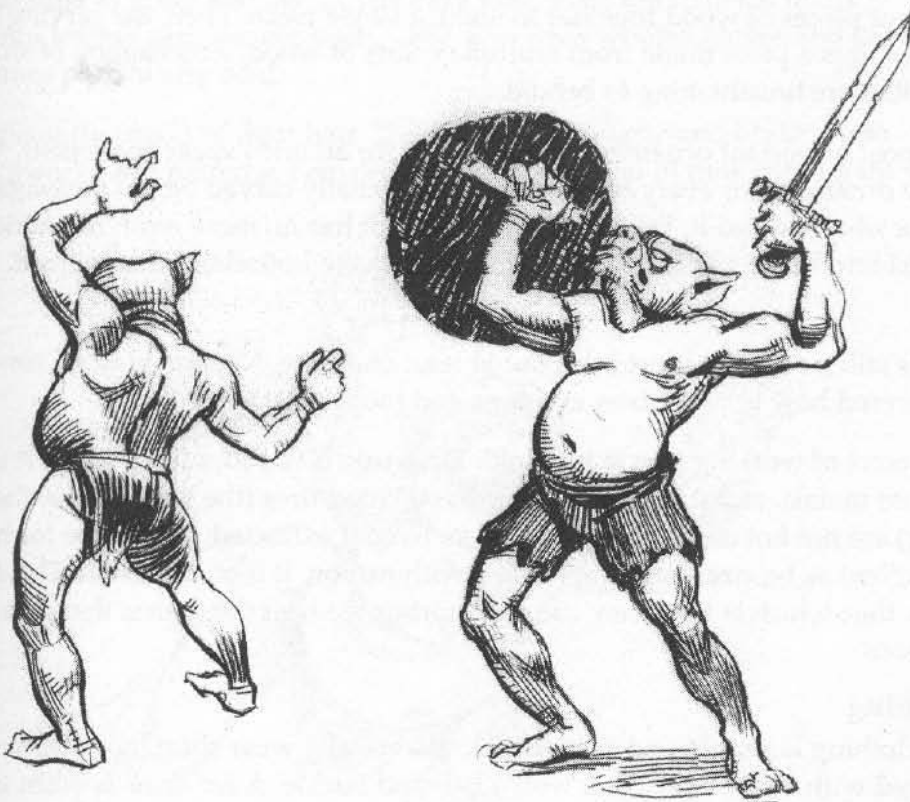
Style, Subject & Theme

Ornamentation is a ritualistic, almost religious activity. The subjects of ork art are almost always animals and ork heroes sitting within a complicated border of knotwork. The twisting vine-like knots represent both the great mystery of the world and the unity of ork culture. Despite the fact they are a disjointed group of tribes, orks know they are one race, united by blood and Trouble.

In the ork point of view, there are no endings and no beginnings, only transitions. From a human's perspective, winter is the end of a year. From an ork's perspective, it's only a transition into a new spring. The twisting and turning knots that surround ork knotwork represent this notion.

Bronze

Bronze working is a matter of pride for orks. It is difficult to accomplish, but the results



are always worth the labor. They make belt buckles, spear heads, broaches, bracers, rings, necklaces, cups, bowls, ax heads, knives, spoons, boxes, helmets, breast plates, shield rims and many other objects.

Orks make bronze by smelting tin and copper together. It holds an edge, is hard as rock and while it is soft enough to bend, it is also tough enough that it can be beaten back into shape. Working bronze is a valuable secret, and one that is not passed on to just anyone. Orks who know the bronze secret pass it on to those who prove their worth. Every tribe worth mentioning has at least one bronze worker, or knows a tribe who is willing to trade for bronze items.

Stone

Ork "standing stones" are covered with images of heroes, tales of great battles and ornaments celebrating the ork way of life. Orks use large stones as landmarks and territorial boundaries. The intricate patterns and images they carve into these stones lets other tribes know that this ground is reserved and that violating these territories is grounds for tribal warfare.

Wood

Surprisingly, the most amazing ork ornamentation is not in bronze, but in wood. Orks are master wood carvers and know many secrets to make their carvings spectacular pieces of art. Orks learned how to make glue from sap and animal fat, and use it to fit different pieces of wood together to make a single piece. Then, the carving begins. The end result is a piece made from multiple colors of wood, a menagerie of shades and hues that are breathtaking to behold.

The most important ornaments are reserved for an ork's spear and shield. A spear gains a new ornament for every battle it survives, usually carved by the downmga of the thraka who wielded it. When the wooden shaft has no more room for stories, it is never carried into battle again, but instead, retired to the household that owns it.

Iron

Iron is still a secret to most orks, but at least one tribe, Neelstalday's Crow Tribe, has discovered how to make iron weapons and tools.

The secret of working iron is two-fold. First, iron is not found naturally. It is only found in other metals, and it is difficult to extract. Wood fires (the kind of fires the orks are using) are not hot enough to extract iron. Even if extracted, in its pure form, iron is not as resilient as bronze. But when mixed with carbon, it is *much* harder. The dwarves know this, which is why they use coal (carbon) to heat the flames that make their iron weapons.

Clothing

Ork clothing is simple and efficient. Thraka usually wear short, reindeer wool tunics covered with a wool vest, tied with a belt and buckle. A fur cloak is worn in heavy





CULTURE

... you can't get up, that's *your* problem.



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weather, fastened with a bronze broach. Orks also wear trousers, a fashion tip picked up by the dwarves, although elves and humans still utilize robes and togas. Ork trousers can be long or short, wide or tight, depending on the taste of the individual.

Dowmga wear a long chemise that reaches down to the ankles, accompanied by a dress. A belt and buckle are worn, although the dress is fastened by a broach. In addition to broaches, orks also utilize heavy and ornamented pins.

Orks are also fond of wearing arm-rings and necklaces, usually made from bronze, stones or colored rocks. Wooden jewelry is also popular.

Almost all ork clothing is textured with elaborate braids. Jackets, vests and trousers are fastened with wooden buttons or a single bead. Tools, eating utensils and other items are tied to thongs and hung from leather belts which are fastened with bronze buckles. Orks dye their clothing bright or dark colors, depending on their mood. A thraka usually owns two vests: one brightly colored and the other darkly colored for hunting. An ork who is particularly haunted by Trouble is sometimes called a "one vest ork."

Footwear is made of animal skin, usually deerskin, and is laced around the ankle. Boots are more difficult to make, thus more valuable. Because of the wet conditions orks live in, they go through many pairs of shoes. This is also why boots are so uncommon; they take too much time to make and do not last very long. Hats are unusual in ork households, but leather caps are common. Orks also wear woolen gloves and caps when it becomes particularly cold.

Orks are particularly proud of their hair. They wash it regularly and braid it into elaborate knotworks and patterns. Females spend a great deal of time coming up with



new ways to show off their hair. Males usually tie their hair back with a string or ribbon, and leave a single braid behind the left ear. When a thraka is in love, however, he ties his ribbon behind his *right* ear.

Another material, called "rahsh" has become quite popular among the tribes in recent months. Orks have actually known how to make rahsh for quite a while, but a recent innovation they stole from men, the loom, makes the rough material soft and comfortable. The loom also cuts down on the time it takes a dowsma to make clothes. Instead of making a shirt from scratch, the loom allows her to make sheets of material. From there, she can cut shirts or pants out of the sheet and sew them together.

Music

Music stirs the soul, inspires passion, and drives an ork's dreams. Music is an important part of ork culture, not just in religious rituals, but in mundane life as well. Ork culture includes only three instruments: the flute, the drum and the lyre.

The Drum

Drums are used in every aspect of ork culture. Orks learn how to play drums when they're very young, gaining experience and skill as they grow. At night, when the sun sets, the drums come out and orks begin their nightly revelry of dancing and drinking.

Ork drums are of different sizes, but made from the same material: bone and skin. Specifically, ork bone and skin. Most often, drums are made from skulls covered with tanned ork hides, but larger drums are made from rib cages bound with leather and sinew. Drums are played with sticks also made from ork bone (typically femurs).

The Flute

Many thraka know how to play this instrument, although it requires a bit more practice than the drum. The ork flute has six finger positions and is made from ork bone. There are two typical sizes for the flute: large (made from leg bones) and small (made from arm bones).

The Lyre

Unlike the flute and the drum, the lyre is *only* played by tala as they use the music to accompany their storytelling. The lyre usually includes five to ten strings. Like other ork instruments, the body of the instrument is made from bone while the strings are made from hair or sinew.

Humor

Ork humor doesn't make a lot of sense to men, but then again, ork humor is all about men not understanding orks. Orks don't "tell jokes"; rather, ork humor is more based on the absurd activities of the other races. The set-up line is one ork making an





observation on human (dwarf or elf) behavior and the punchline is another ork replying "Men are so dumb." Like most humor, it's difficult to explain. You can find some examples below.

A: "Men value gold."

B: "Too bad humans can't eat it. Men are dumb."

A: "Swords are longer than spears. Men use swords."

B: "Swords are short and easy to break. Men are dumb."

A: "Men fret."

B: "What will be will be. Men are dumb."

A: "That thing you have is mine and I'm willing to ruin our friendship to prove it."

B: "Men are selfish and dumb."

Riddles

Orks love riddles. A household can spend hours (sometimes even days) working out another household's riddle. There are two standard formats for thala: "small riddles" (*thianla*) and "day riddles" (*nathanla*). Thanla are simple questions that require simple answers. Complex riddles require a series of answers and sometimes require days to solve. Thanla are usually between individuals while nathanla are challenges between households that last until the end of the day (at sunset, the challenged household must come up with an answer). However, sometimes households challenge each other to a series of small riddles.

Games

Like most warrior cultures, ork games prepare youngsters for life ahead of them by playing rough games with a real risk of injury. Orks don't believe in "fair play" or "sportsmanship." If you get knocked down, and you can't get back up, that's *your* problem, not the fellow that hit you. Below are a few of the games orks (children and adults) play.

Trees

Trees is played by both youngsters and thraka, though not together, in a forest. Orks are divided into teams and each team is given a number of acorns equal to half the orks on the team. (For example, if a team was made up of eight orks, the team receives four acorns.) The object is to eliminate every member of the other team by hitting them with one of your acorns. However, you can only eliminate someone who has fewer acorns than you. Also, if an opponent catches an acorn you throw at him, *you* are eliminated and he keeps your acorn.



Timboo

Man's version of Timboo is called "Tag." However, the ork version of tag is a bit rougher than our version. Instead of simply touching someone, you have to tackle him down to the ground.

Baloolah

Baloolah ("Stick & Bone") is played with blunt spears (thraka remove the metal points) and a ball for each team. Orks use the sticks to strike the ball to team mates. Striking an opposing player with the ball makes that player a "captive." All captives sit on the sidelines and cannot participate in the game.

The object of the game is to strike an opposing team's "home stone" with your ball. Whenever a team makes a score, they can either score a point or free one of their captives. The first team to score a predetermined number of points (usually ten) wins. Another way to win is to capture all your opponent's players.

Pilah

Pilah ("Plates") is a variation of baloolah played by some of the southern tribes. Instead of a ball, thraka use wooden plates. Players divide into two teams with a single plate which gets thrown between players until it's thrown to a player who can hold both the plate and the opposing team's home stone at the same time. The player holding the plate cannot move, only throw the plate to a team mate. If the plate is caught by an opposing player, possession of the plate goes to that team. Play continues until a team scores a predetermined number of points.

Gambling

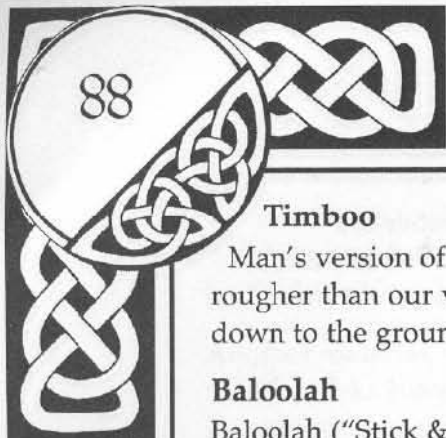
The dice game orks play is called "Ooeetha" ("Bones"). Orks roll five dice (with six sides), looking for sets and runs. A set is multiple dice falling on the same face (two threes, four sixes) while a run is multiple dice rolling a series of numbers (1, 2, 3 or 4, 5, 6, etc.). Ork gambling involves the thrower making a boast and other orks wagering items against that boast. The thrower says, "I can throw two doubles." Another player says, "No, you can't." Then, both players put forth something they're willing to wager on that roll. Some tribes equate Ooeetha to boasting and forbid their thraka from playing it.

Healing & Medicine

Like every culture in its scientific infancy, orks' knowledge of wounds is rather lopsided: they know far too much about causing them and far too little about healing them. This section details orks' knowledge of what they call *sayshum*: the healing art.

Shayla: Wounds

Shayla is the ork word for a wound made by a weapon. Orks' knowledge of shayla is extensive due to the race's long history with such injuries.





Bleeding

There is one symptom pervasive in all *shayla*, and that's bleeding. Usually, if a wound bleeds extensively, it is already fatal; bleeding is incidental^{vii}. This kind of wound, called *eeshoola* ("the last wound"), includes cut throats, missing limbs, deep puncture wounds and decapitations. Eeshoola are simply too grievous for the healer to do any good. However, when the patient can be saved (simple lacerations that do not involve major blood vessel damage), the healer covers the wound with sulfur powder and applies direct pressure. Healers also use amputation and cauterization when the limb has no chance of being saved.

Lacerations

When dealing with lacerations (wounds caused by swords, knives, spears, etc.), the healer begins by washing the wound with a wine/water mixture. Once the blood has cleared away, he inspects the wound. If the wound is *basha* ("clean"), he can use sutures. If the wound is "doonda" ("inflamed;" the ork word for "infected"), he does not.

The sutures used on clean wounds are made from linen and threaded with thin, bronze needles. With the wound closed, the healer then covers the wound with a mixture made from honey, butter and reindeer fat (1/3 honey/butter and 2/3 reindeer fat). This mixture is augmented with dried wine dregs, juniper and prunes. Finally, the healer pours wine on the mixture and lets it dry. After an hour or so, the mixture turns into a sort of cast. It's bound with a bandage to protect it from cracking and staining.

Some tribes use a slightly different method of suturing, a method that has fallen out of favor with many healers. The healer cleans the wound, as before, but instead of using a needle and thread, he employs bees.

The healer holds a bee close to the wound, and when the insect bites with its mandibles, the head is twisted free from the body. The mandibles hold the wound shut and the poison numbs the region, acting as a kind of local anesthesia. The wound is then covered in the same honey-butter/reindeer fat mixture as above.

If a wound is infected, the healer does not use sutures. Instead, he prepares a mixture similar to the one listed below and dips long strips of linen into it which he then places over the wound, pulling the edges tight. Finally, he wraps the wound in linen bandages soaked in wine.

Tanda: Arrow Wounds

Dealing with wounds from arrows is a special case; in fact, orks have a separate term for the wound: *tanda*.

The healer first determines if the arrow must be *tandoo* ("pushed through") or *shoondoo* ("pulled back"). It's the arrowhead that causes this problem. Arrowheads are designed with "wings" or "barbs" which catch tissue if they are simply pulled out the way they



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Bandoo, Kowkow & Toonay

entered, ripping the tissue, making the wound much worse and far more difficult to treat and heal.

If the arrowhead is deep within the tissue, the healer pushes the arrow until the tip breaks through the other side of the limb or body. Then, the shaft (on the entry wound side) is broken and the rest of the arrow is pulled through. If the arrow has pierced the limb, the patient is in better luck. The tip is broken and the arrow is pulled back out the way it entered: through the entry wound. Once the arrow is removed, the healer applies the honey-butter paste described above.

The worst case for the victim of an arrow wound is when the arrowhead and shaft are broken off in the limb with no visible means of grasping the arrow. The healer touches the wound to discover where the arrowhead rests. Then, using a sharp knife, the healer cuts open the wound and allows the blood and pus to run. This also allows the healer to see the shaft and push it toward the other side of the limb. If this method fails, the healer must make an incision on the other side of the wound to see if he can remove the arrow from that direction.

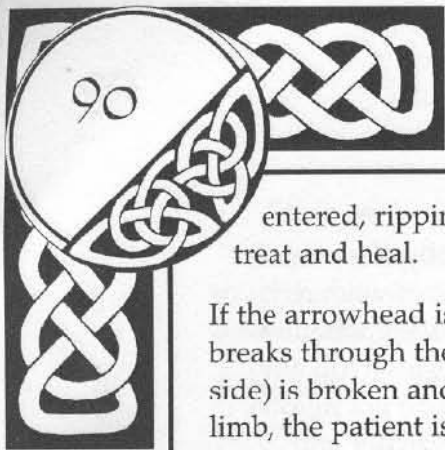
This is a very dangerous procedure, for the arrow can pierce major organs and arteries on its way to the other side of the body. Thraka try not to perform the procedure, leaving it to downmga who know much more about anatomy. However, sometimes circumstances don't allow for patience.

Ta: The Burning

When a wound becomes infected, orks refer to the red, tender flesh as *ta*, which is also their word for "to blow," as in "to blow on a fire."^{viii} Healers treat all wounds with a wine-water mixture, to help prevent the wound from becoming inflamed.^{ix} Some healers also add a mixture of salt and mustard seed to the wine-water. As an old ork proverb dictates: "If medicine burns more than the wound, it is healing."

The two most common infections are *beeta* ("the bite") and *balana* ("blackening"). *Beeta* is caused by poisons^x infiltrating the body through an open wound. Symptoms usually start within several weeks after infection. The victim feels depressed, suffers headaches, and soon has trouble opening the mouth and swallowing. After a while, all of the body's muscles tighten, and spasms interfere with breathing. Death occurs from malnutrition, dehydration and simple exhaustion.

Orks aren't exactly sure what causes banala, but they do know it comes from untreated wounds.^{xi} The skin around the wound turns black, the patient loses all sensation in the limb and eventually, the limb falls off. The only treatment orks know for banala is amputation and cauterization. Amputating a limb is always a sad decision: it makes the thraka less capable of carrying his downmga's house.





A third kind of infection, googan ("brown boils") is also highly common. The patient suffers from high fever and brownish, pus-filled bubbles under the skin. The victim dies in a matter of days.^{xii}

Sheeloo: Drinking Illness

A common practice among downmga is one called sheeloo or "drinking illness." Orks believe that illness runs in the blood, and therefore, it can be removed by removing the infected blood. Downmga make specific cuts in the skin, usually just above the liver, and drink the blood that oozes forth. The principle is simple: the ritual of taking the blood allows the downmga to take the illness from the patient.

Broken Bones

Compared to the rest of the world, ork healers are masters of fixing broken bones.^{xiii} No one is certain how they gained the knowledge for this practice (although, the orks say it came from Gowthdukah). When a healer encounters a broken bone, he first gives the patient the ork version of anesthesia: he knocks him out with alcohol. (Of course, there are less comforting methods, but I'll let you use your imagination.) After cleaning the wound with wine-water, he makes incisions in the wound around the broken bone. This allows the bone to move; without these cuts, the swelling and damaged tissue do not allow the healer to manipulate the bone. Pushing the bone back into the limb, the healer then packs the fracture with the mixture we mentioned above.

If the bone is exposed, drastic measures must be taken. A slice of flesh from the patient's rump is sliced off and placed over the opening. The flesh is then sewn together, covering the wound. Again, the honey-butter mixture is cast over the wound and the patient is not allowed to walk for three moons. Every seven days, the mixture is refreshed.

Other Salves

We've talked greatly about the honey-butter salve. But there are many recipes, each used by different tribes, each sworn to by a different healer. Some tribes use a mixture of spruce bark, gum of aleppo pine, honey, fat from the kindey of a male sheep and essence of cedar. Still others swear by a mixture that involves powdered mistletoe, honey, milk, wine, water and crushed reindeer horns. Each tribe is different, and each salve delivers different results.

Other Common Ork Ailments

Orks suffer from many diseases. Listed below are a few of the more common ones along with the method (if any) that orks use to treat them.

Byoobon

Byoobon ("purple tongue") is a disease that chiefly strikes children. The first symptoms are a sore throat, headache and fever. Soon enough, purple swelling appears under the





chin, indicating the child has byoobon. The purple swelling develops into a rash two days later. The rash looks like purple pimples spread all over the body. The child's tongue also turns a bright purple and swells. After several days, the infected skin - including the tongue - begins to peel. This lasts for almost two weeks. Fortunately, most cases of byoobon are not fatal; at the end of the two weeks, the child makes a complete recovery. However, complications from byoobon can cause difficulties later in life, depending on the age of the child. If the patient is too young, the disease kills him quickly. If he is old enough (and strong enough) to survive it, he is left with scars from the rash and never grow hair on those once-infected areas.^{xiv}

Bandoo

Another common illness infecting the ork population is bandoo ("the runs"). Symptoms of bandoo include severe diahrrea which causes dehydration and death. Orks treat bandoo with a special mixture of 1/5 milk, 1/5 honey and 3/5 salt. Orks die from bandoo because the tribe simply does not know how to treat it.^{xv}

Kowkow

Another all-too common disease that strikes down two-thirds of its victims is something orks call *kowkow* (the ork word for *coughing*). Victims experience high fever, persistent coughing and lack of strength. Strangely enough, they also complain that they cannot get warm enough, and shiver from the cold within. Patients with kowkow are isolated from the rest of the tribe. Orks know that once one ork has the disease, others will follow; an observation that has given the disease the nickname "the hunting illness." The only treatment orks have for kowkow is isolation, keeping the patient warm and constant care. Orks have learned that keeping the patient eating and drinking seems to help the illness along. As the condition worsens, breathing becomes rough and painful. If the condition is not treated, the patient dies with blue lips and pale skin.^{xvi}

Dowmga treat the shivering, *tilna*, by feeding the patient a butter covered snail. The patient then wears the shell in a small pouch around his neck for thirty days.

If the patient suffers from *tilna* and kowkow (a cold), dowmga mix together a porridge of dandelion, chickenweed, wood sorrel, hazel-buds and honey, mixed with oatmeal. The patient must eat this every morning for seven days.

Toonay (Seizures)

For *toonay*, the patient swallows a spoonful of milk sweetened with honey and mixed with shredded bread that's gone green (mold).

Oonoona (Asthma)

Dowmga believe dandelion juice mixed with honey is the best cure for *oonoona*. They boil the mixture and rub it over the chest of the patient until his breathing is dry again.



Boonoo ("Bad Blood")^{xvii}

To cure *boonoo*, downmga hold down the patient and have him drink boiled carrot juice. For *boonoo* caused by the bite of a mad animal (rabies), the downmga cleans the wound with a honey-butter and mead mixture, then covers the wound with a paste and let sit for thirty days, changing the paste every three days.

Koolah (Cramping Limb)

Wrapping the cramping limb with a rope of oak leaves until the cramp is gone is the most common cure.

Loopah (Dysentery)

Woodbane and maidenhair (the plant), boiled into a thick honey-milk is the best cure for *loopah*.

Owcolah (Earache)

Wool from a black reindeer stuffed into the afflicted ear will cure it within one week.

Eetordun (Erysipelas)

Orks call it "red fever," and treat it with blood drinking.

"Yellow Eyes"

When an eye is clouded with mucus, the ork must go to a holy well and wash it clean.

Baldana (Jaundice)

Baldana is best treated with a mixture of saffron, turmeric, sulphur, tartar emetic and honey.

"Yellow Brains" (Bad Memory)

To treat yellow brains, the patient must swallow the brains of a bear.

Peetowlah (Rickets)

To treat a child with *peetowlah*, downmga carry the patient around a battle site of a great hero. This must be done three times. Then, the child must be kept in the cloak of the hero and stay by a fire until the condition betters.

Balloon (Toothache)

To treat a toothache, the patient must chew on the teeth of reindeer. If this does not cure him, the tooth must be removed.





PART FOUR

Zhoon

"Just as an ork has two hands, so does he have two considerations in war: reason and objective. If an ork has one, but not the other, then he is as a one-handed ork: not incompetent, but crippled, nonetheless. If he has both, then like a two-handed ork, he may wield both the spear and the shield, and bring victory and glory to his household and his name."

—The Saga of Gongoo Hrolf

War is a serious matter for orks, one that should never be undertaken without consideration. And while their methods of going to war are as formalized as everything else, they have no written record dictating the methods and devices of warfare. All orks have to go on are the stories they are told by the bards. These stories, the great War Stories, tell of heroes from the past who fought, won and died. From their example, the ork philosophy of warfare has developed.

The Two Considerations

A tribe needs a reason to go to war, and before it commits lives to winning that war, it must also first consider what it hopes to achieve, for from an ork point of view, "killing the enemy" is not enough.

Reason

A tribe needs serious reason to call war on another tribe, and for orks, the only acceptable reason is invasion of territory. At least, it's the *beginning* of a reason. If a tribe arrives in a territory and find its natural resources stripped by another tribe, lives will be lost.

When a tribe violates another tribe's territory, the offended tribe sends a bard to settle the matter. If the bard cannot find an equitable solution, he informs the offending tribe that war has been declared and they should expect visitors soon.



Objective

Orks do not go to war for the joy of it. In the example above, the objective of war is to gain back lost territory. For the offending tribe, the objective is to *keep* the territory.

Fana: The Five Virtues

Previously, we've discussed the word *fana* and it's many meanings. Here, in terms of warfare, "fana" means "hand."

Orks look at strategy from the point of view of a hand. Just as all the fingers must work together to wield a spear, so must a commander have five interlocked and complimentary virtues. These are the virtues by which all thraka are measured.

Zho: Strength

Strength alone is not enough, but it's the best place to start.

Zho means "strength," but it translates better as "capability." It's not enough for a thraka to be strong, he must also be able to use his strength when the time comes. Orks do not drink before battle, for this compromises their *zho*.

Bha: Courage

You do not begin to live until you know you're going to die.

This kind of courage, embracing one's own mortality with joy and zeal, is *bha*. When an ork realizes this for the first time, it is said "his soul sings the song of *bha*," a song that his body cannot contain. Orks usually first experience *bha* at the end of a battle, when they look around at the bodies of their fallen comrades, remembering their own courage, remembering their own struggles to live. Tears are inevitable. Those tears of joy, sorrow, grief and release are *bha*. It is said an ork's *bha* is hidden in the dark forest of the heart, and every ork must dedicate his life to finding it. Some never do.

When an ork enters battle, fights an opponent, knocks him to the ground and is offered the opportunity to kill him, his *bha* is tested. Does he have the willpower to kill? Or will he be weak and offer mercy to an enemy who would certainly offer no mercy to him? To be a thraka, an ork must have the will to kill. He must also have the will to make plans that will bring death to other orks. He must do things to his enemy that will make them beg for their lives. In short, he must be ruthless. Any thraka who is not leads his comrades into certain death.

Thrun: Prowess

'Practice' is failure in a pretty dress.

"Practicing is pretending," is another common phrase. Orks don't have time for "practice." When their warriors train, they train as if they were facing an enemy. Too often, young thraka train without putting their full force behind the blow, afraid they'll





CULTURE

An army possesses five advantages...



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harm their training partner. The ork word for this is *plana*, or "play-fighting." Experienced thraka know that play-fighting only prepares you for failure. When they train their young thraka, orks train them to hit as if they mean it, to make every hit count. If a thraka trains falsely, he fails both himself and his opponent; he won't know how to strike and his opponent won't be prepared when *real* blows come during war.

Incidentally, here's an old ork proverb: "Never trust a *gooena*." A *gooena* is an ork who is capable of using a spear with *both* hands. We'd call such a fellow "shifty."

Wan: Cunning

A strong thraka can kill many men in a battle. A cunning thraka can kill them all in a single night.

An ork who charges into battle blindly, counting on his skill and strength to carry him through is stupid. Orks know that strength and skill are only two fingers on the hand; he must have *wan* ("cunning") as well. Cunning gives advantage where strength and skill cannot. It also keeps his fellow thraka alive. Wan tells an ork that fighting from the top of the hill gives his archers and spearmen an advantage, thus keeping them alive. It also tells him to fight on the other side of a bog, peppering his enemy with arrows, forcing him to move through the rough terrain, thus keeping his brethren alive. A commander who can win battles with few (or no) casualties is greater than one who kills half his army. These are the commanders who are remembered with *fana*.

Shoon: Endurance

Getting knocked down doesn't matter. Getting back up does.

Shoon means "endurance," but in this context, it means a great deal more. On many occasions (especially when they're drunk), thraka are known to *bhoola* ("friendly fighting"). The two orks involved use no weapons and fight with only their bare fists (no kicking allowed). One ork throws an insult, and then a punch. The second ork does not dodge; he takes it. Then, the second ork gets back to his feet, throws an insult and a punch of his own. This continues until one ork can't get back up. This ritual *only* takes place between friends – you cannot trust a stranger to fight fair.^{xviii} *Bhoola* is more than a friendly ritual, however, it is also a way for thraka to prove their *shoon*.

The Laws of War

Just as orks have laws that govern them during times of peace, so do they have laws governing their behavior during times of war.

Preliminaries

Wars are generally conducted between gathums. Households seldom fight with each other; personal duels usually handle that kind of conflict. When one gathum declares war on another, the declaring gathum is called the *zhoondoo*, while the gathum on the



receiving end of the declaration is called the *doozhan*.

The zhoondoo sends a bard to notify the doozhan there is a problem that must be settled. The implied threat of sending a bard is that if a settlement cannot be reached, war is on its way. Although killing a bard is bad luck, it has been known to happen on many occasions.

If a settlement cannot be reached, the bard declares war on the doozhan, returns to the zhoondoo and notifies the bashdownmga. Once war has been declared, authority over the gathum shifts from the downmga to the thraka. The bashdownmga chooses a thraka to organize the gathum and prepare it for war. This commander, called the *zhoothraka*, creates a council of advisors, usually headed by the bard.

Each household sends a battalion of thraka to serve the zhoothraka. Young thraka usually serve as archers (see *Tactics*, below) while the rest serve as spearmen. One thraka from each household is given the household spear (*doomtama*), marking him as the household's champion and leader of the battalion.

Kooma: Yielding the Field

Goodowka looked at his enemy with venomous eyes. He slammed his spear against his shield, making thunder ripple across the green grasses. "You cannot win, Shaleenu," he shouted, even though his enemy was only two paces from where he stood. "I have fana here! Look at my army; there are three of us for every one of you. And while you stand at the bottom of the hill, my army stands at the top, looking down at you like I look down on the ants who pester and bother me! The Bear Tribe will kill many Foxes this day!"

"Pah!" Shaleenu shouted back. "What good is numbers when your thraka are so soft, even a toothless old tala could wrestle them down to the ground with her bare hands! And you believe we chose to stand at the bottom of the hill to give you an advantage? We were here first, Goodowka. Do you not think I would be wiser than to choose a position of weakness? And certainly you see those trees to the south. Even a child would know to put archers there, ready to fire the moment you give your thraka the order to charge. And as they charge, the wet land will slide under their feet and they will slip onto their backsides, helpless as newborns. I think many Bears will find themselves on the ends of sticks this day."

The two commanders gazed at each other, their eyes as stern as dwarven iron. For many moments, the thraka on either side waited. And waited. The Foxes counted heads while the Bears tested the slick soil beneath their feet.

"Enough!" Goodowka cried. "We will leave the field, even though we are many. I do not wish to kill foxes today."

"And we do not wish to die, wise Goodowka. Your wisdom has saved Fox lives today. You have our gratitude."





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— from The Battle of Broken Hill

Before any blood is shed, before any bows are fired or spears are thrown, the two commanders of the ork armies meet in the middle of the battlefield and compare notes. They list their own advantages and their enemy's disadvantages, hoping to convince their opponent that it would be in their best interest to *kooma*: yield the field.

This ritual occurs before *all* ork battles. No commander would ever consider "skipping the formalities." The ritual of *kooma* allows an enemy the opportunity to withdraw without needless bloodshed. There is no dishonor in *kooma*; it saves lives. However, there are times when both commanders are convinced of their own advantage and refuse their right to retreat. Of course, this leads to battle... a mad, bloody time when the only rule is that the strong and lucky survive.

Some may see this as boasting. Orks don't; it's merely a declaration of facts. "These are my advantages, these are your disadvantages." Stating facts doesn't invite Trouble, but a general who ignores them certainly does.

"Yellow-Feet"

There is no dishonor in surrender. However, when thraka turn tail and run... that's a different matter entirely.

"Yellow-Feet" refers to orks who run away from a battle. To show such lack of courage is shameful and must be punished. An ork army that runs away is killed down to the last thraka and their bodies left to rot. They are disgraced and no longer orks in the eyes of their brethren. They are *goonda*: "less than dirt."

Oovildah: Hostages

Oovildah are the ultimate prize in war. When one tribe captures thraka, they hold the fate of the entire tribe. The victors return to the defeated tribe and demand *sivladah* ("recompense") from the bashdownmga. She must then give the victors their demands in exchange for her captured downmga. Sometimes tribes trade in weapons, sometimes territory, and sometimes daughters, depending on the merciful nature of the victorious general.

Daring tribes even manage to take hostages *before* the battle. Then, when the generals meet on the battlefield, the hostages are offered in return for surrender.

Zhoontowmfa: The Five Advantages

The commanders above were very specific; they spoke in terms of *zhoontowmfa*: advantage.

In ork warfare, an army possesses five advantages: foreknowledge, mobility, command, numbers and provisions. We'll discuss each below.



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CULTURE

... because they can move quickly.



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Foreknowledge

One of the most important advantages a commander can have is advance knowledge of his enemy. Not only the number of troops he commands, but their equipment, morale and position. How quickly do they move? How *well* do they move? Are they disciplined troops or are they an army of frightened children eager to go home? Who is the commander and what battles has he fought in the past? The answers to all of these questions are weapons to be used against an enemy. A commander who has foreknowledge of his foe has the First Advantage.

Mobility

Large armies move slowly, while smaller armies have the capacity to move quickly. Moving an army quickly is one of the most important keys to a commander's success. If an army can move, it can gain advantageous ground, make strategic retreats, flanking maneuvers, and attack its foe where its weakest. No matter how large an army is, if it is attacked where it cannot defend, it will break. A commander who has an army that can move quickly has the Second Advantage.

Command

An army's commander is its brains. Without knowledge of command, without knowing how to motivate men and teach them how to be soldiers, he is less than nothing, and useless to the orks he leads. Commanders must make quick decisions and have the willpower to carry those decisions through, no matter how bleak the battle may seem. Victories are not won by slamming your army against your enemy, they are won in a single moment, and it takes a commander who understands war to see those moments and seize them when he does. A commander who can do this has the Third Advantage.

Numbers

An army's size cannot be discounted. Although few *can* defeat many, history proves that a swarm will overwhelm a pack on nine days out of ten, no matter the skill and sagacity of the commander. A large army can crush a smaller one – if it moves quickly. A larger army can crush a smaller one – if its commander is wise enough to avoid tricks. A larger army can crush a smaller one – if it strikes without mercy and destroys without guilt. A commander with numbers has the Fourth Advantage.

Provisions

It is true that a thraka's body is a weapon, but it is also true that a thraka without his spear and shield is next to useless. Thraka who have weapons of quality, who are well-fed, and well-rested will always defeat an army that has poor weapons, has not eaten in days and cannot sleep for the grumbling in their stomachs. An army that is well-provisioned holds the Fifth Advantage.



Retreat and Victory

It is an understanding between orks that an army that holds more advantages will win. It is foolhardy for an inferior army to stand against a superior one; only a selfish and vainglorious commander would commit his thraka to a battle that he could not win. That is why there is no shame or loss of fana in retreating. An army that turns away from a battle is spared by its enemy. It's done the right thing; surrendered the field to the conquering army. Even in the middle of a battle, if the commander calls for a surrender, all his thraka stop and drop their spears and shields. The opposing army also stops fighting, allowing their opponents the opportunity to walk away from the battle.

In a proper surrender, the army that admits kooma surrenders their weapons. This includes spears, shields, helmets, armor and anything else they happen to be carrying (although it is not uncommon for a generous commander to allow the surrendering army to keep some possessions; usually their spears and shields). All that is on the battlefield belongs to the victor.

That includes the bodies.

A mid-sized ork gathum (consisting of fifteen households) fields one general, five advisors (bards), one hundred and fifty thraka, thirty archers and ten thraka on reindeer.

Wa: The Spirit of Bashthraka

There are times when an ork charges into battle and the next thing he knows, the battle is over and he's covered in the gore of his enemies, surrounded by corpses.

This is *wa*: the berserker spirit that sometimes fills an ork's heart. Some orks believe it is the spirit of Bashthraka himself that enters the ork, making him faster, stronger and as brave as an ork with seventeen horns of mead in his belly. Orks who become possessed by *wa* say they all they can remember of the experience is a powerful surge of courage, a flash of bright light... and then nothing else. There is no precedent for *wa*; it can show up in any ork at any time.

Bards

Bards may be a commander's most important resource. In addition to giving advice, bards also act as advanced scouts. A small group of bards (usually three) march a day or two ahead of the army, sending back information to the commander on the terrain ahead. At least one bard stays behind, giving the commander advice based on his own knowledge of the territory.



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CULTURE

The Fool's Weapon



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When the time for battle arrives, bards do not fight with their brethren. Instead, they sit on a hill above the battle, looking down and watching the fray. Oftentimes, they shout insults and taunts at opposing thraka, hoping to distract them from their tasks and keep them from reaching wa. When the battle is over, the bards go back with their army, (defeated or victorious) to tell the tale of what happened.

Archers

While the spear is the rightful and holy weapon of a thraka, none can deny the devastating effects of archers on the battlefield. An ork army always has a contingent of archers, usually made up of young thraka who have not yet found their bha, but there is another reason. Younger orks are kept from direct contact with the enemy so they may see combat before they engage in it. A distinguished ork (usually a good judge of character) is put in charge of the archers and it is his duty to tell the commander when they are ready to graduate to the army's front ranks. Some tribes also keep female thraka in the archer legions as well. Not so much because they are weaker than male orks, but because they move more quickly. Archers who can relocate quickly and calmly in the clamor of battle are of great value to a commander.

Cavalry

Cavalry gives an army many advantages. A mounted unit against foot soldiers is the equivalent of a modern tank against infantry. Orks use reindeer for their mounts, trained in the ways of combat. Reindeer are not skittish creatures and learn quickly, although they do take a while to break in properly.

While other races also have cavalry, the orks have one very important advantage: the stirrup. Stirrups allow ork thraka to ride without using their hands, which also allows them to use both their spear and shield to their optimum ability.

With both saddles and stirrups, ork cavalry becomes a powerful force on the battlefield. Thraka use the stirrups to stand up in the saddle and thrust down at foot soldiers with their spears. Ork cavalry usually carry a sheath of ten to twelve disposable spears for just that purpose.

Tactics

While orks are cunning hunters, thieves and warriors, their sense of tactics leaves something to be desired. Orks have a lot of experience at hunting, thievery and personal combat, but they rarely go to war, which doesn't give them a lot of time to practice.

The Battle Standard

All military decisions fall to the commander. His knowledge of tactics (and his advisors' knowledge, as well) either saves or dooms his army. He communicates his commands with a battle standard. Standards fly on poles fifteen to twenty feet tall. Made from



Bronze Helmet

Embroidered cloak
fastened with bronze brooch

Wool tunic
hangs mid thigh

- Leather pouch

Loose Trousers

Leather shoes

Wood spear with
Flint spearhead



Engraved wood spear with bronze tip

Bronze helmet

Wool cloak with
bronze pin

Goat skin Tunic

Wood shield

Fur boots lashed with
leather straps



Orc with Thraka



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The brain is reserved for the tala alone.



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cotton or animal skin, a war banner usually displays the symbol of the tribe (drawn by one of the tribe's bards) and other symbols of past successes.

The ork chosen to be the standard bearer has an important responsibility. It is through him that his commanders communicate to his army. Using a system of flag movements, the banner tells the army when and where to move, informs the archers when to fire and when the army should retreat.

A commander never uses a list of regular commands, doing so informs the enemy of his plans. Instead, he gathers his advisors and sergeants together and designs the commands for each battle.

"Zha!"

"Zha!" is the order to charge: a common command. An ork charge is unlike any other. The entire army rushes at its enemy; its commander right up front. Orks believe that a commander must lead by example, from the front, not the rear. Right next to him is his standard bearer, carrying the tribe's colors into battle.

"Butanee!"

Butanee is the ork word for "turtle." Forming a circle of shields, the orks attack by thrusting their spears from behind their protective wall. With enough thraka, they can even form a ceiling above them to shield against arrow fire.

Thraka Outfit

In order for a thraka to go to battle, he must first be equipped properly. Listed below is everything a well-equipped thraka can expect to have on his campaign to war.

Spear

There are three kinds of spears: thrown spears, cavalry spears and melee spears.

Thrown spears are generally four feet long and made of light wood (usually soft pine). They're designed to break upon impact (so the enemy can't pull them out and throw them back). Oftentimes, a bolt is set in the head of the spear. Just before it's thrown, the bolt is pulled out, making the weapon useless to the enemy.

Cavalry spears are longer than thrown spears; they range anywhere from eight feet to eleven and a half feet long. Made of the same material as thrown spears, cavalry thraka try to break the spear when they strike, so it cannot be picked up and used by an enemy.

Melee spears are as long as cavalry spears and made of the hardest wood orks can find. This is usually oak, although the lighter pine is also used for smaller thraka.

Spearheads are made from flint or bronze (the latter being much more difficult to



acquire). There are only a few iron-tipped spears, although men use them with regularity. The head is made with "wings" which make the spearhead penetrate deeply. A crossbar at the base of the head prevents the spear from penetrating too deeply.

Shield

Orks use two kinds of shields: infantry shields and cavalry shields. Infantry shields are used by spearmen. They are circular, about a yard in diameter, with a metal boss in the center (this is used to protect the hand grip behind the shield). It's made of narrow strips of wood, again usually laminated oak. Some shields have bronze struts in the rear and leather reinforcement around the rim.

A cavalry shield (also called an "archer's shield") is very long and narrow with a point on the bottom. It stands eight to ten feet tall. Cavalry carry this shield into battle to protect their side and legs from attacks. Archers thrust the shield into the ground (at the pointed tip) and stand behind it to protect themselves from fire.

Helmet

While shields and spears are made from wood, helmets are always made from bronze or iron. This limits the supply, which means only the most prosperous tribes can afford to outfit their thraka with helmets (most tribes have the skill to *make* helmets, but not all have the resources). The typical replacement is a hard leather cap.

The style of helmet varies from thraka to thraka. Helmets with eyeguards and noseguards are used occasionally, but the average ork goes with something that has no chance of inhibiting his vision.

Mail Shirts

Mail shirts are even more rare than helmets. One out of every thousand orks has a mail shirt, and those are usually inherited. The secret of making mail shirts is closely guarded and the resources (a vast amount of bronze) are scarce. If an ork wants a mail shirt, he'll probably have to loot it from a defeated army.

Happenstance Armor

An ork army is far from a uniformed unit. Orks wear whatever armor and use whatever weapons they can get their hands on. Twenty percent of an army may wear armor while the rest go without. Some of that twenty percent wear mail shirts, others wear a plate vest while the rest make do with tough leather tunics.

The Fool's Weapon

Orks do not understand the dwarven and human fascination with swords. Swords are heavy and have no reach. They require a vast amount of time and effort to make and break easily (at least as easily as a well-made spear). Swords act well individually, but not in a group. They are poor defensive weapons and are completely ineffective against a cavalry charge. No, orks do not use swords and ridicule any thraka who thinks otherwise. A sword is a weapon for one who is eager to meet Gorlam.





PART FIVE

Anatomy

Orks have two eyes, two ears, one nose, ten fingers, ten toes, two arms and two legs. They stand a little shorter than humans, but because of their bone structure, they also tend to be a bit wider and stronger, albeit slower. The average height for an ork is 5'5" to 5'10" while their average weight checks in at around 180 to 200 pounds.

Their eyes are dark and narrow, their noses large, with thick nostrils. Their mouths are wide and contain seventy-two teeth, including two tusks. The size of ork tusks varies between three and twelve inches in length. Their thick hair is matted, coloration tending toward black and deep brown. Redheaded orks are a rarity and regarded as an omen (usually becoming tala or bodalay).

General Knowledge & Symbolic Importance

Because they eat their dead (and therefore, must prepare them as they'd prepare a reindeer or a bear) orks' knowledge of anatomy is great. They understand that the body is not a unified system, but a series of systems that operate in chorus with each other. Listed below is the current ork knowledge of anatomy and the symbolic importance of some of the more significant organs.

The Brain

When an ork suffers head trauma, he loses memory and/or the ability to think. Thus, orks associate both memory and thought to the brain (accurately enough). Eating an ork's brain gives you his memories, and thus, the brain is reserved for tala alone.

Blood

Orks know that blood moves through the body. They've even figured out that the heart is responsible for pumping it. However, orks recognize that the heart is just a muscle, and treat it as such. To an ork, the most important organ when dealing with blood is the spleen. When the spleen is removed from an ork body, it's saturated with blood. This, to an ork, is a very sacred organ. Eating a thraka's spleen is the equivalent of eating all his emotions (courage, love, devotion, loyalty, etc.). Drinking a thraka's blood is also taking a bit of his courage, and since there's so much of it, it can be shared with the entire



tribe. Dowmga usually make puddings for the tribe to eat in celebration of a dead thraka's life.

Muscle and Meat

An ork's muscle is his strength, and thus, eating his muscle is taking on some of his strength. However, the heart (as mentioned in **Blood**, above) is the most important muscle, for it's the one that pumps an ork's blood through his body. A single thraka is chosen to eat a fallen thraka's heart. Being asked to share a thraka's heart with another thraka is considered an even higher honor.

Eyes, Nose, Ears and Tongue

Obviously, eating a thraka's eyes, nose and ears strengthen sight, smell, hearing and taste.

The Stomach

Eating a thraka's stomach is taking on a little of everything he's ever eaten. Symbolically, this represents taking on not only his virtues, but his vices and even his Trouble. When a thraka is prepared, his dowmga usually cooks his stomach last and



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places it away from the rest of the meal. The stomach remains until the end of the meal unless someone comes up during the meal and puts it on their plate. Some tribes see this as an act of pure courage. Others see it as foolhardy. In other tribes, no thraka eats the stomach, leaving that for the downmga, so she may take back what she brought into the world.

Sexual Organs

It isn't a common practice in all ork tribes, but occasionally, male sexual organs are prepared. The symbolic importance of such a meal should be obvious.

A downmga's organs, on the other hand, are always prepared and eaten by the females of the tribe – downmga and downmgaday alike.

Bones and Other Bits

The unedible parts of an ork's anatomy (bones, ligaments, etc.) are used in many ways. Teeth are ground down into powder and used in medicinal mixtures. Ligaments are used as strings for musical instruments (the greater the thraka, the greater the instrument; in fact, great tala are often turned into instruments for their favorite apprentices), bows, and needles for sewing. Orks find a way to use almost all of a thraka's remains. Even the parts that aren't used always make wonderful kindling for an evening's fire (if they're dried out).

The Five Senses

Orks do not sense the world in the same way men do; their five senses are very different.

Sight

An ork's sense of sight is weaker than a man's. Nearly 90% of all orks suffer far-sightedness. Most suffer mild effects (40/20), but a few rare cases are more extreme. Also, orks have a difficult time in darkness. While orks are not color blind, they do see certain colors better. Mid-range colors (browns, greens, yellows) are clear, but colors at the extreme ends of the spectrum (reds and blues) are difficult for orks to see.

Hearing

While ork sight is not as strong as human sight, ork hearing is vastly superior. Humans can detect sounds from 20 to 20,000 Hz, while ork hearing can pick up sounds up to 40,000 Hz. Also, because the ork auricle is mobile, they are able to pick up sounds at a far greater distance.

Touch

Orks have fewer pain sensors than men. As a result, orks do not respond to pain as quickly. The difference is almost negligible (maybe a tenth of a second), but in terms of combat, it can mean life or death.



Taste

An ork's sense of taste is also much more powerful than a man's. An ork has taste buds on his tongue and his soft palate. Also, the ork taste buds are capable of discriminating more potent tastes from subtle ones. This means orks are capable of identifying ingredients in some mixtures, including ingredients that are poisonous. Mothers usually feed small amounts of poison to their children; just enough to give them a sense-memory of the taste.

Smell

An ork's sense of smell is his most powerful sensory tool. Like dogs, orks are macrosomatic. They are capable of identifying smells from a great distance (a few hundred yards) and can even recognize individual scents. The ork nose can identify poisons, some kinds of illness and even pregnancy in females. Orks can also identify individuals (orks, reindeer, men) by their scents. Finally, ork behavior is greatly impacted by pheromones; orks can smell fear, lust, anger and even trust.

Digestion

Of all the differences between human and ork anatomy, how they gain nutrients is probably the greatest. An ork has a stomach, large and small intestines, and a colon, but in this case, it isn't what he lacks that makes him different.

A Small Advantage

Before we go through the digestive system, there's one element we have to cover first: orks have a secondary source of nutrition. A source even they know nothing about.

It's a subtle advantage, but it is a significant one. While a thraka is under the sun, he can go a week without eating before his strength begins to fade. An ork can go many weeks (about three), eating only once a day without feeling the pangs of hunger.

However, orks must drink much more than their human counterparts. An ork's thirst demands that he drinks at least twenty-four cups of water a day. However, like a man, the effects of dehydration are long to surface and subtle.^{xvii}

Through the System

Orks possess two stomachs. The first is identical to the human version, but the second is special. It rests right where the human appendix lies, and it allows orks to properly digest material humans cannot; materials like grass, tree bark and any other organic product.^{xviii}



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Chapter One Notes

- i A few great ork heroes have traveled to the other side of the world, most notably the great ork hero, Taldootha.
- ii Downga and bodalay do *not* drink sooeeta (honey mead); this is a privilege reserved only for warriors and bards. Bodalay feel the drink interferes with their lucid dreaming, and you just don't want your judgment compromised when dealing with the gods.
- iii It is suggested that orks invented bala in an effort to find a way to imbibe sooeeta in great quantities without suffering from its hallucinatory effects.
- iv The reason the meat tastes differently a day later has everything to do with biology. When a startled animal (or one that's racing away from hungry orks) is killed, its muscles are filled with lactic acids. Also, the typical "killing shot" is in the abdomen, which commonly pierces the liver, kidneys or intestines, releasing chemicals into the meat that spoil its flavor. Because the meat is hung for a day or two, those chemicals have a chance to flow out of the muscles. Washing the meat later also cleans them of any other chemicals that affect the taste.
- v What orks are hunting is called "halite."
- vi One of the oldest religions in the world (our world, that is) is bear worship. The orks probably used to worship bears before their belief metamorphosized into something more anthropomorphic.
- vii Orks do not use tourniquets, so they have no tool to stem severe bleeding; a simple bandage will not do the job. The concept seems simple, but men in our world did not discover tourniquets (a bandage made tight by a twisting stick) until after they were shooting guns. But wounds that cause severe bleeding – usually damage to a major artery – are the kind that kill a man from shock long before he dies from loss of blood. Orks may have experimented with tourniquets, but they're tricky tools to utilize. In order to be fully effective, a tourniquet can only be used for a short time. Otherwise, the limb turns gangrenous (that's the "blackened and filled with bile" we talked about before) and infection spreads to the rest of the body. Orks have no knowledge of vessel reconstruction, which leaves them with only one alternative: amputation/cauterization.
- viii To a modern human, blowing on a fire (like a match) means blowing it out. For



orks, however, blowing on a fire makes it hotter. Therefore, as a wound becomes inflamed, it is "blown upon."

ix The specific toxin is called *Clostridium tetani*, otherwise known as tetanus, or "lockjaw." Unlike some other bacteria, *Clostridium tetani* does not require air to live and grow, making it very dangerous, indeed.

x Of course, a modern reader should recognize banala. Gangrene (as we call it) is caused by a loss of blood supply to areas of the body, often the hands or feet, and results in the death of body tissues due to a lack of oxygen. There are really three kinds of gangrene, each equally nasty.

Dry gangrene is caused by a loss of blood supply. This is the kind of gangrene acquired by frostbite (also diabetes and arteriosclerosis) and is the most common type of gangrene in ork culture. First symptoms are pain and cold in the extremities, followed by a darkening of the skin. Eventually, the darkened tissue becomes dry and falls off. Fortunately, dry gangrene does not infect the living tissues, making it non-life threatening.

Moist gangrene results from a sudden loss of blood supply, a crushing injury, a bad burn or a blot clot. The injured cells and living cells are not isolated from each other (as in dry gangrene) which results in a spreading infection. First symptoms include swollen skin, blisters and a foul smell from the contaminated skin. Moist gangrene can be fatal if not treated.

xi We know banala as "gas gangrene," a deadly bacteria that infects wounds with the speed of an angry god. The bacteria release gas and poisons into the body, killing the victim within days.

xii We're talking compound fractures here, folks. That's when the bone is sticking straight out of the skin. While human and dwarf healers cut the leg or arm off at the break, orks use a technique that most Terran men won't figure out until the twentieth century.

xiii Some may recognize byoobon as scarlet fever.

xiv *Bandoo's* more familiar name is cholera. Cholera is caused by a bacterium called *Vibrio cholerae*, which is transmitted by water or food that has been contaminated with the feces of orks who have the disease. Cholera enters the intestines and releases cholera toxin which causes the intestine to secrete large amounts of water and salt. Because the intestine cannot absorb the water and salt at the rate they are secreted, the patient suffers severe diarrhea which causes dehydration. If treated properly, cholera lasts only a few days. If not treated, the patient usually enters shock, a condition orks have no knowledge of how to treat, which usually means the patient dies.



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xv *Kowkow* is more commonly known as pneumonia. While modern science has many methods of dealing with the disease, orks do not. As mentioned in the main text, only one out of three patients survives kowkow. Pneumonia attacks the lungs where oxygen is exchanged for carbon dioxide. The disease multiplies quickly in the air sacs, filling them with fluid. Soon, the patient drowns in his own phlegm. The worst part about kowkow is that it spreads quickly and easily. Orks don't understand the reasons for contagion quite yet, but they know they exist (as evidenced by the isolation of those with the disease). Pneumonia usually occurs in patients whose immune systems have been compromised by another disease. In an ork's case, this disease is usually influenza (the flu).

xvi Orks believe that madness is caused by "bad blood," usually caused by eating the flesh of a creature that eats meat.

xvii Nor should you. If you were involved in a fight with a stranger, wouldn't you do anything you could to win, even if it meant cheating? That's why orks don't bhoola with strangers – because *they'd* cheat, and they expect nothing less from a stranger.

xviii If you haven't figured it out yet, orks are capable of photosynthesis. In a nutshell, the process works like this.

Ork epidermal cells are much like those of humans, but with two significant additions. First, light-absorbing pigments, much like chlorophyll are present in ork cell membranes and are linked to a reduction-oxidation series that approximate the noncyclic photophosphorylation steps of photosynthesis. Basically, these reactions use sunlight and water to produce cellular energy and oxygen. A photon will excite an outer valence electron of the pigment molecule. This excited electron can then be passed to other specific proteins. Each time it is passed, the electron donator is "oxidized" and the acceptor is "reduced." During that path, one of the reductions allows the foundation of ATP and, in general, small amounts of energy are lost, thus producing heat. Finally, the electron is passed back to the pigment such that an unexcited pigment can repeat the process.

Second, ork epidermal cells differentiate such that extra proteins are produced and inserted into the mitochondrial membrane. These proteins allow ork mitochondria to utilize reactions that approximate the "dark reactions" of photosynthesis, also known as "the Calvin-Benson cycle." These reactions allow the mitochondria to synthesize sugar from energy and carbon dioxide. These sugars then comprise the carbon source of cellular building blocks when food sources are limited. This also means orks eat foods heavy in nitrates, and if all else fails, may eat dirt or compost to gain the nitrates they need. In a nutshell.

xix The second stomach works in exactly the same way a goat's stomach works.



STORIES

*In which the Author discusses myth cycles
and the Tala who tell them*





Introduction



When the world was only mist and water, the gods came and looked out upon the Void. One of them said, "What is this?" Another answered, "It is Nothing."

Finally, one of the gods said, "It shall be Something."

This is how the world began.

Out from the crust of the world grew giants. These giants were terrible and great, and made war across the world. The gods looked down and smiled at the sight.

But then, one of the giants looked up and saw the gods above him and was jealous. "No creature should be above the giants," he said. And that is when the giants and the gods fought.

The blood washed over the rivers and lakes, and from the boiling waters came the gods of the elves.

The blood washed over the stones, and from the burning stones came the gods of the dwarves.

The blood washed over the sands, and from the melting sands came the gods of the humans.

The blood washed over the trees, and from the trees came Keethdownmga, the Mother of the Orks. And with a single breath, her first breath, she was with child. And with her second breath, her belly swelled up. And with her third breath, all ten thousand of her children were born into the world, their helmets on their brows, their hands with spear and shield, screaming war songs. And when the rest of the world heard the songs they sang, they trembled for the fear that rumbled their bellies.

Then, the children of Keethdownmga made war until only three of them were left. The first was Bashthraka, the Warrior. The second was Gowthdukah, the Silent. The last was Pugg.

And that is how the world was made.

Once upon a time, when wishes were still worth something, storytellers wandered this world, carrying their tales in pockets and pouches. There was no television, no radio, and no internet.

For the orks, that once upon a time is here and now.



STORIES

Introduction



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Whenever a tala tells a tale, he does so with an immediate audience, watching every move, listening to every word. Different audiences respond differently to different stories, meaning the tala must have a vast repertoire of tales, and he must be ready to pull out any of them in a heartbeat, just in case the audience needs a good laugh much more than they need a good cry. This makes a tala a bit like the modern stand-up comic, always feeling out his audience with a few joking jabs before he kicks into high gear with the uppercuts and hooks.

This also means that there's no such thing as "the definitive author's edition." Such a beast is a modern one and a creature that does not belong in Orkworld. The stories in this section of the book are examples of how these stories could be told. However, as a bard moves from village to village, not only does his repertoire change, but the way he tells each story changes as well.

This is not new, nor is it unique; humans were doing it long before the orks. Try to count how many different versions of the Arthur cycle you can find. Percival, Tristan, and Lancelot have had their stories told dozens times by dozens of different authors, each taking the themes in a slightly different direction. Beauty and the Beast is nothing more than a re-telling of the Cupid and Psyche myth, and almost every Shakespeare play had its seeds sown in some older story. We're all telling the same stories over and over again, changing the masks and costumes to better fit our audience.

Keep that in mind as you read the stories that follow. In fact, keep that in mind with everything you read in this book. But that's probably a step too far, one that we can take up when we get to the next chapter...

The Stories

Three stories make up the core of ork mythology. Orks call these Boondahtel, or "The Brother Stories". Each centers on one of the Three Brothers (Bashthraka, Pugg and Gowthduka) and reveals important elements of each character. It's interesting to note that while Pugg and Gowthduka are both transformed by their stories, Bashthraka remains exactly the same. The Thunderer isn't transformed by anything.

The second group of stories are called Puggthwaku, or "Pugg Trick" stories. There are countless Puggthwaku stories, but only five are presented here.



How Bashthraka Lost His Spear



This story happened a long time ago, when men and elves and dwarves and orks all spoke the same language and did not kill each other over simple matters. It tells of how Bashthraka lost his spear in a game of chance and the three tasks he had to accomplish before he could get it back. And in the end, there will be a lesson.

Bashthraka was out with his two brothers when they came across a small band of dwarves gambling with bones. "Ha!" he announced. "Dwarves do not know how to gamble! Bashthraka knows how to gamble! Bashthraka will teach them how to gamble!"

"Brother," said Pugg. "No one likes tricking a dwarf out of his belongings more than me, but shouldn't we keep our minds on where we're going?"

"Pah!" rumbled Bashthraka. "Bashthraka knows his own time. Bashthraka does not need you telling Bashthraka what to do!"

Pugg sighed. "It's your Trouble," he said and followed his brother to the gambling circle.

"Dwarves!" roared Bashthraka. "Bashthraka will show you how to gamble!"





STORIES

"Dwarves have a lot of names!"



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The dwarves – who all look the same and never speak unless it's to complain – made a place for Bashthraka to sit. Much time passed and Bashthraka made many loud sounds as he lost time and time again. It seemed only a moment after he sat down that he saw a dwarf holding his spear.

"What are you doing with Bashthraka's spear?!" Bashthraka screamed.

The dwarf, who grumbled about the noise Bashthraka was making, explained that this was *his* spear, and Bashthraka lost it in a wager.

Bashthraka turned to Pugg. "Why didn't you say something?!"

"You told me if I said anything you'd break my other foot. So I was silent."

"Spuh!!!" screamed Bashthraka. "Now Bashthraka must get a new spear!"

The dwarf – whose nose was too big and didn't have the common sense to shave even when he stumbled over his own beard – said, "You could have this spear back..."

"Give it to Bashthraka!" hollered Bashthraka.

"... if you do something for me."

"Bashthraka is no dwarf's errand boy!"

"I am no common dwarf," said the dwarf. "I am Lord-Baron Balinor Balin sur Balinsson of House Balindoor!"

"You have a lot of names!" said Bashthraka.

"Way too many," agreed Pugg. "Can we just call you 'Balin?'"

The dwarf, who decided that orks were dumb because they had only need for one name (which shows you where a dwarf's priorities lie), grew even grumpier than he was before – no mean feat – and turned away from the three brothers. "I guess I'll keep my brand-new ork spear," he mumbled over his shoulder.

Pugg poked his head into the conversation. "I'll tell you one thing for free, brother. Mom won't be too happy that you lost your spear to a dwarf."

Bashthraka grumbled so low it made the mountains shake. "What is it you want Bashthraka to do?!"

The dwarf turned on his heel and walked back. "It's simple, really," said the dwarf, who smelled like rocks and couldn't get clean if he fell into a bath. He cleared his throat and began to speak as if he had a tala's tongue.





"Two years ago, the House of Balindoor warred with House Thrandoom. We sought to reconcile our differences with a marriage, and so, my sister, the lovely Balindee was married to Lord-Baron Thron Thrandroo ur-Thron of House Thrandoom. But that traitor - "

"Bashthraka cares not for your story!" The Thunderer interrupted. "Just tell Bashthraka what to kill!"

Startled, the dwarf stumbled through his words. "Y- you need to know the history in order to understand your task."

Bashthraka pounded his silent brother Gowthduka on the back. "He knows everything in the world! Why should Bashthraka need to know anything?!"

"He's right," said Pugg. "He really doesn't know anything."

Bashthraka nodded and smiled with pride. "See?! Even Pugg agrees, and he never agrees with Bashthraka!"

The dwarf nodded, still a little dazed. "All right. What you need to do is go to House Thrandoom, steal my sister, steal her brideprize and..."

"Brideprize?! Bashthraka doesn't know what a brideprize is!"

The dwarf grumbled something about ork ears being so big and they still don't listen when Pugg interrupted. "Just tell him what you need. It's easier that way."

The dwarf counted out the three things on his fingers. "First, steal my sister back. Second, steal the jewel. Third, kill the lord of the castle. Is that easy enough?"

"Easy enough!" said Bashthraka. "Give Bashthraka his spear!"

"No. You don't get the spear until you've done those three things."

"Then Bashthraka will go and do those three things!" He paused. "What were they again?!"

Pugg counted off the list. "Thwak the dowmgaday, thwak the jewel and fight the thraka of the household."

"Right!" said Bashthraka, and he began on his journey.

"I'd better go with him," Pugg said, standing next to his tall, silent brother. "Just to make sure he stays out of Trouble." But Gowthduka put his hand on his little brother's shoulder and shook his head. Pugg nodded. "You're probably right. A little Trouble could do our big brother some good."

Gowthduka nodded, and for the second time in the history of the world, showed a little smile.



STORIES

"What do babies eat?!"



Along his way, Bashthraka met with many dangers and Troubles. He killed them.ⁱ

When he met with the army of men out trudging through the swamps, he killed them. Their blood filled the swamp, making the waters red and stagnant. And if you go there today, you can see the red flowers that grow there, their roots still feeding on the blood of an army of men.

When he met the slaver elves out looking for mothers and children to build their idols to their slaver gods, he killed them. He struck down their flying chariots like the lightning strikes the trees, and their bodies fell and broke on the rocks. And if you go there today, you can still find the remains of those chariots and the white, weak, fragile-as-an-egg, thin, hollow bones of the slaver elves.

But many days later, sitting under a tree with bare branches (for he had eaten all the fruit and most of the bark), Bashthraka looked up from his troublesome stomach and said out loud:

"The dwarf forgot to tell Bashthraka how to get to the castle!" He cradled his aching belly and made a little moan. "Dwarves are dumb!"

Just then, a little black bird landed on the bare tree. It hopped about on the branches, looking for something, making sad little sounds. Bashthraka looked up, saw the bird and said, "Why are you complaining?"

"Because there's no food left," said the little bird. "Someone ate all the fruit and there's nothing left for my babies."

"No food for babies?!" screamed Bashthraka, jumping to his feet. "Bashthraka will get food for babies!"

He ran as fast as he could across the hills, over the lake, through the forest... then turned on his heel, ran back through the forest, over the lake and across the hills 'till he came back to the bare tree where the bird sat and screamed, "What do babies eat!?"

"Fruit and worms," said the downmga bird.

"Poolah!" said Bashthraka. "That's easy for Bashthraka to hunt!" He ran to the hills and ripped one of them out of the ground.

"Worms!" he cried and plucked fat, juicy worms from under the hill.

Then, he ran across the lake and to the forest. There, he ripped trees from the ground.

"Fruit!" he cried and ran back with his bounty. He gave the hill and trees to the downmga bird. "Food for babies!" he said.



"Yes, indeed," said the downmga bird, trying not to laugh. "A great deal of food for babies. I am indebted to you."

"It was nothing!" said Bashthraka.

"Oh, but it was," said the mother bird, still trying not to laugh. "Is there some way I can help you?"

"Yes! Stupid dwarf forgot to tell me how to get to his home! You can tell Bashthraka how to get there!"

"A dwarf home? There are many dwarf homes, great ork hunter. Do you remember the name?"

"Bashthraka does not need to remember anything! Bashthraka's brother knows everything in the world! Why should Bashthraka need to know anything!?"

The downmga bird nodded her little head. "Very well. I will go to your brother and learn the name. In the meantime, you stay here."

"Bashthraka does what Bashthraka wants to do!"

"How will I find you when I come back if you aren't here?"

Bashthraka nodded. "That's why Bashthraka has decided that he wants to stay right here until you get back!"

The downmga bird flew away, leaving Bashthraka alone. When she returned, she found Bashthraka surrounded by loads of trolls. "What happened?" asked the downmga bird.

"They were hungry! They tried to eat Bashthraka! So, Bashthraka killed them!"

The downmga bird smiled. "Again, you've done me a favor. Those trolls have hunted my sisters and cousins for many years. Now, they'll hunt our babies no longer."

"It was nothing!" said Bashthraka.

"One day I will repay you for all your good deeds. Now, I repay you for the first. I can lead you to the dwarf's home if you wish."

And so Bashthraka followed the little downmga across the fields, over the stream and into the tall, tall mountains. There, the iron home of the dwarves stood, carved out of the rock of the mountain itself. Bashthraka looked at the tiny downmga and said, "Bashthraka thanks you."

"I still owe you a favor, my great friend. Do not think this will be the last time we ever meet." And with that, she flew away on her blue-red wings.





STORIES

"Bashthraka is not thirsty!"



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Bashthraka climbed the tall mountain up to the iron home of the dwarves. When he reached the front, he pounded on the gate. "Open up! It is Bashthraka, come to steal your wife," he paused, "and your jewel," and paused, "and fight you!"

From the top of the gate, dwarves in armor looked down on Bashthraka. "Go away, ork! We haven't the time to kill you today! Maybe tomorrow!"

"Kill Bashthraka!? You cannot kill Bashthraka! Nothing can kill Bashthraka but the Great Toad Gorlam! And you don't look like a Toad, little dwarf... more like a pale, sickly frog!"

The dwarves talked amongst themselves – probably complaining they had to deal with an ork rather than drink and sleep like they usually do while standing guard – and came to the conclusion they should pour hot oil on Bashthraka. They rolled up the pot and poured its contents over the side, laughing that they could eat boiled Bashthraka for dinner that night.

But just as they started complaining that boiled ork never comes out exactly the way you'd want it, one of them looked over the side and pointed to what still stood below. The dwarves peeked over and there stood Bashthraka, all steaming.

"Bashthraka is not thirsty!" he shouted up at them. "But Bashthraka will tell you that your sooeeta tastes like troll droppings! Dwarves drink sooeeta that tastes like troll droppings. Dwarves are dumb!"

The dwarves talked amongst themselves again – this time complaining how the boiling liquid didn't kill the ork and why did they always have to deal with things like this when there were so many other dwarves in the castle, all not doing anything really important and why were they up here all alone on the tower when...

"Bashthraka is still waiting for the gate to open!"

... and the dwarves complained that orks always interrupt a good grousing. And so they decided to shoot Bashthraka with arrows. They let loose with their bows and fired their arrows down on Bashthraka, but he caught each one they fired.

"You gave Bashthraka a ladder!" Bashthraka yelled up to them. "Bashthraka will kill you quickly, rather than pulling your stomachs out through your noses like Bashthraka was planning to do!" Bashthraka slammed the dwarves' arrows into the great wall and began climbing upward toward the now-very-frightened dwarves.

"Arrows never work," complained one dwarf.

"The bow was broken," complained the second.

"You always blame the bow," complained the third.





"Why don't we go get help?" asked the fourth, but no-one heard him because they were all too busy complaining. And by the time they were done complaining, Bashthraka reached up and over the side and climbed up to the top.

And then, Bashthraka killed them.

All except the fourth dwarf who put his sword down and his hands high. "I don't want to fight you," he said.

"You do not want to fight?!" asked Bashthraka. "Or you do not want to die?!"

"I don't want to die," said the dwarf.

"You are wise!" said Bashthraka. "Finding a wise dwarf is like finding a beautiful flower. Bashthraka will not kill you!"

"Thank you," said the dwarf.

"Wise dwarf," said Bashthraka. "Bashthraka is looking for a dwarf bride," he paused, "her jewel" and paused again, "and her husband! Where can Bashthraka find them?!"

"I'll show you," said the wise dwarf. He took Bashthraka deep into the castle. They walked together to a large oak door bound in iron. "She's behind there," said the wise dwarf. "But you need a key to..."

Bashthraka broke down the door with one good shove.

"Well," said the wise dwarf, "I guess you don't need a key."

There behind the door was the dwarf bride, recently awakened by Bashthraka smashing down her door. She screamed.

"Be quiet!" Bashthraka yelled. "Bashthraka is trying to be sneaky!"

But the dwarf princess kept on screaming. So, Bashthraka grabbed her and hit her over the head.

"Now she won't make any noise!" he told the wise dwarf.

The wise dwarf suddenly looked as if he'd eaten bad meat. "No, she won't be making any more noise," he said.

"Now where is the jewel?!" asked Bashthraka.

"Down in the treasure room."

"Show Bashthraka the treasure room."

The wise dwarf led Bashthraka down a set of stairs to a pair of guards. The guards charged Bashthraka.



STORIES

"Didn't you have a spear?"



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Bashthraka killed them.

Down another set of stairs, deeper into the iron house they went. Finally, they came to a large room filled with items of gold, silver and steel.

"The jewel is over there," the wise dwarf said, pointing to an iron and gold box.

"Hold this!" said Bashthraka, handing the limp body of the bride to the wise dwarf. The wise dwarf's hands shook like leaves in a windstorm as he took the dwarf bride into his arms.

Bashthraka walked across the room and picked up the case. He threw the case on the floor, shattering it into handfuls of pieces. Then, in the middle of the mess, he picked up the bright, blue jewel.

"This jewel is almost as big as Bashthraka's head!" said Bashthraka.

The wise dwarf said nothing.

"You look the color of milk!" said Bashthraka. "You and Bashthraka will leave now."

"Don't you have to fight the lord of the house?" asked the now-very-pale dwarf, obviously not quite certain of what he was saying.

"You're right, wise dwarf. Bashthraka does have to fight the husband. Bring him to Bashthraka!"

The wise dwarf nodded, propped the dwarf wife up on a chair and wandered off down the dark corridor. When the dwarf came back, Bashthraka was surrounded by the loads of bodies. But he was not alone. Standing beside him was the master of the house, Lord-Baron Thron Throndroo ur-Thron of House Throndoom.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Bashthraka does not answer questions!" said Bashthraka.

"I've heard of you," said the dwarf. "I thought you carried a spear."

Bashthraka's battle cry was so loud, it made the stars weep for the pain in their ears.

"Bashthraka challenges you, dwarf!"

"An ork? Challenging a dwarven lord? Very well. Let's step outside to settle this." The three of them (and the motionless bride) walked out into the night air. The dwarf lord and Bashthraka stood off while Thron's loyal thraka stood by and watched.

"Since you don't have a spear," said the dwarf lord, "I suggest we fight hand-to-hand."

"Bashthraka will fight you until you bleed!" said Bashthraka.



And the fight began.

The dwarf took a swing at Bashthraka. Bashthraka caught the dwarf's arm, spun away, still holding the arm and dropped down hard on it.

The dwarf went down and Bashthraka stood back and watched.

The dwarf lord looked up, his face showing his confusion. He got to his feet and watched Bashthraka.

"Why did you - ?"

Bashthraka slammed both fists into either side of the dwarf lord's face.

The dwarf went down and Bashthraka stood back and watched.

"Talking during a fight!" Bashthraka said. "Dwarves are dumb!"

The dwarf lord got back to his feet, wiping the blood from his nose and lips. He didn't say anything this time, just smiled and nodded. The fight continued.

Bashthraka threw a punch at the dwarf lord's stomach, but the dwarf lord turned, and Bashthraka's punch went right by him. In his spin, he leveled a strike at the back of Bashthraka's head. Bashthraka fell to one knee... and the dwarf lord stood back and watched.

Bashthraka got back to his feet and smiled at the dwarf lord. The fight continued.

Bashthraka caught the next punch, twisting the dwarf lord's fingers. Bones broke, the dwarf lord fell to his knees and Bashthraka slammed his other fist against the dwarf lord's forehead.

The dwarf lord fell down and Bashthraka stood back and watched.

And watched. And watched.

When the dwarf lord finally moved, he looked up and asked, "I was out?"

Bashthraka nodded and offered the dwarf lord his hand. "But not as long as Bashthraka thought you would be!"

The dwarf lord took the hand and Bashthraka pulled him back to his feet.

"Why are you here, ork?"

"Bashthraka is no storyteller!" Bashthraka said.

"No," said the wise dwarf. "But I am."





STORIES

"I hope our Trouble's busy somewhere else."



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Both Bashthraka and the dwarf lord looked at the wise dwarf as he peeled away his disguise. Bashthraka frowned. "Pugg!" he said. "What are you doing here?!"

"Keeping an eye on you," said Pugg. Then, he turned to the dwarf lord. "And making sure my brother didn't cause you too much Trouble, lord dwarf. If you want to know why he's here, I'll tell you."

The dwarf lord listened and Pugg told the tale.

A day or so later, Bashthraka and Pugg were walking home (Pugg carrying the still-motionless dwarf bride) when a dark shape moved in front of the sun. Pugg looked up and shook his head. "Now that's a bunch of Trouble."

The shadow fell over them in a heartbeat. Then its tail and talons and wings blocked out the sun, the clouds and the sky.

"Um," mumbled Pugg. "It's..."

"... just a dragon!" said Bashthraka.

YOU, said the dragon, its eyes focusing on Bashthraka. YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WOKE ME FROM MY SLEEP.

"You woke up a dragon?" Pugg asked. Bashthraka just shrugged and looked up at the dragon hovering in the sky. "Bashthraka doesn't care about your sleep!"

"Maybe we shouldn't be so..." Pugg began.

"Come down here and Bashthraka will show you why you should have rolled over and gone back to sleep!"

Pugg shook his head and dug his feet in. "I hope our Trouble's busy somewhere else."

The dragon swooped down, its maw as wide as the Great Cave. Bashthraka dug in his feet and reached for his...

"Bashthraka doesn't have his spear!" Bashthraka yelled at Pugg. "Give Bashthraka something to fight with!"

Pugg dropped the dwarf wife and reached into his bag... finding nothing but the giant jewel. He shrugged. "Good enough," he said and tossed it to his brother. Bashthraka took it into his huge hands (and his hands were only barely large enough to hold the giant dwarf jewel) just as the dragon snatched him up in its enormous jaws.

But Bashthraka held the dragon's jaws open with one hand while he held onto the jewel with the other and slammed it down the dragon's throat. The dragon whipped its head around and pushed with its tongue and kicked with its legs, but it just couldn't get Bashthraka out of its jaws or the jewel out of its throat.



It kicked and it clawed and it bucked and it coughed, but Bashthraka held on. It bit down hard and it gnawed and it choked, but Bashthraka held on. It flew up high and it swooped down low and it curled 'round tight, but Bashthraka held on.

... and fell...

... and fell...

... and fell all the way down to the ground.ⁱⁱ

Pugg went to the edge of the hole, clouds of dust still settling. He peered through the dust, but could see no movement. No movement at all.

Then, there was something... something moving down at the bottom of the hole. He backed up, not certain if it was his brother or the dragon. But then, a single ork hand grabbed the edge of the hole and pulled a Bashthraka up after it.

"It was only a dragon," Pugg said.

"Next time Bashthraka thinks it's a good idea to wager Bashthraka's spear," Bashthraka said through broken teeth and a broken lip, "remind Bashthraka of this." Pugg even thought he saw a wink sneak through his brother's black eye.

"You aren't dead," said Pugg.

"And the dragon is," said Bashthraka. "A good story." he said.ⁱⁱⁱ

"One worth remembering," said Pugg. "Come on. Let's go get that spear of yours."

A day or so later, Bashthraka and Pugg met with the dwarf lord who had Bashthraka's spear, Lord-Baron Balinor Balin sur Balinsson of House Balindoor. The dwarf lord looked at them and looked at his sister.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked.

"She's asleep!" said Bashthraka.

"Asleep?" asked the dwarf lord. He took his sister into his arms and looked at them with hard eyes. "She's not asleep! She's dead!"

"Do you think Bashthraka stupid enough to carry around a dead dwarf for days?!"

"I wouldn't answer that if I were you," said Pugg.

"Besides," said Bashthraka, "you said to steal the dwarf bride. You didn't say anything about bringing her back alive."





STORIES

"What do you mean, 'The dragon ate it?'"



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"Well, I guess you're right," said the dwarf lord, tossing his sister's cold body to the ground. But then his eyes turned greedy and he asked, "How about the jewel?"

Bashthraka turned to Pugg and the little fox pulled a dragon's head out of his bag. "It's in here," he said.

"What do you mean, 'In there'?"

"The dragon ate it."

"What do you mean, 'The dragon ate it?'"

"Do you always ask so many questions!?" Bashthraka demanded. "Bashthraka wants his spear back!"

Pugg explained. "I mean what I said. There was a dragon. It ate the jewel. We brought you the head. Although, I have to be honest, it's probably goo by now. Dragon gullets are like that."

The dwarf screamed (Bashthraka's scream was much louder) and raised the spear above his head. Just then, the noise of horns came over the hill and the sound of an army's feet pounding against the ground.

"What's that?" said the dwarf lord, the spear still held high above his head.



"The other dwarf lord," Pugg said. "He's a little angry at you."

"Our agreement is null!" the dwarf said. "You swore you'd kill him!"

"Actually, we never agreed to 'kill'," Pugg reminded him. "We said, 'fight'. That doesn't mean kill." Pugg looked at Bashthraka. "Dwarves don't know the difference between fighting and killing."

Bashthraka laughed. "Dwarves are dumb!"

The dwarf lord's hands shook. His eyes watered. His cheeks turned as red as cherries. He slammed the spear down on his knee... and his knee broke in half. He fell to the ground, screaming and crying in pain.

Bashthraka picked up his spear. "We're done!" Then, he looked to the army that just crested the hill. "But you two are just getting started!"

Then, Bashthraka and Pugg walked away from the scene, leaving the lame dwarf begging for his life.

And that's the end of the story. All that's left is the lesson. Some say the lesson of this story is "Don't wager your spear." Others suggest the lesson is "Don't take anything for granted." But those who are wise in the way of the world know the true lesson of this story, which is...

"Dwarves are dumb!"



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Pugg and the Tree of Troubles

It was when the world was still young enough to remember its name, that is when this story was first told. It involves the Little Trickster and a certain tree, but it also involves something that all orks must face sooner or later: our own foolish pride. As that is true for each and every one of us, so it was true of Pugg... and is still true to this very day.



Pugg once got it into his head that he should go out into the world and solve the problem of Trouble. He got this notion after a bottle of sooeeta he got from his older brother when Bashthraka could not solve one of his riddles.

It was a simple riddle, but Pugg made sure Bashthraka was drunk when he asked it – so drunk he couldn't keep hold of his spear. But Pugg didn't steal his brother's spear. He already did that once, and it earned him a limp. Looking at that spear, he thought, "I don't need another one," and he stole the sooeeta instead.

The Little Trickster wandered about, drinking and singing as young thraka do, with half the sooeeta in the bottle and the other half in his belly. As he passed by a roseberry bush, he stopped for a moment to let out some of that sooeeta, and as he did, he heard the roseberry bush shout in anger. Pugg fell backwards, broke his bottle and hit his head on a rock. When the stars in his head faded, he looked up to see one of the dwarf gods – which one doesn't really matter, they all look and sound the same – his beard dripping and his eyes angry.

Not even the Little Trickster could talk himself out of this beating. And when it was done, he was sad. Not for the beating he took, and not for his sore head that fell on the rock. No, my friends, Pugg was sad because his bottle of sooeeta was broken.



And that's when Pugg decided to do something about Trouble.

He went back to his older brother, Bashthraka, and told him what he planned to do. Pugg found him where he left him: in Old One Eye's Winter Home, looking around the floor.

"Hello, brother. How are you this morning?"

"Angry," said Bashthraka.

"That's nothing new; you're always angry."

Bashthraka said nothing, but kept looking on the floor, under the tables and chairs.

"What are you looking for?"

Bashthraka picked up one of his guards, still reeling from the previous night's revelries, and looked under him. "A bottle of sooeeta Bashthraka was saving!"

"Oh that. That bottle broke when the dwarf knocked me down. Which is why I'm here, Big Brother With Shoulders As Wide As Mountains."

Bashthraka stopped looking for his bottle and started looking at Pugg. "You thwaku Bashthraka's bottle?!" he asked, his voice low and slow.

"I'm going to rid the world of Trouble," Pugg told his brother.

"You thwaku Bashthraka's sooeeta!" said Bashthraka, picking up a chair.

"Did you hear me? I'm going to rid the world of Trouble and I need your help."

"YOU THWAKU BASHTHRAKA'S SOOEETA!!!" said Bashthraka, raising the chair over his head.

Pugg looked at the chair, looked at his brother, then realized that he needed to duck. Right now.

The chair swung over his head just as Pugg dived under the table. "I guess you're not in the mood to help me rid the world of Trouble, brother?"

"YOU THWAKU BASHTHRAKA'S SOOEETA!!!" Bashthraka shouted. His cry traveled all the way around the world and awoke a dragon that had been asleep since before the world was born.

That last bit is important. Remember it for later.

Pugg dodged the chair again, this time moving toward the door. "I guess I'll come back after I've gotten rid of the world's Trouble. Then, all this spilled sooeeta will be a little matter. I promise!"





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"Well someone should do something about that."



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"Get back here and take your beating!" Bashthraka shouted, but Pugg knew better.

"What a storm-head," Pugg said under his breath. "I guess I asked the wrong brother."

And so, Pugg went into the world to find his brother Gowthdukah, the Silent One, keeper of secrets. Not only would he help, but he'd probably also know how to find the source of all Troubles.

* * *

Pugg found Gowthdukah on a hillside overlooking a battle between two armies of men. He watched them closely, writing and remembering what he saw. Pugg watched for a few moments, grew bored and impatient, then nudged his brother, saying, "Tall, skinny and silent, when are you done with all this nonsense?"

Gowthdukah turned his head and stared at his brother with fiery eyes, but said nothing.

"I need to find the source of all Trouble. It has to come from somewhere. Tell me."

Gowthdukah turned back to the battle, his eyes darting back and forth, back and forth.

"Does it come from a well? Does it drop from the sky like raindrops? Does it come from under a mountain, locked away in a secret cave, guarded by a dragon? Where is it? Where? Where? Where?"

Gowthdukah's writing stopped and he flipped to a blank page in his book, his pen drawing furiously. When he finished, he tore the page out and threw it at his brother. Pugg caught the page and saw what his brother drew there. It was a tree.

"Trouble grows on trees?"

Gowthdukah – his attentions still locked on the battle – shook his head and held up a single finger.

"It grows on a single tree?"

Gowthdukah nodded.

"Where?"

Gowthdukah, only half-listening to his brother, pointed a single finger to the sky.

"At the top of the world?"

Gowthdukah nodded.

"I see. Well, someone should do something about that."



Gowthdukah, still only half-listening to his little brother, nodded slowly as his hand busily scratched secrets into his great book.

"I'll do it," Pugg said. "After all, no one else will." And Pugg left his brother on the mountain overlooking the battle. It was only a little while later that Gowthdukah realized what his brother was proposing. If only Pugg hadn't burned up Gowthdukah's magic cloak, he would have been able to take the shape of a hawk and stop his brother, but that's the way of the world: you never need something until it's gone.

Pugg went back to his Winter Home and gathered what he needed for his climb to the top of the world. He put on a pair of tall, leather boots with thick soles, a heavy coat and his leather cap. Then, he threw a bag over his shoulder – the very same bag he won from an elf god in a drinking bet. The elf boasted that he could out-drink any ork. Pugg agreed to the wager, saying that he could drink more than any elf. When the contest over, the elf was sleeping off his silly fruit wine while Pugg threw the elf's bag over his shoulder. One of the other elves smelled Pugg's cup and objected. "This isn't wine, it's water!"

Pugg shrugged. "He only said he could drink more. He didn't say 'more wine.'"

And with that bag, Pugg went out to find the Tree of Troubles.

When his bag was two days empty, Pugg met up with two trolls fighting over the half-gnawed skeleton of an ogre.

"Issss miiiine!" one of them hissed.

"No! Issss miiiine!" claimed the other.

That's when they saw Pugg. They dropped the half-eaten ogre and walked toward him, one to one side and the other to the other.

"Issss miiiine!" one of them hissed.

"No! Issss miiiine!" claimed the other.

"Lookssss at it, coussssin," said the first. "Sssscrumptioussss and ssssumptuoussss."

"Eatssss it will we do," said the other. "Eatssss it meatssss, eatssss it gutssss, eatssss it bonessss."

There was no place to run, no place to hide. So, Pugg tried talking.

"You can't eat me," Pugg said. "I'm on my way to the top of the tallest mountain to rid the world of its Troubles."





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Pugg should have kept his mouth shut.



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The two trolls were not impressed. Pugg should have known better, but his head was so filled with the knowledge of what he was going to do that it didn't have room for what he should be doing. But another look at the troll jaws mashing and gnashing took care of that right quick.

"And besides," Pugg said, his wits coming back to him, "you can't eat ork without oogulberries."

"Oogulberriessss why?" said the other troll.

"It's poisonous. Why everyone knows that." Pugg pointed at the troll. "Even your cousin there knows that, don't you?"

The troll paused. "Ummmm... yyyessss. Know me that, yessss."

"Right then," said Pugg. "Let's go fetch us some oogulberries."

"Ork clever one," said the troll. "Triessss to trick ussss. Ssssneaky ssssneaky ssssneaky."

"Not at all," said Pugg. "While we all look, you can tie my hands and feet. I'll ride on your backs."

"Miiiiine!" the troll hissed.

"Miiiiine!" hissed the other.

"If you two cannot make up your minds, I'll just have to go my own way and bring the oogulberries back."

"Yessss, yessss! Oogulberries get!" said the troll.

"We desssside!" said the other.

"Right then. I'll be back when I get the oogulberries."

And Pugg left them that way, arguing over which one should carry him. "That was easier than I thought it would be," Pugg said to himself. "I thought for certain I'd have to be more clever than that."

Pugg should have kept his mouth shut. Trouble was certainly listening.

He reached the foothills just before the Tallest Mountain in the World with his food and sooeeta half gone. It was there he met the giant.

"Hm," thought Pugg. "Looks like I won't be walking up the mountain after all."





When the giant saw Pugg, he stretched his shoulders and gave out the biggest yawn he could. The giant looked down at him with its one eye and said, "What a tiny morsel. Why, you won't even make my breakfast!"

"I wouldn't say such things," said Pugg. "I am no one to be trifled with."

"Such talk," said the giant. "And why should I fear such a bug as yourself."

"Bug?" said Pugg. "That's not my name, but it will do for you. This is the strongest bug you've ever met, my tall, wide friend."

"Strong, eh?"

"Stronger than any giant."

"That's a brave claim, little one. Perhaps you'd like to prove it."

Pugg smiled. "Oh, I could prove it. But I'm just so tired. I just got done climbing to the top of this mountain and climbing back down again."

The giant looked at him with disbelieving eyes. "You climbed to the top of the tallest mountain in the world?"

"And back down again," smiled Pugg. "But certainly that's no mean feat for a giant. I'm sure you could do it."

"Of course," said the giant.

"Twice even," said Pugg.

"Uh... of course," gulped the giant.

"All right then. Tell you what. You climb up to the top of the mountain and I'll take a nap on your back. You can wake me up when we get to the top."

"Of course," gulped the giant. Pugg jumped up on the giant's shoulder and made a pillow out of his bag.

"And don't forget to wake me up when we get to the top."

The giant began the great climb, and all along the way, Pugg snatched fruit from the treetops they walked by and munched as the giant climbed and climbed and climbed. And when they reached the top, the giant called, "We're here! The top of the tallest mountain in the world!"

Pugg yawned and stretched his arms. "Why, is it night already? How long have we been climbing?"

"Two days," said the giant.



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"The source of all Trouble in the world."



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"Well begun is half done," said Pugg. "Climb back down and come back up. I'll wait for you up here."

"Right," said the giant, and began the long climb to the bottom of the mountain.

"A little too easy," said Pugg, watching the giant climb back down the mountain. "He'll probably get wise at the bottom and I'll have to climb down myself."

Again, Pugg should have kept his mouth shut. Trouble's always over your shoulder with an ear for such things.

There Pugg was, at the top of the tallest mountain in the world, looking up at the Tree of Troubles. It looked like a tall, slender skeleton. The tree was stripped of its bark, reaching towards the sky with its limbs, threadbare of leaves, adorned only with round, ripe fruits.

"Trouble," Pugg whispered. "The source of all Trouble in the world."

And he was right. Every fruit – as red as blood, as bright as sunrise – was ready to fall to the world and cause mischief, misfortune and pain. And as he watched, one of the fruits fell from the limb down into the world. As it fell, Pugg heard the sound of weeping come up from somewhere in the world.

He stepped up to the roots of the tree and looked up at the branches. Then, he unstrapped the bag from his shoulder and opened its mouth. "All right," he told the bag. "The elf lord said you could hold an ocean of water and a forest of fruit. You only need to hold one tree's bounty today. Don't disappoint me."

Then, Pugg began to climb the tree. He reached the first limb and climbed out as far as he dared, clutching for the fruit that hung at the end. It was soft in his fingers and bled like a wound when he squeezed. Pugg threw it into the bag quickly, wiping the fruit's blood on the limb. "Nasty stuff," he said, quietly to himself. "A messy job, but that won't deter me." He looked at the tree with a smile. "You'll have to do better than that," he said.

And on he went, taking the fruits of the tree. One by one, he dropped them into his magic bag, then scrambled up to the next limb, snatching another. Soon, his arms and legs began to ache, but he did not let pain dissuade him. His foot urged him to stop, at least pause, but he paid it no heed. The fruits fell into his magic satchel and he continued his climb.

Finally, he reached the top of the tree and grabbed hold of the very last fruit. When it was in his hand, he smiled. "You are the last one," he said. "The last bit of Trouble in the world. When you're gone, there will be no more pain, no more sorrow and no more suffering. Only peace and quiet."





Pugg threw the fruit into the bag and watched it join its brothers. But what he saw made him lose his grasp on the limb. What he saw made him fall from the limb and tumble from the Tree of Troubles. And as he fell, he hit and broke every limb...

... all

... the

... way

... down.

When he awoke at the tree's roots, he looked at the bag one more time to see if what he saw before was a dream. It wasn't.

The bag was empty, and at the bottom was a tear in the fabric. A hole. Somehow, from the bottom of the tree to the top, a limb or a twig caught on the bag and ripped it open, causing all the fruit – all the Trouble – to fall down into the world all at once. Not one at a time, but all at once.

Pugg sat there, letting his mind sort through all the pain he just put upon the world. He didn't move for many days, sitting there with food and sooeeta in his pouch. Food and drink that remained untouched until a certain pair of giant hands pulled a giant body up over the top of the mountain.

"I made it," said the giant. "Are you ready? Down is a lot easier."

Pugg looked up from his misery. "What did you say?" he asked.

"I said 'Down is a lot easier.' But I am very tired and very thirsty. We'll have to get started if I'm to make it all the way down."

Pugg blinked. Then, he licked his dry, parched lips and shook his head. "No. Stop a while. Take a rest. In fact, here..." he opened his pouch and took out what was left of his food and sooeeta. "Share my food and drink with me. You look like you're about to fall down."

"Oh, I can't. Up and down twice over. That was our wager."

Pugg shook his head. "I insist. You've proven enough. I'd carry you down the mountain, but I'm afraid I'm a bit tired myself. Perhaps we can help each other down."

The giant nodded. "I'd like that. But first," he sat down next to Pugg under the naked Tree of Troubles, "I think I'll take you up on that offer."

The giant took a swig of the sooeeta and made a giant sound. "That is good drink, my



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"The only failure in the world..."



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friend. What do you call it?" Pugg told him. "Sooeeta, eh? You'll have to teach me how to make it."

"It's a secret," Pugg said. "But a secret's worth a secret. What's your name, large one?"

"Boolboolah," said the giant. "And it's a pleasure to meet you, little ork."

And together, they went back down the tallest mountain in the world.

When Pugg made it back down to his Winter Home, he sat himself down by the fire and stayed there for a long time. It wasn't until his mother, Keethdownmga, brought him soup that he said anything.

"You look like a dwarf has been riding your back for most of your life," she told him.

"What's wrong?"

He sighed, then told her the story. He told her of how he stole his brother's sooeeta and how he lost it and how he decided to take care of all the Trouble in the World. He told her of his misadventures enlisting his brothers and how he tricked the trolls and the giant and how he dropped every last Trouble into the world and needed a giant's help to climb back down the mountain. And when he was done with his story, she looked like she was about to smack his head right off his shoulders. But when she saw the sorrow in his eyes, her own expression softened and she held him close to her.

"Little Pugg," she said. "You were the runt of the litter. You didn't survive this long by being so stupid."

"Yes," he said. "I was foolish to think I could catch all the Trouble in the world."

She squeezed him tighter. "You just don't see it, do you?"

"See what?"

"Trouble is what it is: it makes an ork a hero or it breaks him in half. Before you climbed that tree, there was only a little Trouble in the world. Just enough for heroes to share. Now, there's Trouble enough for all. Every ork will have his own share of Trouble. And he'll have to decide for himself what to do with it."

She stroked his brow and kissed his forehead. "The only failure in the world is when we fail to try."





Gowthduka and the Well of Wisdom

This is the story of how Gowthduka lost his tongue. It is a long story, but as Gowthduka was wiser at the end of it, so shall we all be wiser as well.

It was a long, long time ago when Gowthduka decided he would seek out the Well of Wisdom. Stealing secrets was all well and good, but what he really sought was the Riddle of Life, the Secret of All Things. And

once he found this knowledge, he would share it with all orks, so they could be strengthened by it as well. And so, with his Cloak Deceivous, Gowthduka went out to find the Well of Wisdom.

On the first day, he came across an elven lord, all dressed in gold and jewels. Gowthduka put his head under his hood and took the shape of an elf. "Good day, handsome one," he said, knowing how vain elves are.

"Good morning, cousin," said the elf lord. "What mischief are you up to this morning?"

"I'm looking for the Well of Wisdom so I might learn the Riddle of Life," said Gowthduka.

"You are a fool looking for wisdom, for I can tell you everything you ever need to know."

Gowthduka sat on the edge of the elf's bed and listened.

"What are you willing to do to drink from that well, cousin?"



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"I'd be with my enemies in the cold, cold ground."



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"Anything," Gowthduka said.

"Then you already know the secret. Life guards its secrets – and its pleasures – like a dragon guards its horde. You must be ruthless, cousin. You must be willing to do anything to get what you want."

"I see," said Gowthduka.

"I am a Prince. The only reason I have what I have is because I was willing to do what my brothers were not. They were not willing to lie; I was. They were not willing to cheat; I was. They were not willing to murder..."

Gowthduka eyed him closely. The elf lord smiled.

"My brother was married to a woman I loved, so I stole her away from him. My cousin held the titles I wanted, so I ruined his name and inherited his wealth. My sister plotted against me, so I paid one of her servants to put poison in her... well. That secret's mine. If I was not willing to do these things, I'd be with my enemies in the cold, cold ground."

"This is the Riddle of Life, cousin. If you are not ruthless, you'll end up in the grave."

"Thank you for your wisdom, cousin," Gowthduka said. "You've saved me many strides on my journey. I'm sure I'll find a way to repay you for your gift."

"Not at all," said the elf lord. "Advice is free."

Gowthduka nodded and went on his way, whispering, "Advice is worth what its worth."

On the second day, Gowthduka saw a dwarf on the road, swinging his sword at shadows. He put his cowl over his head and said, "Good day, cousin."

"Good afternoon, cousin," said the dwarf. "What work are you out to do today?"

"I'm looking for the Well of Wisdom so I might learn the Riddle of Life."

"Look no further, for I can tell you all you need to know." The dwarf held up his sword.

"This," he said, "is the answer to the Riddle of Life."

"Your sword?"

"Discipline. Excellence. That is the Riddle of Life. Be the best at everything you do. If you wield a sword, be the best swordsman in the world. All my life, this is all I've ever wanted to be. So I practiced and I practiced and I practiced. I've challenged every swordsman who claimed to be the best, and I beat them. I destroyed them. I proved to them, to myself, to the world, that I was the greatest swordsman in the world."

"Be the best at everything you do. That is the Riddle of Life, boy."



"That is indeed great wisdom," said Gowthduka. "I will remember it." And one day, I'll repay you for your advice."

"It's no matter. Advice is free."

"Advice is worth what it's worth," Gowthduka said and went on his way.

On the third day, Gowthduka came to a man, half-hidden by shadows. Gowthduka put his hood over his head and approached him. "Good d—"

"Hush!" said the man. "Come in here and hide with me if you know what's good for you!"

Gowthduka climbed into the leaves and trees and stayed perfectly still and silent. After a while, the man wiped his sweaty brow. "It must be gone," he said. "What are you doing here all alone in the middle of the night?"ⁱ he asked Gowthduka.

"I'm looking for the Well of Wisdom so I might learn the Riddle of Life."

The man made a guffaw sound and said, "You don't need to go looking for any well. I can tell you everything you need to know."

Gowthduka nodded and sat back against a tree.

"Life is short, my friend. Always shorter than you think. Death is every man's shadow, hovering over his shoulder, waiting for the moment when he expects it least. No matter how you prepare, no matter how well you plan, no matter how well you practice, Death is always ready. He's more patient than you."

The man suddenly looked over his own shoulder, his eyes glaring as if he expected to see something. Then, he turned back to Gowthduka. "He's always there. Right over your shoulder. And no matter how quickly you look, he hides out of sight, so you think he's not there. But he's always there. Always ready."

"And this is the secret?"

"Yes. Be ready for Death. Know that he's everywhere. Know that he's right behind you, waiting for you to slip at the right time. Know that he'll take you when he's ready and he doesn't care about your concerns or plans. And so you must fight against Death. Don't give him any opportunities. Don't let him see you weak. You have to be stronger than Death. You have to be smarter than Death. You have to be faster than Death. You have to be better than Death. That's the Secret, my friend. Know this wisdom and you'll be wiser than most men in the world."

Gowthduka nodded. "I will. And I will find a way to repay you for your wisdom."

"Don't bother. Life is too short for debts and favors. Save them for yourself. You're the





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"I am an ork, and my name is none of your concern."



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only one you should be indebted to."

Then, without another word, the man was gone.

On the fourth day, Gowthduka found a cave. From deep within the darkness, he heard a voice calling to him. Gowthduka clutched his spear and shield and wandered into the cave, ready for what he had to face.

Down and down and down he went, deeper and deeper and deeper into the world. More than once, he wondered if he was traveling to the Otherside, if it was Gorlam who called his name, calling him to his own death. But soon enough, he reached a wide, open cave, and in the center of that cave stood a well.

"I found it!" he shouted and rushed forward. But as he did, a Thing crept from the shadows, slithering as it moved. Gowthduka stopped, for the Thing was more horrible than even he had words to describe. It gnashed its teeth and twisted its talons and its skin gurgled like a cauldron as it moved across the floor, leaving a gray trail behind it as it did. And from that gray trail boiled tiny bubbles. And from those bubbles spawned tiny creatures, and those creatures flew up from the trail and made homes in the crevices of the cave. Gowthduka did not look upon them or the Thing that slithered before him.

"You come to drink from the Well of Wisdom?" it asked.

"I do."

"And who are you?"

"I am an ork, and my name is none of your concern."

The Thing chuckled and the sound made Gowthduka's skin crawl. "You are a clever ork," it said. "But are you a strong ork?"

"Strong enough."

It chuckled again. "There is a price for wisdom, ork. I'm sure you know that."

"After everything I've seen on my way to this cave, I was afraid I was the only one in the world who knew that."

"Yes. Many think knowledge is free. They give it away like a bauble. Such knowledge is free, for it is useless. But true knowledge... we both know the difference don't we?"

Gowthduka nodded.

"Very well. Here is the price, ork. You are the first of your kind to come to the Well. I want you to be the last. And so the price I take for the wisdom you seek... is your tongue."





"My tongue?" Gowthduka asked, his voice betraying his surprise.

"Do you hesitate to pay the price, ork?"

Gowthduka's hand – shaking all the way – rushed down to the knife on his belt, and without a second thought, he drew it across his tongue and cut it out of his mouth. When he was done, with his mouth full of blood and his eyes full of tears, he threw the tongue toward the Thing. Threw it away with the same carelessness elves, dwarves and men throw away their secrets.

The Thing caught Gowthduka's tongue in one of its mouths and swallowed it down. The sound was worse than the pain of cutting out his own tongue.

"Very well, ork. You may drink from the Well. But be warned – there are rules you must follow. First, you may only take a single draught. No more, no less. Second, you may not share the Well's gifts with any other. You must drink all you take. Finally, you cannot drink it here. You must carry it with you to where you began your journey. Only there may you drink it. Only then will you be ready for the wisdom it will give you."

Gowthduka nodded and stepped forward. He opened his water pouch and took the ladle from the side of the well. Then, he dipped the ladle in the Well and poured the water into his pouch. He turned away, and walked toward the way he entered... when suddenly, he turned and looked directly at the Thing. Then, he smiled.

"You see me for what I am," said the Thing.

Gowthduka nodded. For the Thing he looked upon was no longer a faceless horror, but a shape he knew better than any other.

On the fifth day, Gowthduka traveled through the forest where he met the man hiding in the shrubbery. Within no time at all, he came across the same man, hiding under the same leaves and branches, weeping for all the wounds in the world. Gowthduka hid under his cowl and approached the man, and he jumped when he saw the Tall, Silent One.

"What are you? Are you a ghost?" he shouted.

Gowthduka shook his head.

"You are! I know you are! You've come to haunt me! You're my brother!"

Gowthduka shook his head again, his silence only aggravating the man.

"I left him. But when the beast attacked, I broke rank and ran. I watched him from the woods, watched him scream when the beast broke him in half. I would have been there.



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"I am nothing."



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I would have seen it. If I was standing at my brother's side, it would have been me! It would have been me!"

The man ran from Gowthduka and the Silent One tried to follow. But then, the scent of something foul came to him and he stopped.

Trolls, he said to himself.

But the man did not smell them, and Gowthduka heard his cries as his flesh was torn from his body and the cackle of feasting trolls. He turned away and walked further on.

On the sixth day, Gowthduka came across the dwarf he met before, sharpening his sword with a whet stone. He put his cowl over his head and approached him.

"I see you've returned from your voyage. Did you find what you were looking for?"

Gowthduka nodded.

"Aye. Cost you your voice, did it?"

Gowthduka nodded again.

"I am a dwarf who can read the hearts of others. It is a skill my profession has given me."

Gowthduka motioned to the sword.

"Ah. I ready myself for a duel. A warrior from a rival household is on his way. I intend on teaching him the price of dishonoring my name and underestimating my skill." The dwarf looked at Gowthduka. "Would you be my second?"

Gowthduka nodded and followed the dwarf to a clearing where the dwarf's opponent waited for him. The two dwarves stood at attention and went through their dwarf motions as Gowthduka watched. And the Tall, Silent One saw them bow. And he saw them draw their blades. And he saw the precision of their movements. Gowthduka marveled at them, despite the fact they were grousy dwarves. Their movements were exact, their form like birds dancing on the wind or snakes, still and ready to strike.

And he saw the two blades strike and his dwarf fall to the ground, his blood spilling over the crisp, green morning grass.

Gowthduka rushed forward and held the dwarf's head in his lap.

"I am nothing," he said, blood choking his words. "I am nothing."

Gowthduka shook his head, wanting to comfort the dwarf.

You were beautiful, he wanted to say. Never have I seen such poetry.





But there were no words. Only silence.

"I am nothing," whispered the dwarf as the life fled from his body, leaving his skin as cold as the sword at his side. Gowthduka left the dwarf behind him and went on his way.

On the seventh day, he approached the elf he'd met before. Gowthduka put his hood over his head and approached him.

In the elf's left hand was an empty bottle and in his right hand an empty goblet. At his feet, more empty bottles and a broken plate and an empty bag. Gowthduka could smell the mushrooms from the bag and the wine from the bottles.

When he came closer, the elf drew a sword, pointing it straight at Gowthduka's neck. "You're a spy!" the elf shouted. "Sent here to kill me!"

Gowthduka shook his head, showing the elf his false features. *Don't you recognize me?*

"Oh. It's you. The one looking for the Well of Wisdom."

Gowthduka nodded. *That's me.*

"Did you find it?"

Gowthduka nodded again. *Yes, I did.*

The elf dropped his sword and fell back into his chair. "Good for you. Perhaps you can share that wisdom with me?"

Gowthduka opened his mouth and put his hand over his throat, shaking his head. *I have no tongue to tell my tale.*

The elf watched Gowthduka's reply. "Well, I don't suppose that's too high a price to pay now is it?"

Gowthduka shrugged. *Wisdom carries its own price.*

The elf lord smiled. "There's no need for your disguise, ork. I can see through it. Sorcery is something you orks shouldn't dabble with. Trust me on this."

Gowthduka shrugged again and lifted the cloak from his head. *Very well.*

"An ugly one, aren't you?" asked the elf lord. Gowthduka said nothing. "Well, I suppose you're wondering what happened to me, eh?"

Gowthduka shrugged again. *You can tell me if you like.*

"A touch too much treachery, I suppose," said the elf lord. "I tricked them too well. Now, no one trusts me. All my friends, all my servants. All gone. They can smell



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Dogs smell disease? I have to remember that one.



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weakness, you know. Smell it like a dog smells disease."

Gowthduka nodded. *Dogs smell disease? I have to remember that one.*

"Now, I wait for the assassin to come and take my life. Do you know what we pay our assassins in, little ork?"

Gowthduka shook his head. *No, I don't.*

"Souls, my green friend. Their fee is paid in souls. The souls of the elves they kill. I bet your Well of Wisdom didn't tell you that, did it?"

No. Not yet.

"Go on, then. You've bored me already. I'll just sit here and wait for the one who will drink my soul this evening."

Gowthduka turned away and left the elf on his own, drunk and drowning in his own pity.

On the eight day, Gowthduka arrived where he started. His feet and legs were sore from walking, his mouth was sore from its wound and his head was heavy with memories.

As he approached the spot where his journey began, he recalled the three he met on his way to and from the Well, and remembered their words to him.

"You must be ruthless, cousin," the elf told him. "You must be willing to do anything to get what you want."

That can't be the truth, Gowthduka thought. An ork carries every word he ever speaks. The weight of those words is measured by their honesty.

The place that used to house Gowthduka's tongue suddenly burned and that's when Gowthduka knew why the elf's words are wrong.

It's not carrying a ruthless heart that's the secret. It's not being willing to do anything to get what you want. It's being willing to carry the cost.

Gowthduka took another step toward the place he started from.

"Be the best at everything you do," the dwarf told him. "That is the Riddle of Life, boy."

But Gowthduka remembered the dwarf's words as his blood spilled into Gowthduka's lap.

"I am nothing," he said. "I am nothing."



Gowthduka remembered watching the dwarven duel, remembering how beautiful their movements were, how perfect, how deadly.

He couldn't see the beauty of what he was, thought Gowthduka, because he was too enamored with what he could be.

That's when Gowthduka knew how the dwarf's words were wrong.

The Riddle of Life isn't about striving to be the best at everything, it's striving to be the best at what you are.

Gowthduka took another step toward the place he started from.

Finally, he thought of the man and what he said.

"You have to be better than Death," the man said. "That's the secret, my friend."

Then, Gowthduka thought of the way he died, weeping for his lost brother.

"If I was standing at my brother's side," the man said, "it would have been me!"

He could have given his life to save his brother, Gowthduka thought. But instead, he gave up his life to be troll food.

And that's when Gowthduka knew the man's words were wrong.

We all die, thought Gowthduka. We can't be smarter than Death. We can't be faster than Death. All we can do is die the best death we can.

And Gowthduka took the final step toward the place he started from.

Waiting there were his two brothers and his mother.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" asked Pugg.

Gowthduka nodded. *Yes, I did.*

"Was all the walking worth it?!" shouted Bashthraka.

Gowthduka nodded. *Yes, it was.*

"What did you learn?" asked Keethdownmga.

Gowthduka unslung the pouch from his shoulder, opened it and poured the water out onto the ground.

I learned... that the learning was in the journey.





STORIES

Pugg stole fire. This is how he did it.



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Puggthwaku

These stories tell how Pugg won the orks their place in the Otherworld. One by one, Pugg tricks the gods of the other races, and as he does, they grow angrier, and angrier. It all ends with Pugg tricking the men and the revenge the other gods have on Little Pugg.

Pugg Thwaku Broonum

Long, long ago, when the world was all winter, Pugg stole fire. This is how he did it.

The sun is a covetous creature. It shares its warmth when it chooses and hides behind clouds when it feels it isn't being adored. This is why the men pay such homage to it. Silly men. They have yellow brains.

The Orks were freezing. Pugg knew it. Did he complain? No! He did something about it.

The sun is not only covetous, but it is also vain. And proud. And selfish. Why do you think the sun is so yellow? But the sun has one thing that nothing else in the world has: it has fire. And Pugg went up there to steal it.

He borrowed his brother's cloak of changing (as he so often does) and changed into the shape of a bird. Then, he flew up as high as he could, even above the clouds and above the sky, to the place where the sun is.

"Look at you!" shouted Pugg at the sun. "You're much fatter than I thought you would be!"

The sun ignored him. At least, pretended to ignore him. But nobody can fool Pugg. Not even the sun.

"Look at you!" shouted Pugg again. "All fat and happy. And very, very ugly. Is that why you make yourself so bright: so the rest of the world can't see how ugly you are?"

This time, the sun made a scowl. Pugg hid his face behind his wings. "Ah!" he cried. "Don't do that! You are already too ugly to behold. Making faces only makes it worse!"

The sun grew ever angrier. It said, "What do you want little bird? Do you want to feel my fire and fall to the earth as a cinder?"

"Hah!" shouted Pugg. "You couldn't hit me with your fire. You're so fat and ugly, you couldn't even hit yourself! Although if you did hit yourself in the face a few times, it might make an improvement!"





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STORIES

And that is how Pugg stole fire...



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The sun burst with fury and shouted at Pugg, "Foolish bird! Now you will feel the wrath of the sun!"

The sun sent out its fire and the flames hit Pugg and his brother's cloak of changing. And Pugg screamed at the pain. But he did not fall. Oh no. He did not fall.

Instead, he flew with his flaming feathers down into the world. But the flames were hot, too hot for even Pugg, and he fell. Fell, fell, fell. But before he hit the ground, he was caught by an oak tree.

"Thank you, oak tree for saving me," said Pugg. "And for your kindness, you may have a bit of the fire I have stolen."

Then, he flew away to the orks of the world and cast off the flaming cloak. The orks took the fire of the cloak and kept it safe, although the cloak was ruined.

When Pugg returned home, his brother asked about his cloak. "I am sorry, my brother," said Pugg. But I have lost your cloak." Then, he told the story of what happened. Instead of anger, Gowthdukah smiled and walked away, content with the trick Pugg had made.

And that is how Pugg stole fire and gave it to the orks.

Pugg Thwaku Rhuntee

As it turned out, all the Gods decided to gather together to divvy up the Afterlife and someone "forgot" to invite the orks. Well, the orks didn't think very kindly of that and decided to show up anyway. However, by the time they got there, all the land was already claimed by the Men, the Halfmen, the Dwarves and the Elves. And so the orks were left out in the wind.

But Pugg had a solution. He invited all the other Gods to a great feast on the mortal plane. At the feast, he revealed a great table of food. "Enough to feed us all," he said. "For surely, none of us here could finish such a table themselves."

"Do not be so sure of that," said that Halfman God. "I think I might be a match for your table."

"Well now," said Pugg. "That would be something to see! But I do not think that you could clean my table. In fact, I would wager you something very precious if you could do such a thing."

And Pugg pulled out from his pocket his magic pouch. "This pouch contains one hundred pockets," he said. "And for every one thing that you place inside of it, seven things you may pull from it. Now wouldn't it be nice to put a fat roast in my little bag and pull out seven?"



"Indeed, it would!" cried the Halfman God. "But what would I wager against such a treasure?"

"Oh, nothing really," Pugg smiled. "Only that land you claimed when all you Gods divvied up the After life."

"A heavy wager."

Pugg smiled. "Only if you're a halfman with a small stomach."

Well, the Halfman God's eyes were filled with loaves of butter-smothered bread and steaming pies and crisp, cold chocolates and try as he might, he could not resist Pugg's offer.

So, the contest was on, and the Halfman God started eating. In no time at all he finished a third of the table, the appetizers all but gone. He was starting to work on the entrées when Pugg shouted to him, "My, my. You must've not eaten for a week! Here," he said, taking a glass and filling it with wine. "Drink some wine to wash down the dainties. After all, the wine was sitting on the table, and you'll have to finish it off sooner or later."

"Indeed," said the Halfman God and he swallowed up the goblet of wine faster than you can say "krunkets!" Then, in not half a breath more, the Halfman God was finished with the and beginning to work on the desserts.

"Slow down!" cried Pugg. "You eat so fast it is easy to see why you never grow any bigger! Here, take another drink of wine to wash down what you've eaten before you begin on the desserts."

"Indeed," said the Halfman God and swallowed down the wine faster than the first time. Then, turning his attention to the desserts, he began to chew away like a suckling on his mother's breast.

Just when it looked as if the Halfman God would finish the table, just when there was only one tiny cake left, Pugg raised his hands and cried, "Enough!" All the other Gods cheered and Pugg scooped up the wine flask and poured out two goblets and handed one to the Halfman God. "You have all but beaten me, little one. Let us drink now to your health, as I salute your victory... and your appetite."

"You are a very gracious host," said the Halfman God. "For an ork." They both drank to the Halfman God's victory, and when the goblets were empty, the Halfman God finished off the last little cake and raised his head with a smile.

"Now, give to me what is mine," said the proud little God. "For I have won!"

Pugg shook his head, heavy and low with sadness. "I do not wish to anger you, my little friend, but you are wrong. You have lost."





STORIES

The Trickster had to hobble along quickly...



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"And how have I lost?" the Halfman God demanded.

"The wager we agreed upon was for you to eat all that was on the table."

"And I have done so! Look! The table is empty." He stretched out his hands over the table, and indeed, it was devoid of eatables and drinkables.

But Pugg smiled and said, "You have missed one swallow. A swallow that you can never finish, little God." And as he spoke, Pugg raised the goblet that he drank from and slammed it empty on the table. "For this swallow of wine that I took from the table to drink to your victory is one swallow that you missed and cannot finish. So, you have lost, and I have won."

And that is how Pugg tricked the Halfman God out of one small sliver of his claim to the Afterlife.

Pugg Thwaku Ahlvsees

After Pugg tricked the rhuntees out of their sliver of the afterlife, Pugg went on to where the gods of the elves lived. Pugg knew word of his trick had not gone far, for the halfmen were so proud, they would never admit to the elf gods that they were tricked, let alone admit they were tricked by an ork.

On this particular trip, Pugg brought his brother Gowthduka along with him. The Tall, Silent One carried with him his Book of Secrets and walked beside Pugg. The Trickster had to hobble along quickly to keep up with his brother's long strides.

Pugg and Gowthduka arrived in the lands of the elven gods and looked at them in awe. It seemed the whole place was made out of stairs and statues. The elven gods sat at their magnificent table, all filled with wines, fruits, cheeses and other tasty treats. Pugg approached carefully and with his hands open. The elves - who did not fear a small, crippled ork - laughed when he came close.

"And what do you want, little ork?" asked the elf gods, all speaking in harmony, as if their voices were a single great song.

"I hear the elves are the wisest creatures in all the



world," said Pugg. "But I have to admit, looking at you now, I don't see why such lies are spread so freely."

The sky suddenly turned black and Gowthduka looked down at his brother with glaring eyes.

"Trust me," said Pugg. Gowthduka nodded, but his eyes could not hide his skepticism.

"You dare question our wisdom?" said the elf gods, their voices rolling like thunder.

"No. I question the rumor that elves are the wisest. I haven't seen it for myself, and certainly an elf is wise enough to trust only his own eyes and not idle gossip."

"Too true," said the elven gods, their voices returning to the sweet, pleasant song they sang before.

"And so, I have a wager for you." Pugg opened his bag. "This is something I thw... acquired from the halfmen gods upon a recent visit." What he showed them was a wide table, carved with beautiful intricacy and detail.

"A table?" asked the elf gods. "Why would we want a table?"

"Because *this* is a magic table. Plates placed upon it are never emptied and bottles placed upon it never run dry. I thought elven lords – who hold such lavish and extravagant parties – would be interested in such a table."

"Indeed, we would," said the elf gods. "But what is this wager and what would we have to put up to win such an item?"

"Oh, the wager is simple. We'll play a game we orks like to call 'Riddles'. You ask a riddle, and I must answer it correctly. If I do, then I get to ask a question and you must answer it correctly. The one who fails to answer a question loses."

The elf gods laughed. "Sounds easy enough. But you still have not told us what we are to put up against your marvelous little bauble."

Pugg shrugged. "Only your claim to the Otherworld. That's all."

The elf gods all looked at each other, their eyes suddenly troubled. "That's all?" they said, their confidence not so bloated.

"That's all," said Pugg. "Of course, if you believe there's not a single one of you who can outsmart an ork..."

"Oh no," said a voice. A single elf stepped forward, taller than all the rest. "I will play your game, little ork. But I raise the stakes. If you win, you take home our claim to the Otherworld. But if I win, you are my slave... for all eternity."





STORIES

Gowthduka opened his book of secrets...



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Without a moment of hesitation, Pugg said, "I agree."

"Then as the challenged, I suggest I have the right to go first."

"Certainly," smiled Pugg. "Ask away."

The elf god put his hand on his chin and thought for a moment. "I have one," he said. And the game began.

The elf god asked:

*The warrior can see me coming, but can never avoid me.
The wise man knows my name, but does not know me.
The king fears my arrival, the prince waits impatiently.
Who am I?*

Pugg raised an eyebrow and smirked. "That's an old one. The answer is 'Death,' elf lord."

The elf god nodded. "Just testing my opponent's abilities, little ork," he lied. Pugg knew better. He knew the elf underestimated him, and that would cost him dearly.

"My turn," said Pugg. And Pugg asked:

"What must a weapon be forged from to harm an elf?"

The elf lord's eyes darkened (there's a lot of that in Elfland). "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I didn't hear that right."

Pugg asked again. "What must a weapon be forged from to harm an elf?"

The elf lord glared at Pugg. Just to the Trickster's left, Gowthduka opened his book of secrets and made ready to write. The elf lord glared at him, too. Gowthduka said nothing and made no expression at all.

"You must answer the question, elf lord. If you don't, you submit."

"I know that!" the elf lord shouted. Then, he turned and looked at his cousins sitting behind him. Their eyes were darker than his own. He turned back to face the smiling Trickster and answered, "A blade made from the stone in the Burning Lake."

Gowthduka wrote in his book and Pugg said, "Your turn."

The elf snarled. "Very well," he said. "Try this one." Then, the elf lord asked:

*At night I come without being fetched,
And by day I am lost without being stolen.
What am I?*



"When do you plan on betraying your brother?"

"Oh certainly you know more clever riddles than these," said Pugg. "The answer is 'the moon!'"

The elf lord cursed something under his breath and stomped his foot so hard, he cracked the ground under him, making statues fall all around.

"I guess that means I was right," said Pugg. "That makes it my turn." And Pugg asked:

"Is there a charm an ork can wear to protect him against elf sorcery?"

The elf lord bared his teeth and bit his lip. Blood oozed down his chin as he turned and looked at his cousins standing behind him, all with their hands on their knives.

"A pendant made from the same stone will do," said the elf lord.

Gowthduka wrote in his book and Pugg said, "Your turn."

The elf lord's lips and nose trembled with fury as he asked:

*I never was, but I shall always be.
No one ever saw me, for I must be seen
I am always before you, never behind
I hold promise, but never keep promises.
What am I?*

Pugg laughed. "Oh, elf lord. I think you and your cousins should play this game more often. The answer is 'tomorrow!'"

Lightning struck down between Pugg and the elf god, throwing the Trickster back into a polished stone stairwell. After a few moments of darkness, Pugg felt Gowthduka's hand on his shoulder. He opened his eyes and looked at the elf lord standing as still as one of the statues, glaring and still bleeding from his lip.

"I guess that means my answer was correct?" Pugg asked as Gowthduka lifted him to his feet. "And it's my turn to ask." Pugg shrugged off the stone dust from his shoulders and asked:

"When do you plan on betraying your brother?"

From behind the elf, one of his kin stood, his eyes on fire. The elf lord did not turn, did not move, did not hesitate. He spoke with a soft, angry voice when he said:

"You. Little. Filthy. Beast."

"That's not the correct answer, elf lord," Pugg said. I suppose that means you can't answer?"

"I choose not to answer," said the elf lord.





STORIES

"He's more devious than any elf could ever dream of being."



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"That means you lose to an ork, elf lord. That can't look very good to your kin."

"Get out of here," said the elf lord. "And never come back."

Pugg tipped his leather cap and bowed curtly. "Farewell, elf lord. I wish you luck in your future with your cousins." Then, he turned on his heel and left with Gowthduka close behind.

When they were an hour outside of the elf city, Pugg stopped walking and sat under a large tree with blue fruit. "Hold here for a moment, brother," he said to Gowthduka. "I'm tired from my task."

Gowthduka nodded and stood beside him. A few moments later, a lone rider approached them on a magnificent horse twice the size of any reindeer. Gowthduka pointed to the steed, but Pugg shook his head. "You worry too much, brother. Wait, listen and learn."

The rider stopped before the tree and jumped to the ground. He pulled the cloak from off his head, revealing the face of the elf who stood in anger at the asking of Pugg's last question.

"It worked perfectly, little ork," said the elf. "You were right."

"Of course!" said Pugg. "But it wouldn't have worked without you. Now tell me, why were you so willing to mouth the answers to your brother's riddles behind his back?"

The elf smiled. "What does the Otherworld matter to me? If he's clever, an elf lord never dies. Also, if my brother lost, he lost faith with our family. That makes it all the easier to put a dagger in his back. I lose nothing and gain everything."

"You learn your brother plots against you," said Pugg.

"I knew that. But now, so does everyone else." The rider climbed back on his horse, saluting Pugg. "I leave you now. We will never see each other again."

"Farewell," said Pugg.

The elf lord looked at Gowthduka. "Watch your back around this one," he said. "He's more devious than any elf could dream of being."

Pugg looked at Gowthduka, and for the first time in history, Gowthduka smiled.

Pugg Thwaku Shtoontee

"News travels quickly." That's what they say. Well, anyone who says that has never been to dwarf lands where even the bees and butterflies move as slow as honey in winter. So when Pugg entered the cold, cold Otherworld mountains, the dwarven gods



had no idea what kind of Trouble was knocking on their door.

Pugg stood before the great iron gates of dwarfdom and looked up. At the top of the wall, he saw many guards, all looking down with their swords and bows.

"Hello!" he shouted. "I'm here for the party!"

The dwarves all looked down at him with grimaces and growls. "What party?"

"The birth party, of course!"

The dwarves all looked at each other, scratching their beards and chewing their moustaches. "Is it your birthday?" they asked each other, and the only answer they had for each other was, "No."

"It has to be someone's birthday!" Pugg shouted up at the wall and the dwarves nodded in agreement. Soon enough, they lifted the gate and Pugg walked on through. Of course, within moments, he was surrounded by dwarves with swords and shields.

"All this for one ork," said Pugg. "You must be mighty afraid of us if you need all this to guard little me."

As soon as he spoke, a single dwarf walked through the crowd of dwarves. His beard was long and braided and his hands were large and calloused. "Who are you?" he asked Pugg.

Pugg answered. "I'm just an ork here to help someone celebrate their birthday."

"Foolishness," said the dwarf lord. "Kill him."

The dwarves all raised their swords and Pugg shook his head. "No! Wait! I'm really here for a birthday party. I even have a present!"

Every dwarf eye in that castle suddenly turned from rage to greed quicker than you could say "thwak."

"What kind of present?" said the dwarf lord.

"I can't tell you," winked Pugg. "That would spoil the surprise."

The dwarf lord's greed turned to skeptical. "Let's pretend it's my birthday," he said. "What kind of gift did you bring?"

"A gift greater and grander than any in all the world!"





STORIES

"Did I stutter?"



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"An ork gift?" asked one of the dwarf guards. "The greatest and grandest in all the world?"

"Greater than any gift ever made!" said Pugg.

"Even a dwarf gift?" asked one of the guards.

"Did I stutter?" Pugg asked. "I said any gift in the world."

The dwarf lord smiled. "I think you've overstepped your bounds, ork."

"Not at all. I'm confident that my gift is better than any gift a dwarf could make. In fact, I'm so confident, I'd be willing to wager on it."

"What kind of wager?"

"It's very simple. I brought a birthday chariot. I'll give your blacksmiths seven days to make a chariot of their own. Then, we'll have the lord himself judge which chariot is better."

The dwarves nodded. "A fair contest," said the dwarf lord. "Come back in seven days with your chariot, ork."

"One last thing, dwarf lord," said Pugg. "We haven't talked about what the winner gets."

"You're right," the dwarf lord said.

"If I win, you give your Otherworld to the orks."

The dwarf scowled. "And if I win, you give me what you've won from the elves and halflings."

That took Pugg by surprise. "News travels quicker than I thought," said Pugg.

"You won't win this wager, little ork. This time, you've met your match."

Pugg left the dwarves behind and went back to his Winter Home. "The dwarves were waiting for me," he thought. "I'll need help with this one." So, he went across the hills to his brother's house.

Bashthraka was chopping wood outside his home, singing a song he wrote after a recent battle.

*Oh, Bashthraka fought long and Bashthraka fought hard
Bashthraka fought ten thousand men in a yard
Bashthraka is mighty, Bashthraka is great
Somebody better bake Bashthraka a cake*





"A lovely song, brother," said Pugg.

"What mischief do you bring to Bashthraka?!" asked Bashthraka.

"Dwarf mischief. And to make it, I'll need your forge."

"Let Bashthraka hear your plan first!"

Pugg told him the plan, and when he was done, Bashthraka laughed. "It's good mischief! Bashthraka will help you!"

And together, the two brothers set themselves to making a chariot.

Seven days later, Pugg climbed back up that mountain with Bashthraka right behind him. On those massive shoulders was something even bigger than Bashthraka, covered with a heavy tarp.

"Why don't you carry this thing?!" asked Bashthraka. "This is your thwak!"

"Because your broke my foot. Now I can't carry anything but my own weight."

"Bashthraka broke your foot because you stole Bashthraka's spear!"

"You could have punished me in a wide variety of ways. But, you choose to break my foot. Now, I can't carry my present. Who's fault is that?"

Bashthraka grumbled. "Remind Bashthraka to just kill you the next time you steal Bashthraka's spear!"

"I'll be sure to do that."

Soon enough, the two of them stood in the grand hall of the dwarven castle, surrounded by the dwarf gods. They all looked at Bashthraka.

"Who are you?" one of them asked.

"Bashthraka!" said Bashthraka.

"I am Lord-Baron Dundar Dun -"

"IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOUR NAME IS!" Bashthraka shouted, making the skies rumble all around him.

The dwarf god stepped back as the res of the dwarves stepped back.

"Well," said Pugg. "Now that's over with, maybe I can see your chariot?"

The dwarf god suddenly remembered why they were all here and smiled under his beard - not that you could notice. "Very well. Bring forth our chariot!"





STORIES

"All of a sudden, you all sound like elves."



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It took four hands of dwarves to pull that chariot into the great hall. Pugg and Bashthraka looked at it in wonder.

It was made entirely of gold. The wheels were perfectly round. The front of it was fashioned into a falcon's head. Bashthraka looked upon it and said, "It's the most perfect chariot Bashthraka has ever seen!" He looked at his little brother. "There's no way you can beat that chariot, little one."

Pugg winked. "We'll see," he said.

"Very impressive, lord dwarf," Pugg said as he walked around the gold chariot. "Very impressive indeed. Magnificent. Beautiful. Why, it makes the sun dim in comparison."

"I'm glad you like it," the dwarf lord said. "Let's see what you brought."

Pugg gave the signal and Bashthraka threw aside the tarp. What lay beneath was the ugliest, dirtiest, squarest, most pungent chariot that has ever been made.

Bashthraka smiled. "It's perfect!" he said, his smile beaming with pride.

The dwarf chuckled under his beard. "You must be joking, little ork. You think that hunk of metal compares with the chariot my smiths made? Hah! You've tricked yourself this time, I think."

The whole chamber burst into chortles and sniggers. But when the noise died down, only Pugg was still laughing.

"That's funny," said Pugg. "I thought I was standing in a dwarf hall. But all of a sudden, you all sound like elves."

Swords were drawn. Pugg stood his ground. The dwarf lord raised his arms and looked at the Trickster. "There is more than simple insult behind those words, I assume?"

"Certainly. I thought dwarves judged things on their quality, rather than their appearance. Isn't that the case?"

The dwarf lord nodded. "Of course."

"Well then, I think you may not judge the worth of these chariots until they've been tested."

"A race?" the dwarf lord asked, his interest rising his voice.

"A race," nodded Pugg.

"Very well! We shall have a race to determine which chariot is the better!"

"Even have a course mapped out," said Pugg, pulling a parchment from his Many



Pocket Satchel. He threw the map down across the table and the dwarves all looked.

"We race around the sun?" asked the dwarf lord.

"Where else? Any other course would certainly not be worthy of such a grand design as this." Pugg pointed at the chariot of gold and looked back at the dwarf lord. "Don't you agree?"

The dwarf lord nodded. "Of course! We shall race around the sun and the chariot that arrives back first is the better."

"Very well," said Pugg. "My brother here shall be the master of my chariot."

Bashthraka nodded. "And Bashthraka will smite down that silly gold chariot as if it were made of baby's clothes!"

The dwarf lord put his champion forward. "And my champion shall be the master of my chariot. And we will see who will do the smiting today."

The two riders climbed into their chariots, put their helmets on their heads and made ready. Bashthraka hooked his own reindeer Baldoon to the front of his chariot. The dwarf champion hooked a stallion up to his.

A moment passed, the dwarf lord made a sound and the chariots took off to race around the sun.

When they left sight of the hall – the dwarf chariot far in the lead – the dwarf lord smiled. "You've lost this wager, little ork. I'll have your head on a platter and dine on your brains."

"We'll see," said Pugg.

The riders continued their dash, the dwarf chariot far in the lead. The dwarf champion turned for a moment to call back to Bashthraka. "You don't stand a chance, ork! Give it up now!"

Bashthraka said nothing, only grinned and whipped the reins.

Much time passed in the hall, and it passed slowly. The dwarves all began sharpening their swords, each hoping to earn the honor of decapitating the ork who thought he could trick the great lord of the dwarven gods. And soon enough, a chariot came into view.

"Who is it?" asked the dwarves.

"I can't tell," said the dwarf lord. "It is surrounded with billows of black smoke."





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"Oh, Bashthraka fought long..."



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Pugg began singing a song to himself. "Oh, Bashthraka fought long and Bashthraka fought hard..." he sang, almost laughing for the fun of it.

The smoking chariot slammed into the great hall, engulfed in black clouds. It threw its rider from the seat, and he slid halfway across the hall. The rider stood, covered in soot, stepped forward and pulled off his helmet. He walked over to Pugg and smacked him on the head.

"Remind Bashthraka to kill you the next time you ask Bashthraka to do something that stupid again!"

"B - but, where is my chariot?" asked the dwarf lord.

"Melted!" said Bashthraka, "The sun was too hot for a chariot made of gold!" Bashthraka shook his head. "Dwarves are dumb!"

The dwarf lord shook with anger. Every sword in the house was ready to strike. Pugg looked at the dwarf lord and shook his head. "I thought dwarves understood the necessity of hospitality."

The dwarf lord nodded. "Indeed they do. You may go, little ork. And take that - that - thing with you."

Pugg bowed. "Thank you, dwarf lord. I promise we'll take good care of your piece of the Otherworld."

Pugg Thwaku Manoo

With a troubled brow, Pugg went to the winter home of his brother Gowthduka. When Pugg found his brother, he bid him well and Gowthduka silently offered him hospitality. Pugg accepted. He ate rare meats spiced with secrets, but could not find the joy in his heart. He drank sooeeta better than any he ever drank before, but could not find the joy in his heart. Finally, a beautiful young downmgaday caressed his cheek, but even she could not find his smile.

Gowthduka put his hand on Pugg's shoulder.

What ails you, my brother?

Pugg frowned. "I tricked the shtoontees because they're nothing but stomachs without brains. Then, I tricked the elves because its easy to trick someone without a friend in the world. I tricked the dwarves because... well, dwarves are dumb. But these men. I haven't got a single idea how to trick them."

Pugg took another swig of his sooeeta and spoke some more.

"These men... they're so afraid of the world. It's easy to trick someone who's boastful



or a braggart. It's easy to trick pride and envy and sloth. But these men... They don't believe in anything. They don't risk anything." Pugg shook his head. "They don't do anything."

Gowthduka nodded.

I understand.

Then, he opened his book and began scribbling. Pugg watched. And as Gowthduka scribbled, Pugg started to find his smile. The quicker Gowthduka scribbled, the more Pugg nodded, until finally he reached up and kissed his brother on his mute mouth.

"Thank you, brother!" he said, taking the hand of the downgaday sitting next to him. "Come along, sweet one. I have planning to do... but first, I'd like to tell you some secrets."

The next day, Pugg went to the home of his brother, Bashthraka, the Thunderer.

"What do you want!?" Bashthraka asked.

"Brother, I just want to know if you'd like to kill some men?"

"Kill men?!" screamed Bashthraka. "When does Bashthraka *not* want to kill men?!"

Pugg smiled, handing his brother his spear. "I thought you'd say that."

Outside his household, Bashthraka summoned five hundred of his best thraka. "You and Bashthraka are off to kill men!" he told his thraka. They cheered his name and Pugg nodded.

"This is the way it starts," he said. And they were off.

The next day, Pugg, Bashthraka and the five hundred thraka marched until Pugg told them to stop.

"Bashthraka says stop!" shouted Bashthraka. The thraka stopped.

"Wait here," said Pugg. "I'll bring the men to you."

Bashthraka looked around. "This is a good place for Bashthraka to kill men," he said.

"I'm glad you think so. Let's hope the men think it's a good place to kill orks." And with that, Pugg went to talk to the Gods of the Men.

Their palace was made of white stone. Never before had Pugg climbed so many stairs. "The Afterlife of Men is made of stairs," he said to himself. "I'll have to remind myself to take care of that when it belongs to orks."





STORIES

"But my brother... he's not so reasonable."



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At the top of the stairs sat all the gods of men: two groups, each sitting on either side of the world. One group was dressed in the colors of the midnight sky, all night and stars and moon. The other side was dressed in the colors of the midday sky, all sun and blue and clouds. They sat apart like children who refuse to talk to each other.

"Hello Gods of the Men!" said Pugg. "I bring you news."

"We know who you are," said one of the Moon Gods.

"You are Pugg, the one who tricked the elves, dwarves and shtoontee," said one of the Sun Gods.

"That's correct," said Pugg. "And now I'm here to see if you want a chance to win it all for yourselves."

"No," said the Gods of the Moon.

"No," said the Gods of the Sun.

"Why not?" Pugg asked. "You can even name the wager. If I win, the Afterlife of the Men goes to the orks. If you win, you gain it all."

"No," said the Gods of the Moon.

"No," said the Gods of the Sun.

"Hm. It's true what the dwarves said. Men are cowards."

They ignored him.

"And it's true what the elves say. Men have no blood in them."

They ignored him.

"And its true what..."

"You waste your breath," the Moon Gods said.

"We will not play your games," the Sun Gods said.

Pugg hung his head until his chin hit his chest. "I was hoping it wouldn't come to this," he said. He turned and started walking away. "But you leave me no choice."

"What is that?" the Moon Gods asked.

"What did he say?" asked the Sun Gods.

Pugg paused. "I'm the reasonable one," he told them. "I was willing to win or lose in wager. But my brother, Bashthraka, he's not so reasonable."



"What does that mean?" asked the Moon Gods.

"I think he's trying to trick us," said the Sun Gods.

"No. No tricks. My brother doesn't like tricks. That's why he's out there, right now, waiting in the mountain pass that separates your Afterlife from the rest of the gods. He's there with five hundred of his best thraka, ready to storm your lands and take them by force."

"He's bluffing," said the Moon Gods.

"We're not that stupid," said the Sun Gods.

"See for yourself," Pugg said, pointing over the palace walls down to the mountain pass. The Man Gods looked and saw Bashthraka there, relieving himself on one of their white stone statues.

"This is what Bashthraka thinks of men!" he said and his thraka laughed and did the same thing. Then, Bashthraka turned. "And this is what they'll be kissing when they lose!"

The Gods of the Sun and the Gods of the Moon both looked at each other and frowned.

"You have to do something about this," said the Moon Gods.

"This is your fault!" said the Sun Gods.

Pugg shrugged and walked away. "You have to deal with him now. I'll talk to you later."

They didn't even hear him for their arguing. Nor did they hear his laughter as he skipped down the steps toward his brother's army.

Two armies at a mountain pass. One charges, the other stands fast.

Swords are short. Spears are long. Men are dumb.

Bashthraka killed them.

The Armies of the Moon ran away like men always do. But Bashthraka didn't let his men waste spears. "Keep them, we'll need them soon enough!" he said.

When the Armies of the Moon reached the Armies of the Sun, they were laughing. "I guess they know how to counter a simple charge," said the Gods of the Sun.

The Gods of the Moon frowned. "They're locked in there tighter than a maiden's knees. There's no way to get them out of there."





STORIES

And the ork army advanced. Fast.



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The Gods of the Sun smiled. "We'll get them out," they said. Then, they turned and commanded the archers come forward. They looked at their Moon cousins with knowing smiles. "This is called 'strategy,' cousin. You'd best watch and learn."

The Armies of the Sun brought forward their archers, protected by shieldmen. Bashthraka yelled back at his men, "Make ready with the shields!"

The Archers of the Sun shook their heads. "Shields? Shields will do no good against our arrows of light!"

The Gods of the Sun agreed. "Cut them down," they commanded.

The archers pulled back and let their weapons loose. Those arrows of light arched through the sky like falling stars, plummeting down on the thraka.

"Now!" screamed Bashthraka, and every ork pulled out a shield... with the bodies of men strapped to the front.

Some dead, some not as dead as the others. When the shafts of light struck them, some of them screamed. Most of them just burned.

And the ork army advanced. Fast.

"Retreat!" screamed the Armies of the Sun. But they were only archers, untrained to move like thraka should move. They stumbled while they scurried and when Bashthraka found them... Bashthraka killed them.

The remains of the Armies of the Sun fell back to find the Armies of the Moon laughing at them.

"I'm glad you taught me strategy," they said. "I'll be sure to remember it the next time our armies meet on the battlefield."

"We must coordinate our attacks," said the Gods of the Sun. "If we do not, we are lost."

The Gods of the Moon shook their heads. "We have only a third of each army, cousin. Not nearly enough to stand against the orks. We are beaten, and our land is theirs."

The Gods of the Sun screamed at the sky. "We cannot be beaten! Not by orks!"

"We must retreat, cousin. Otherwise, we'll lose our lives as well as our lands." The Gods of the Moon smiled. "But if we cannot find allies here, we will look for them elsewhere."

And that's how the Gods of the Men lost their Afterlife to the orks.



But that isn't the end of the story.

Because afterwards, all the gods Pugg tricked met in a secret cave and talked about what happened.

"He stole our Afterlife," wept the Rhuntees.

"He stole ours, as well," scowled the Elves.

"And ours," grumbled the Dwarves.

"And we have a plan," said the Men.

"We will make a guardian. Something that will ensure the orks never make it to the Afterlife."

"What *kind* of guardian?" asked the Elves.

The Gods of the Men explained their plan, and when they were done, all the Gods smiled. They left that cave for their homelands, and when they returned, each of them brought something with them.

The Gods of the Men brought a great cauldron, and one by one, each of the Gods put something into it.

The dwarves said, "We give it skin of steel." And they threw the steel wheels from their melted chariot.

The halfmen said, "We give it an appetite for ork flesh." And they threw in the cup that Pugg drank from at their table.

And the elves said, "We give it Life." And they threw in the elf who lost his wager with Pugg.

The men said, "We will sit and stir for a span of the moon. And when we are done, our revenge will be ready."

And for the span of a moon, the Gods of the Men took their turns stirring the cauldron, waiting and watching for their plan to come to fruition. During the day, the Sun Gods stirred. When the night came, the Moon Gods stirred.

On the twenty-ninth day, the Sun God whose turn it was to stir watched as the night began to creep into the sky. As he did, his replacement arrived, covered in bee stings.

"Where were you?" asked the Sun God. "You were almost late!"

The Moon God shook with rage. "That ork! He sent a hive of bees to sting me so I would be late!"







The Sun God shook his head. "Then he's learned of our plan."

The Moon God nodded. "Someone must tell the others. If he knows about me, he knows where the cave is."

"I will go," said the Sun God. "You start stirring."

The Moon God nodded and took the ladel from the Sun Gods hands. The Sun God rushed out to warn the others.

And when he was gone, the Moon God stopped stirring.

The Gods of the Moon and the Gods of the Sun rushed to the cave, bringing soldiers to guard their pot against Pugg and his tricks, but when they got there, they found the cauldron alone, boiling over.

The Gods of the Men screamed and fought over each other to reach the cauldron. They grabbed the ladel and started stirring.

"Why weren't you here?" asked the Gods of the Moon.

"Why weren't *you* here?" asked the Gods of the Sun.

"Now, our revenge is ruined!" said the Gods of the Moon.

"No," said the Gods of the Sun. "Not ruined..."

And they all looked into the cauldron to see what they could see.

Many miles away, a bee stung God of the Moon climbed a tall tree and watched the cave where the Gods of the Men scrambled to save their revenge. Sitting next to him were Bashthraka and Gowthduka.

"Did you ruin it?" asked Bashthraka.

"No," said the God of the Moon. "The magic was too great."

Gowthduka said nothing.

"Then it is invincible!" said Bashthraka.

"No," said the God of the Moon. "It has a flaw. Only one."

Gowthduka said nothing.

"Then I will kill it!" said Bashthraka.



STORIES

I know who it is.



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"No," said the God of the Moon. "It is a tiny flaw. So tiny, only one ork in the world can see it."

Gowthduka said nothing.

"Who is this ork?!" asked Bashthraka.

The God of the Moon took the cloak off his head and Pugg peeked out.

"I don't know."

Gowthduka opened his book.

I know who it is.

The three brothers looked. Bashthraka squinted. Pugg grinned.

Gowthduka closed the book.





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Notes

How Bashthraka Lost His Spear

i Bashthraka stories always contain the refrain "He killed them", which is chanted by the audience. As the tala tells his story, he gives the signal to the audience (lifting his mug above his head) and the audience shouts out the words. Then, everyone takes a drink as the story continues. The best tala always make sure to have Bashthraka kill something as often as possible; every kill is another opportunity to drink.

ii "But Bashthraka held on," is another good example of repetition in ork storytelling. The passage is intentionally lyrical, setting up a rhythm the audience can anticipate. The tala repeats the same phrase three times, each time the audience chanting along with him a little louder. "... and fell all the way to the ground," is a similar technique. The storyteller begins the chant and the orks sing along with him until Bashthraka hits the ground. Then, they all make the sound of the dragon and the Thunderer making the largest hole in the world.

iii Those are the only words you'll hear from Bashthraka that aren't shouted at the top of his lungs. Make of that what you will.

The Well of Wisdom

i This is a subtle ork joke. The man is out in the woods all by himself, and yet, he's asking Gowthdukah what he's doing out in the woods all by himself. Men have a tendency to point out "what's wrong" with others while ignoring the very same problems in themselves.

How Pugg Tricked the Men

The "revenge" brewing in that pot is, of course, Gorlam. Legend says that a hero will rise up and lead the orks into the Otherworld through a secret cave. There, he will face Gorlam and kill the creature, slicing its belly open, freeing all the orks within. Then, this vast ork army will march into the Otherworld and take it by force.

But this can only happen when one of the Three Brothers has been murdered by the elven gods, another slain by the dwarf gods and the third mortally wounded by the human gods. The ork hero will eat of their flesh and gain the wisdom of Gowthdukah, the strength of Bashthraka and the cunning of Pugg. Only then will he be worthy to face Gorlam and lead his people to their place of rest.



Introduction

In this chapter, you'll find all the rules you need to create characters for the *Orkworld* roleplaying game. However, you'll find rules for creating a Household and a Tribe as well. For new players, there's a section entitled "What is a Roleplaying Game?" right at the front. Chances are, if you bought this book, you don't need to read that section. However, old dogs can learn new tricks, and a new look at an old assumption never does anyone any harm.

A Word of Warning for Experienced Players

Experienced roleplayers will find the rules presented in this chapter very simple; they do little to serve "game balance". There are three reasons for this. First, even an average game master maintains balance better than any set of rules can. Second, each and every GM changes each and every rule set to accommodate his own players. Throwing a complicated game system at him defeats the purpose of personal customization, while a simple system is much easier to tinker with. The last reason has to do with creativity. All too often, a complex system not only tells players what they can do, but it also implies what they cannot do. When players have a small set of limits, their creativity swells, making the game session both dynamic and exciting. And, frankly, from my own playing experience, I prefer a simple system that trusts me rather than a complicated system designed to make sure I don't "cheat".

A simple system not only liberates players, but game masters as well. Instead of concentrating on numbers and statistics, the GM can focus on more important details - plot, theme, atmosphere and character.

However, some players may assume that "simple rules" translate into "abusable rules". Rest assured, players who feel an obligation to try to break this game system will be successful every time. You can make super duper combat monsters that kill anything that step in your path with little effort. *Orkworld* wasn't designed for players who want to make one-sided walking cuisinarts. If that's what you want, go play something else with people who give a hopping hobbit how big your character sheet is. Remember, just because *Orkworld* is a game doesn't mean everyone else has to lose so you can win.

What is a Roleplaying Game?

Chances are, if you're reading this book, you already know the answer to that question. However, just in case you're a first-timer, let's take a look at what makes a roleplaying game different from other kind of games.

Orkworld is a kind of storytelling game. You and your friends get together and tell





stories about an ork tribe's triumphs, trials and challenges. Any number of people can play *Orkworld*, most will play individual characters, while one, the Game Master controls the story and supporting cast.

Each player sits down with a copy of these rules (and a copy of the character sheet at the end of this book) and creates a character. When a character does something, the player rolls a number of dice to see how successful that action is.

While the players take the roles of the main characters, the GM takes the roles of every other character in the world. He also serves as the character's senses, narrating their adventures as they move through the story.

Generally, there are no "turns" in an RPG. Play advances as it does in a movie or novel: with exposition and narration. However, when order and timing is important (in a fight, for instance), the Game Master and dice system decide who does what and when.

And now that we have all that out of the way, let's take a look at the rules of the game.

PART ONE

The Basics

The following rules are broken into four parts. The first presents the basic rules of the game. The second shows how to create individual thraka. The part shows how a group of players can create a Household. The part shows how an even larger group of players can create an entire Tribe.

The Basics

Before we get into making characters, households and tribes, let's spend a moment or two talking about the basics of the game; in professional circles, we call this the "task resolution system."

Zhoosha

Each ork has a "zhoosha," his (or her) role in the Household. Many orks are thraka (warriors), but a few are tala (bards) and downmga (mothers). To represent this, each ork character has a Zhoosha Trait which is Ranked from 1 to 6 (although some legendary orks have a 7 or 8). Zhoosha represents your character's life experience, so the higher



his Zhoosha, the more capable he is.

Virtues and Skills

Every ork also has five **Virtues** (other games call them "Traits" or "Attributes"): Courage, Cunning, Endurance, Prowess and Strength. Every ork also has **Skills** such as Dodge, Hunting, and Spear & Shield (that last one is a single Skill).

Making a Roll

Whenever your character attempts an action whose outcome is uncertain, you make a roll. You roll a number of six-sided dice equal to your character's Virtue + Skill against a **Target Number** set by the Game Master. The Target Number is usually 2 (Easy), 4 (Default) or 6 (Very Hard). You choose one die that rolled equal to or greater than the Target Number; this roll is your **Success Total**. If no die rolls equal to or greater than the Target Number, you fail.

There's a trick, however. If you roll **doubles** – that is, two or three dice that roll the same number as the die you chose – add one to the Success Total for each double.

For example, you roll six dice and get: 1, 2, 3, 3, 3 and 4. You could keep the 4 (that is the highest die roll, after all), or you could keep the three 3's. Each additional 3 adds to the first one, giving you a Success Total of (3+1+1) 5.

For example, you roll six dice and get: 3,3,3,3,4 and 4. You've rolled two doubles. However, you want to keep the 3's because the Success Total they make (3+1+1+1 = 6) rather than the two 4's (4 + 1 = 5).

For opposed rolls (when your character attempts something another character is actively opposing or trying to out-do) both characters roll and the character with the highest Success Total wins. If they tie, they compare their second highest die, or third highest, until one of them exceeds the other.

For example, you roll 5,3,2,1,1 and your opponent rolled 5,4,3,2,1: a tie. You and your opponent compare your next highest dice. You rolled a 3 and your opponent rolled a 4. You lose this tie.

Later, you roll 5,4,4,3 and your opponent rolls 5,4,2,2: another tie. You and your opponent compare your next highest dice. Your next highest roll is another 5 (your double 4 makes a 5) while your opponent only rolled a 4. You win that tie.

You do not have to count doubles as a single roll when disputing ties. It's up to you. On a few occasions, having more dice can be more important than a single roll.

If all this is a little confusing, there's a very easy way to resolve ties: the character with the highest Trouble (see below) loses. And, for the record, monsters don't have Trouble.





That's it. The basic mechanic. Now let's look at the different ways to make characters.

PART TWO

Creating a Household

In most games, players create a character all on their own. *Orkworld* doesn't work like that. The Household Method is the basic character creation system, and it requires that you make your character from a pool of points you share with other players. In other words, you get together a group of friends and make the entire Household. If you want to make a character alone, use the Creating a Thraka rules below.

Each player needs a character sheet. Go check it out now so you have a little perspective before you get started.

STEP ONE: Questions

Before you start filling out that character sheet, spend a few minutes to consider the questions below. Some are for you and your friends to think over as a Household and the others are for you to answer all on your own.

Household

How does your Tribe carry Trouble?

When Trouble comes to visit, do you shut it out or pack up and run (if so, what are you going to do for plots)? Or, do you dig in and get ready for the storm? How a Tribe deals with Trouble says a lot about its character.

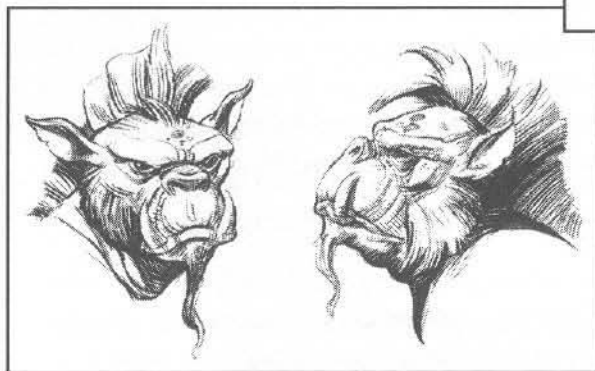
Are monsters truly monsters?

Are all men as bad as the legends say, or are there a few noble exceptions? How about the dwarves? Is there such a thing as a kind-hearted elf? Has your Household ever encountered any evidence to support your beliefs?

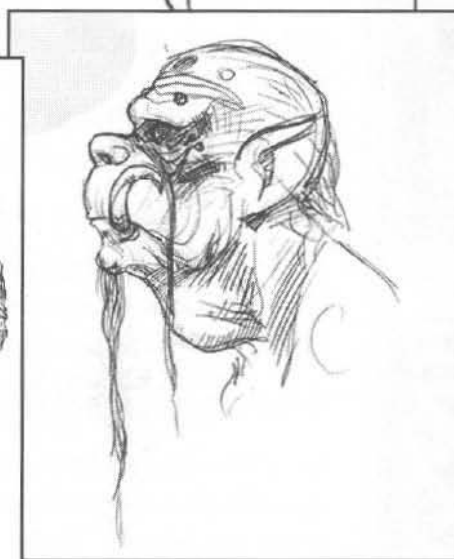
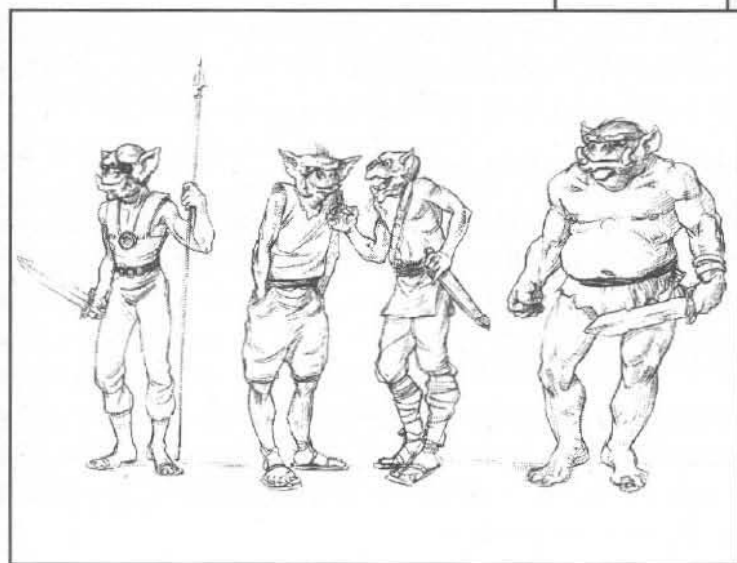
Do you have any tribal rivalries or loyalties?

Are there other tribes out there that owe you favors? How about the other way around? You all came from somewhere, so you have relatives out there in the world. Where are





All orks look alike? Look again.



they? Who are they? Do you love them, hate them, resent them, respect them or fear them?

What's your downmga's best meal?

What does your downmga do best? And with that in mind, is there anything your household is known for? Are you great hunters, great spear-fighters, or great storytellers? Or maybe your household is known for its versatility? Or maybe it's just not known at all... and its up to you to change that.

How does your household distinguish itself?

Do you wear tattoos that bear your household totem? Do you tie your hair in a certain way, wear a certain kind of jewelry, or scar your faces in a distinct pattern so other orks know where you're from?

Do the Gods still walk Ghurtha?

Some orks claim the gods don't come 'round to the Wakingworld anymore. They say Gorlam keeps them from interacting with their mortal worshippers. How do you feel about that? Specifically, what does your bodalay say about that? And if the Gods don't walk the face of Ghurtha anymore, how about magic? Do miracles still happen if the Gods aren't there to make them happen? (Remember, just because you may know the answer to this question doesn't mean your character will.)

Character

What does your character look like?

Not all orks look alike. Some are short, others are tall. Some are slight and slender, others are large and muscular. Eye color, hair color, skin shade (light or dark) are all details you can use to make your character your own. Does he have scars? Where are they? Does he have all his fingers and toes? How about a missing nostril?

Does your ork have any distinct habits or quirks?

Does your ork stutter, stammer or shlur hish ehshesh? How does he hold his spear? How does he address those who hold authority over him? Does he get into a lot of fights, or does he try to avoid them with glib wit?

When does courage end and bravado begin?

It's a question many orks don't like looking at. Face facts: an ork dies, he's eaten by his cousins who carry his soul. But that means facing death: not an easy prospect. Not every ork believes in the myth mumbo-jumbo the tala and bodalay spout. Ever seen a god? Ever seen a miracle? If you can't prove it...





GAME

How will you die?



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How will your ork die?

What would be the best death? How about the worst death? Be careful with your answer – the GM is listening.

STEP TWO: Choose a Household Totem

The players choose a single animal to represent their household. I've seen Boar totems, Reindeer totems, Elk totems and even Skunk totems. Players also assign a single Bonus Die they get to roll under special circumstances. For example, the Boar orks got to roll one Bonus Die on all Strength rolls while the Skunk household got to roll a Bonus Die for all Intimidation rolls. Again, the Game Master has the final word on all bonuses.

STEP THREE: The Point Pool

First, your group gets twenty-five Household Points per player in the group.

For example, if you have five players, your group gets 125 points to make your Household. These points are not only used to develop your Household, but also to create each of your characters. How you divide those up between yourselves is up to you. You can decide to split the points evenly, give a majority of points to a single player, or spend a majority of points on your Household and only a few on your individual characters. Average starting characters begin with 15 points (give or take a few).

STEP FOUR: Household Advantages

Before your group spends points on their characters, they must first use those points to determine their Household's advantages. The advantages (and their respective point costs) are listed below.

Dowmga (5 Points per Zhoosha Die)

Every household starts with one dowmga with a Rank 1 Zhoosha.

Every 5 Household Points you spend on your dowmga gives her one additional Zhoosha Die. You may choose to play a Household without a dowmga; this gives your Household an additional 3 Points to use, but the disadvantages of playing without a dowmga are extraordinary. You have no political clout when dealing with other Households, you have no craftspersons to make and repair items, and you have no children for at least one year. For a better look at why having no dowmga is severe disadvantage, see **The Winter Season**, below.



Household Spear (2 Points per Bonus Die)

Every Household also starts with one Household Spear, wielded by the downmga's favorite thraka.

The Household Spear gives Bonus Dice (extra dice to roll on damage, see details below). Every Household Spear begins with a single Bonus Die. For each 2 Points invested, give your Spear an extra Bonus Die.

Reindeer (2 Points per Reindeer)

Reindeer are ubiquitous in ork culture. Ork migratory patterns are based on reindeer seasonal movements, orks ride reindeer, eat reindeer and use them as draft animals. Every 2 points you spend gives your Household one reindeer.

Smithy (10 Points for Bronzsmith; 30 Points for Blacksmith)

Your downmga must be at least Zhoosha 2 to purchase Bronzsmithing and Zhoosha 3 to purchase Blacksmithing.

Most ork households have mastered bronzsmithing, but not all. Now's the time to ask if your household is one of them. If you don't purchase the secret of bronzsmithing for your household, you'll be forced to employ stone-tipped weapons and tools – not a very favorable option to say the least. And while most households have not mastered blacksmithing, a few have discovered the benefits of iron weapons.

Tala (3 Points per Zhoosha Die)

Your household's bard is your household's living memory, its history and its legacy. Each Household begins with a Zhoosha 1 Tala. Every 3 points invested gives your bard an additional Zhoosha Rank, which will determine not only your household's story, but also its magic. You'll see how below.

Thraka (1 Point per Thraka; 1 Point per Zhoosha)

The size of your household is very important. The more thraka your household has, the more food they can collect, the better they can protect their downmga. Don't forget, the more thraka you have, the harder it is for other households to bully you around. Every 1 Point your Household spends gives you a Zhoosha 1 Thraka (in addition to the player characters). Additional points can purchase thraka of higher Zhoosha, 1 Point per Zhoosha, but you can't have any thraka with a Zhoosha higher than your downmga's Zhoosha. Of course, each of these thraka is a potential competitor for glory, food, Trouble and the downmga's favor.

Village (5 Points per Village)

Orks are a migratory race, moving from one region to another as the seasons pass from spring to summer to winter. But orks are also territorial creatures, marking out their dominion with standing stones. Other households (and tribes) violate that territory at





the risk of war.

The basic village costs 5 Points. If you don't have any villages at all, you have no place to hunt for food, a serious disadvantage through the short summer months. Points invested in villages also count as Hunting Dice when looking for food in that area. See **The Winter Season** for more details.

Winter Home (Variable)

Every Household begins with a single Rank 1 Winter Home.

Winters are cold, harsh and unforgiving in the northlands, a fact orks have come to live with. During winter, orks stay in the only permanent structures they ever build: a set of structures called a "winter home." Each year, when they arrive a few weeks before the great snows and winds of winter, the household repairs the standing structures and build a new one. If your household does not have a winter home, it must suffer the savage winter without the benefit of hearth and home.

Every 15 Points invested in your winter home gives you one permanent structure, a benefit that allows you to give hospitality to other households and provides a strategic place for defense against monsters. A Rank 1 Home provides a single Bonus Die to all combat actions of all defenders (this includes tala taunting – see below) while actively defending the home. Every 15 points invested adds either another Rank to an existing structure or another Rank 1 structure.

STEP FIVE: Creating Thraka

Once you've spent all your points on your Household, it's time to create your individual thraka. The rules for creating downmga and tala characters can be found later in this chapter.

Character Points

Divide the remaining points between the members of your Household. Players creating individual thraka without a Household get 15 Character Points. Characters with more than 15 points are a little more capable than your average post-gooleala teenager. Orks with fewer than 15 points grew up during a tough time... and have a tough time ahead of them. Allocate your points accordingly.

Zhoosha

Thraka are warriors. It is their duty to protect the rest of the tribe from dangers. Therefore, on your character sheet, write "THRAKA" in the Zhoosha box. The Zhoosha box also has a spot for "Rank." All beginning characters are Rank 1 Thraka. You cannot increase Zhoosha with character points. Character points cannot be used to increase Zhoosha. That comes with Fana (see below).



Finally, because thraka spend so much time fighting, when your thraka engages in combat, he gets more actions than other orks. He also gets to add his Zhoosha Dice to his Initiative Rolls. You'll learn about those in the **Specifics** section, below.

Virtues

Orks judge a thraka by five virtues: Courage, Cunning, Endurance, Prowess, and Strength. So too will your thraka be judged. Your Virtues are ranked in the following method:

- 1) One Virtue at Rank 3
- 2) Three Virtues at Rank 2
- 3) One Virtue at Rank 1.

Decide what Virtue is most important to you and assign your Ranks accordingly.

Increasing a Virtue costs 4 Points.
No Virtue can start higher than 3.

Skills

Once you've assigned Ranks to your Virtues, it's time to figure out your ork's Skills. However, instead of choosing from a "skill list," you create your own Skills. If you want a "Sneaky" Skill, write it down on your character sheet under the appropriate Virtue. If you want a "Ride Reindeer One-Handed" Skill, write it down and define the single thing it does. Be creative. The more unique your skills, the more unique your character.

However, note on the character sheet that each Virtue has one Skill already assigned to it:

Courage: Darkness 1 (used to resist the primal fear of the dark)
Cunning: Make Fire 1 (used when you want to make a fire)
Endurance: Stay Awake 1 (used when you feel sleepy on post)
Prowess: Spear & Shield 1 (used in combat against monsters)
Strength: Carry 1 (used when you need to carry something heavy)

These Skills are free; you don't have to pay any points for them. However, you can spend points to increase these Skills or buy new ones.

Like I've said before, I don't put a lot of restrictions on what manner of Skills players choose; I've found that giving players the freedom to make whatever kind of character they want – rather than presenting them with a pre-conceived Skill List – encourages them to create unique orks. Of course, all Skills are subject to Game Master Veto. However, just in case you need some inspiration, see the "Sample Skill List" for a few Skills some playtesters came up with.





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Increasing Skills



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**Increasing a Skill – or buying a new one – costs 1 point.
No Skill can start higher than 3.**

A Final Appeal to Your Good Sense

The Skill system presented here trusts the players to create a group that works well together. The guy who chooses to destroy drama by having an "I Do Everything!" skill is having fun at everyone else's expense.

Don't be this guy.

Game Masters, a flexible system does not mean you have to give in to every player whim. If one player comes up with a Skill that makes another player's Skill obsolete, try to find a way to make both Skills useful.

For example, one player has "Sneak!" and another player has "Sneak Through Crunchy Bits." These could either be the same Skill, or the Crunchy Bits character can be better at sneaking through leaves while the other is better at hiding in dark places, or staying out of sight in a crowd.

Some Sample Skills

<i>Can't See Me! (Hide)</i>	<i>Iron Stomach</i>	<i>Smell Danger</i>
<i>Catch It!</i>	<i>I See You! (Detect Stealth)</i>	<i>Sneak (Move Quietly)</i>
<i>Chuggin'!</i>	<i>Intimidating Battle Cry</i>	<i>Speak Human</i>
<i>Fall Soft</i>	<i>Lift Big Thing</i>	<i>Stick 'Em! (Spear & Shield)</i>
<i>Follow Tracks</i>	<i>Missed Me! (Dodge)</i>	<i>That Didn't Hurt! (Resist Pain)</i>
<i>Freakishly Large</i>	<i>Overpowering Flatulence</i>	<i>Throw Heavy Thing</i>
<i>"Gimme That!"</i>	<i>Pointy Bits (Bow & Arrow)</i>	<i>What Do It Do?</i>
<i>Hit Hard</i>	<i>Ride Good</i>	<i>Zoom! (Running)</i>
<i>I Got a Bad Feeling About This...</i>		



Wounds & Trouble

Two last details.

First, in the **Wounds Box**, write down a number equal to your Endurance + Zhoosha Rank. This is your **Wound Rating**.

Second, in the **Trouble Box**, write a "1." If your Game Master allows, you can take a second point of Trouble, but no one starts the game with more than double their Zhoosha in Trouble. The additional point of Trouble gets you 5 more character points to spend on your Thraka. You cannot spend these points on your Household.

Final Touch

The last time I ran Orkworld, I had the opportunity to run it in the home of our Scotland hosts, David Donachie and Victoria Lawford. When all the characters were finished, when all the points were spent, I told them:

When you were young, you always dreamed of becoming thraka. Joining the ranks of your heroes, you'd wield your spears and shields with honor and courage. One day, strange men came to the village wearing tall masks. Behind those masks lurked eyes and mouths of fire. They came into your mother's house and tore you aware from her. She clawed and screamed, but she could not protect you.

Those masked figures threw hoods over your heads and took you far away from your home into a deep, dark cave.

(That's when the lights in the room went out – thanks to The Wife.)

There, the tala waited for you. He told you to sit in a circle and make a fire.

(That's when I lit a candle – the only light in the room.)

"You must keep the fire lit, little ones," the tala told you. "For deep within this cave lurks the Great Toad Gorlam, waiting to eat any little ork who strays away from the fire. And remember, the Great Toad not only lurks in this world, but also in the next. And if any of you fall asleep, Gorlam will find you and eat you."

The bard pauses as he watches you closely. "So what you must do now little ones... what you must do now is keep the fire burning. If you let the fire go out, Gorlam will find you, and he'll kill you all. And what you must do now... what you must do now is stay awake. If any of you fall asleep, Gorlam will find you, and he'll kill you all."

Again, he pauses to watch you. Then, he steps back into the darkness, his voice cloaked in shadows. "The only way to escape, my little ones, is to find your way out of this cave. You have





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"You have nothing to rely on but yourselves."



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no tools but the ones you make yourselves. You have nothing to rely on but yourselves. And if you find the sunlight, little ones, you will be thraka. If you do not... all you'll be is Gorlam food."

It was in that very cave, you proved yourselves to yourselves. For how many days, you don't know. For how many nights, you don't know. All you know is the bard left a tiny bowl of mushrooms for you to eat. During that time of darkness and shadows, you heard the laughter of nightmares in the darkness. You saw visions of the future, visions of the past and visions of the Otherworld. You saw Gorlam, lurking on the edge of the fire, eager for the light to die so it could feed on your warm souls.

You faced those nightmares together. You faced the visions together. And, in the end, you faced Gorlam together.

When you finally found the light, you were children no longer. What you were then is what you are now: thraka. The tala was waiting for you there at the entrance of the cave, and there, he sat you all in a circle and told you the story that only thraka know. When it was done, he also told you that the names you carried in childhood were not thraka names. Now was the time to take new names – names worthy of children who proved themselves to be thraka.

(It was at this time I told the players to hand their character sheets to the player on their left. That player, I told them, would name their character. And remember, I told them, while it may be tempting to give your buddy the name "Poopy-butt," you're still in character. You've still gone through hell together. And also remember, the guy to your left has your character sheet.)

You returned to your household and there you met a young downmga. Your downmga. At that moment, you were a household. As you are today.

The lights come back on, again thanks to The Wife, and the game begins.

A Bit of Free Advice

The Household you create with this method will be a small one, consisting of only a few thraka and a single downmga. You will not have many reindeer and chances are your winter home won't provide much protection. The more points you invest in blacksmithing, extra thraka and big spears, the more your individual thraka suffer.

Start small. Spend a lot of points on your thraka, so they'll be able to survive the winter. Invest in a few extra thraka so you can go hunting and leave protection at home for the downmga. Play it safe and play it smart. Otherwise, you won't be around next spring.

And game masters? Feel free to give your players more points (30 per player, 35 per player) if you want to start with a larger household.



Equipment Availability

This chart shows items available to a Household, based on the Zooosha of their dowmga. Households begin the game with a number of prepubescent children equal to their dowmga's Zooosha. The rest of these items must be crafted.



Dowmga Rank 1

1 Baby
Baskets
Breadmaking
Knowledge of Death and Midwifery
Rope
Ceramic Fish Hooks
Pottery
Defensibility 1 House
Woodcarving
Wheel
Drums
Blankets & Furs

Dowmga Rank 2

Leather
Nets
Sooeeta
Drinking Horns
Bridles and Saddles
Defensibility 2 House
Stirrups
2 Babies

Metal Items (w/Bronzsmithing)

Flutes
Pillows
Bronze Armor

Dowmga Rank 3

3 Babies
Defensibility 3 House
Basic Medicine
Iron Items (w/Blacksmithing)
Lyres
Iron Armor

Dowmga Rank 4

Poison Antidotes
Advanced Medicine
Def. 4 House
1 Dowmga-in-Training

Dowmga Rank 5

Surgery
Goldsmithing



Weapon Chart

Type	W/V	Range	Short	Long	Availability
Axe, 1-handed	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Axe, 2-handed	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	3
Club	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Club (throwing)	2	Str x 3	2d	3d	1
Discuss, dwarven	3	Str x 10	1d	2d	6+
Bow, short	2	150	0d	3d	2
Bow, long	3	300	1d	2d	3
Dagger, melee	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	Per downmga
Dagger, thrown	1	50	2d	3d	Per downmga
Fist	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Glaive, elven	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	4
Rocks	1-3	Str x 4 y	2d	3d	N/A
Sling	2	Str x 5	3d	3d	1
Staff	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Stick	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sword, human	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	3
Sword, dwarven	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	6+
Spear, throwing	2	50	2d	3d	1
Spear, fighting	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
War hammer	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	3



PART THREE

Specifics

Combat

When it comes down to it, every game system resolves two things: 1) picking locks, and 2) hitting things. You already know how to pick the lock, let's talk about that other one.

Rounds & Actions

Combat can get a bit complicated, so to make things easier, it's broken down into three-to-five second Rounds. During a Round, each player gets one chance to make an Action.

Step One: Determine Initiative

All combatants roll their Courage to determine Initiative. The combatant with the highest roll goes first, followed by the combatant with the second highest roll, and so on. Ties are resolved as normal.

Thraka Initiative

When rolling Initiative, don't forget that orks with the Thraka Zhoosha include their Zhoosha Dice in the roll, still keeping only one. And don't forget to count Doubles.

Step Two: Take Action

Each character gets at least one Action per Round.

To hit someone, you roll your character's Prowess + Skill (usually Spear & Shield) against your opponent. Your opponent rolls his own Prowess + Skill (usually Spear & Shield, but other Skills such as "Duck!" or "Catch It!" may apply). Whoever rolls higher succeeds.

The Weapon Value of the attacker's weapon is added to the difference between the two rolls. This total (difference + Weapon Value) is the **Wound Total**. A tie counts as a zero difference, inflicting a Wound Total equal to the attacker's Weapon Value.

For example, Altoona and Broondoo are fighting with spears (Damage Value 3). Altoona has the Initiative and attacks. He rolls a Success Value of 5 while Broondoo rolls a Success Value of 4. The difference between Success Values is 1, making Altoona's hit have a Wound Total of 4 Wounds.





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Resolving Things



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Later, on Broondoo's turn to attack, he and Altoona tie with Success Values of 6. They compare their next highest rolls, and Broondoo wins with a 4 to Altoona's 1. However, the difference between their Success Values is 0 (they both rolled 6's), so he only does 3 Wounds (the Weapon Value of his spear).

Thraka Actions

Orks with the Thraka Zhoosha get to act more often than their cousins. At Zhoosha 3, a thraka may take two actions per Round; at Zhoosha 5, he may take three actions per Round. Truly legendary orks with Zhoosha 7 or higher get four actions per Round.

Thraka may use their extra Actions when it is their turn to act (as per their Initiative Roll). If they decide not to use their Actions all at once, they can take an Action directly after another combatant has taken his. If a thraka does not use his Actions by the end of the Round, he doesn't get to use them in the following Round. This works the same way for monsters with multiple actions.

STEP THREE: Resolve Action

The hit has been made, but we still have to see if it's a **Lethal Blow** or just a **Glancing Blow**.

First, the attacker makes a **Wounding Roll**. He rolls his weapon's **Weapon Value** (or "Weapon Dice") and his Strength. His Weapon Dice should be differentiated from the Strength dice (use different colored dice, roll them separately, etc.). Bonus dice, such as from a Household Spear, are rolled now as well, but are not counted as Weapon Dice.

Second, record all the numbers rolled on the Weapon Dice. Your opponent cannot count any dice that roll these numbers during his Resistance Roll (below).

Third, the defender makes a **Resistance Roll** by rolling his Wound Dice (Zhoosha + Endurance). His Target Number is the Success Value of the attacker's Wounding Roll.

If the defender rolls equal to or higher than the attacker, the attack has not completely succeeded. The defender only takes a Glancing Blow, losing one from his Wounds.

If the defender doesn't roll equal to or higher than the attacker, he takes a Lethal Blow, and loses a number of Wounds equal to the Wound Total.

For example, Altoona and Broondoo continue their fight. Altoona attacks with a Success Value of 5 while Broondoo defends with a Success Value of 3. The difference between the rolls is 2. Altoona adds his spear's Weapon Value to the difference, making his Wound Total a 5 (Weapon Value 3 + Difference 2 = 5).

Altoona now makes a Wounding Roll, rolling his Weapon Value (3) + his Strength (2). Altoona's player uses silver dice to represent his Weapon Dice, rolling a 1, 2 and 5. His Strength



Dice roll 2 and 4, giving him a Success Total of 5.

Broondoo now must make a Resistance Roll. He rolls his Wound Dice (1 Zhoosha + 3 Endurance = 4 dice), getting 1, 2, 3 and 5. Because Altoona's Weapon Dice rolled a 1, 2 and a 5, Broondoo cannot use the 1, 2 or 5 he rolled, leaving only his 3. Thus, Broondoo's Success Total is 3, less than Altoona's Wounding Roll. Because he rolled lower, Broondoo takes the full Wound Total of 5.

If Broondoo rolled equal to or higher than Altoona's Wounding Roll, he would have only taken a Glancing Blow of 1 Wound.

Wound Penalties and Death

A character (or monster) loses one die from all rolls for every two Wounds he takes. Weapon dice are an exception to this rule (getting hurt doesn't make your spear dull). Also, a character does not lose dice on his Wounding Roll. Finally, dwarves (who are immune to pain all together) do not suffer any penalties due to Wounds.

A character dies when he must make a Resistance Roll and has no Wound Dice. In other words, getting knocked down to zero Wounds does not kill you, but any hit thereafter, even a Glancing Blow, *will* kill you. Game Masters may wish to invoke a "common sense" rule when a character takes more than three times his Wounds in a single blow. Such a single blow kills the character instantly.

Healing and Medicine

Orks naturally heal a number of Wounds equal to half their Endurance per week (round up). A successful Medicine roll (or a similar Skill) restores a number of Wounds equal to the Healer's Zhoosha. Target Numbers for Medicine Rolls are equal to half of the patient's Wounds (round up).

Ranged Combat

Orks using bows or throwing spears resolve actions using the same steps listed above. However, every ranged weapon has a Distance Modifier, shown on the Weapon Chart below. Whenever the target of a Ranged Attack rolls against the attacker, he may roll a number of extra dice equal to the attacker's Distance Modifier.

Weapons & Armor

Weapons are designed to hurt. Armor is designed to protect. Here's how they do their jobs.





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Armor keeps you safe, right?



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Weapons

On the chart below, you'll find the most common weapons found on Ghurtha. Each weapon has the following traits:

Weapon Value (WV)

When you roll to wound your opponent, roll your Strength + Weapon Value. The dice (2d, 3d, etc.) are the number of dice you roll.

Range

Range lists the farthest the weapon can accurately fire.

Short Range is exactly half a weapon's accurate firing range. In other words, a long bow has a range of 300 yards. Half of that is 150 yards, so a long bow's Short Range is 150 yards. The dice listed under Short Range are Bonus Dice rolled by your target. The further the shot, the easier it is to dodge it.

Long Range is any shot fired over a weapon's Short Range. Again, your target gets to roll that many Bonus Dice when trying to avoid your shot.

Armor

When an ork (or anyone else) wears armor, it's harder to get a good shot on them. The more armor you wear, the more protected you are – particularly against ranged weapons.

A character may wear up to 5 pieces of armor (head, arms, torso, legs, shield). Every piece of armor gives him one Armor Die to roll when making a Resistance Roll against Wounding. Armor dice ignore the cancelling effects of Weapon Dice during Resistance Rolls.

A character may only wear a number of armor pieces equal to his Strength +1. Armor also causes frostbite during cold months and trying to swim in armor is a bad idea. No one can sleep in armor. Not even Bashthra. A piece of armor takes approximately one month to make.

For example, Taldoo has a helmet and a shield (2 Armor). He makes a Resistance Roll, rolling a number of dice equal to his Wounds (2 Zhoosha + 2 Endurance = 4). He also gets to roll his Armor (2), giving him a total of 6 dice to roll. Taldoo's player uses 2 bronze-colored dice to represent his Armor Dice.

Previously, Taldoo's opponent rolled a 4 and a 5 on his Weapon Dice, meaning Taldoo could not use 4's and 5's for his Resistance Roll. However, this penalty does not apply to Taldoo's Armor Dice which roll two 5's, giving Taldoo a 6 and saving his life.

However, not all armor is the same. Men have discovered the secret of iron and



dwarves the secret of steel. Weapons made of lesser metals have a harder time piercing armor made of superior metal.

Any weapon attacking against a superior metal (wood or stone vs. bronze, bronze vs. iron, iron vs. steel) loses the ability to cancel an opponent's Resistance Dice. Any weapon attacking against an inferior metal (steel vs. iron, iron vs. bronze, bronze vs. stone or wood) can cancel the opponent's Armor Dice. Magic weapons, such as a Household Spear, never have penalties due to superior materials.

For example, Taldoo gets in a fight with a grumpy dwarf (like there's any other kind of dwarf). The dwarf gets a successful hit with his massive dwarven-steel sword. The sword's Weapon Dice roll 6,5,4 and 3. Because the sword is made of steel and Taldoo's armor is made of bronze, Taldoo's armor cannot keep any dice that roll 6,5,4 or 3.

Counter-Attacks

It's generally not a good idea to attack someone in melee combat who is better at it than you. They're usually capable of turning your own attacks against you, exploiting whatever opening your attack creates.

When a defender rolls higher than an attacking opponent, he can declare a counter-attack. The defender *must* have an Action left this Round in order to counter-attack. If surprised or otherwise unaware of the attack, he cannot counter-attack. The counter-attacker does not need to roll to hit – his opponent's failure counts as the counter-attacker's success. The counter-attacker rolls for Wounding as if he scored a successful hit with a difference of zero. This means he uses *only* the base Weapon Value when determining Wounds.

For example, Shashash (a 3 Zhoosha thraka) gets attacked by a troll. The attacking troll's Success Value is 2 and Shashash's defending Success Value is 5. Because Shashash has a second Action this Round (he's 3 Zhoosha), he can declare a Counter-Attack. He's assumed to successfully hit (the troll's miss counts as his hit), but he only causes 3 Wounds with his spear, regardless of the difference between their Success Values (2 for the troll and 5 for Shashash). Whenever a counter-attack succeeds, the difference between the Success Values is always considered zero. Shashash now makes a Wounding Roll as normal.

Working Together

Orks work better in groups than as individuals. They use hunting techniques they learned from watching wolves to track down, distract and kill prey. They use these same techniques when they must deal with trolls, men and dwarves.

When a group of thraka outnumber their opponent 2-to-1 or better, they each receive an additional die to roll for Initiative. In addition, the target of a group attack loses one die





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Sneak Attacks



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from his attacking and defending rolls for every additional attacker on him that Round, to a maximum penalty of half his dice, rounded up. Any other die penalties apply after this penalty.

For example, ten orks attack a single troll (Prowess 7, Clawing 3). Each ork receives a single Bonus Die to roll for Initiative as long as the numbers remain 2-to-1 or better. The troll would drop nine dice, but has a maximum penalty of half his dice (5). If he kills six of the orks, he'll only have a 4-die penalty remaining.

Later, the same ten orks attack a group of six men (Prowess 3, Sword 4). The orks split up into two groups of five, each attacking one man. Because the orks still outnumber their opponents, those beleaguered men halve their dice, rounding up, rolling 4 dice for their attack and defense rolls. Men the orks aren't attacking don't suffer any penalties.

Surprise, Ambush and Flanking

Whenever a combatant attacks an unsuspecting opponent, he gains a significant advantage. When he rolls his attack roll, one of his dice is automatically considered a 6. This counts for surprised opponents, ambushed opponents, attacks against immobile or helpless opponents and opponents attacked from behind.

This bonus mechanic may also be used outside of combat at Game Master discretion. For example, when a thraka is being judged for offending the tribe and happens to be the bashdownga's current lover, he may have a significant advantage in court. Depending on his Prowess, he may even have more than one 6 when he makes his roll.

Mounted Combat

Orks fighting from the backs of reindeer have many advantages. First, they get to add their mount's Strength to their own when making Wounding Rolls. Second, they can use their mount's Prowess rather than their own when dodging blows. Third, a Glancing Blow has a 50% chance of hitting the reindeer rather than the thraka. Lastly, mounted combatants may consider one attack die a 6 when attacking opponents on foot.

Spears and Swords

Spears are long. Swords are short. Men are dumb.

When fighting an opponent with shorter reach (spear vs. sword, sword vs. hand), one of your attack dice is automatically a 6.

Once an opponent with shorter reach scores a hit on you, your bonus no longer applies. If the spear-wielding opponent gains a hit of his own, he's backed up and the bonus



applies again.

For example, Dandoo surprises a man on patrol. Dandoo happens to be riding his reindeer. (Of course a reindeer can sneak up on a man; men are dumb.) Dandoo has surprised his opponent (first automatic 6), has a spear while the man has a sword (second automatic 6) and is mounted while his opponent is on foot (third automatic 6). This means surprising a sword-bearing opponent with a spear while mounted gives you an automatic 8 (three sixes: 6 +1+1) before Dandoo makes his roll.

Non-Combat Actions

These are actions that don't directly affect other characters, or simply don't involve attacking someone else. Non-combat actions require two to five seconds to complete.

Extended Actions

Sometimes an ork wants to do something that takes longer than two to five seconds. In this case, he can continue his action into the following Round. However, generous Game Masters may rule that orks with particularly quick hands (high Cunning or Prowess) can finish complicated actions quickly, or use their extra thraka Actions to carry out the task in less time. This may require a Cunning or Prowess Test at a Target Number of 3 or 4.

Free Actions

Some tasks are so simple, they don't require an ork to spend one of his actions in order to do it. Shouting out to an ally (or enemy), taking a step back, and grabbing something off the shelf (or out of a scabbard) are all examples of Free Actions.

Fana Points

Fame is an important element of ork culture, and a vital element of ork magic. Ork magic items are not created by wizards, but by opportunities. Whenever an ork gains Fana, there's an opportunity for his own legend to grow. As his name begins to gain fame, so does everything associated with him.

When an ork performs particularly famous acts of bravery, he gains Fana. When he performs acts of cowardice and selfishness, he earns himself Trouble. We'll talk about that in a minute.





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Earning and Using Fana



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Earning Fana

The only way to earn fana is from your Household Bard (tala). Bards award Fana by telling stories of their household's heroes, and it is the bard player (or GM if there is no bard PC) who decides when his fellow orks receive Fana. A tala doesn't have to be present at the act when it occurs, but he does have to hear about it from the participants. The participants are welcome to lie in order to gain more fame, but this is just asking for Trouble.

The bard (GM or player) keeps track of Fana rewards during the game. Whenever a player does something particularly noteworthy – courageous, cunning, stalwart, or even downright stupid; just as long as its memorable – he writes it down as a "Fana Check."

At the end of the game, the tala rolls a number of dice equal to his Zhoosha (don't forget to check for doubles!) for every fame-worthy act each player ork performs. The highest roll becomes that character's Fana Points. The bard also earns Fana Points. He earns a number of Fana equal to his lowest Fana Check.

For example, Rich is playing Tulada, a bard of some merit (2 Zhoosha Dice). At the end of an evening, he looks at his Fana Checks and sees he's making seven checks for Adam, a fellow player. He makes seven rolls, and the highest of those rolls is a 5 (double fours). Adam earns 5 Fana points for his outrageous action.

Using Fana

Fana Points are the building blocks of legends. An ork's fame has an almost supernatural effect on him, making him larger, stronger, faster... and sometimes even smarter. Once your ork has accumulated enough Fana, he can spend it in the following ways.

Virtues: 3 Fana per current Rank to increase any Virtue.

Skills: 1 Fana per current Rank to increase any Skill.

Zhoosha: 7 Fana per current Zhoosha Dice to gain an additional Zhoosha Die.

Legendary Virtues

Orks can have Virtues above 6. It costs 20 Fana Points to increase any Virtue from 6 to 7 and 20 more, per Rank, to increase it further.

Any Virtue above 6 is considered a **Legendary Virtue**. Write "Legendary" in your Virtue box and erase your current Rank. Once a Virtue goes to 7, it is considered a "Legendary 1" Virtue. When it goes to 8, it is a "Legendary 2" Virtue, and so on. The highest a Legendary Trait can reach is 3.



An ork who has a Legendary Virtue can no longer fail any roll involving that Virtue. Also, whenever he makes a roll that involves that Virtue, any dice that roll equal to or lower than his Legend Rank count as Doubles.

For example, Josh has an ork with a Strength of 8. His Strength is considered "Legendary Strength 2." Josh's ork wants to lift a heavy rock. Because he has a Legendary Strength, he can automatically pick up the rock. He cannot fail.

A little later, Josh's ork wants to hit a troll in the nose. He gets a successful hit and makes a Wounding Roll. He rolls Strength (8) + Weapon Value (Spear 3) and gets 1,2,2,3,3,3,3,4,4,5,6. Josh decides to keep one of the 3s because the other 3s count as Doubles. However, because he has a Legendary Strength of 2, all dice that roll equal to or lower than his Strength also count as Doubles. That means the Wound he inflicts is: $1+2+2+3+3+3+3 = 17$.

Magic Items

Characters can also use Fana Points to purchase Magic Items, the rules for which can be found below, under **Magic**.

Specialty Characters

Thraka are not the only kind of characters you can make for your Household. If you like, you can also make downmga, tala and shaman characters. However, realize that each is limited in its own way.

Downmga make babies. They look after the babies. They make more babies. Not a lot of room for adventuring. Tala spend most of their time telling stories, wandering the countryside and staying out of Trouble. They don't get a lot of chance to practice their fighting and it's a dangerous world out there. Lastly, shaman stay in their caves, eat lots of mushrooms and dream. Again, not a lot of room for adventuring when carrying the shaman zhoosha.

On the other hand, each zhoosha has its own part to play in ork culture. If a player wants to play one of these parts (and realizes the limits inherent with his choice), Game Masters are encouraged to let them do so.

Creating Tala

Tala are created in almost the same way as thraka. Individual Tala, created without a Household, get 15 Character Points. However, Tala enter play with slightly different Starting Skills:





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Tala and Dowmga Characters



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Courage: Darkness 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

Cunning: Taunt 1 (used when Taunting an opponent; see below)

Endurance: Walking 1 (used when traveling long distances)

Prowess: Spear & Shield 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

Strength: Carry 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

Tala can have the other Thraka Starting Skills, but must pay points for them. Also, a Tala's Zhoosha is not used in combat. Rather, it's used to give Fana Points to the tribe, as explained in the Fana Points section, above.

Finally, tala can **Taunt**. A tala rolls his Cunning + Taunt against an opponent. His opponent rolls Cunning plus any appropriate Skill. If the tala wins, his opponent subtracts a number of dice equal to the tala's Zhoosha from all actions for a number of Rounds equal to the tala's Zhoosha.

Creating Dowmga

Players who wish to create a dowmga character can do so in the same way they create Thraka and Tala. An individual dowmga (created without a Household) gets 15 Character Points. However, Dowmga characters enter play with slightly different Starting Skills:

Courage: Darkness 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

Cunning: Craft 1 (used for making and repairing items around the Household)

Endurance: Birthing 1 (used for successful births)

Prowess: Knife 1 (used in combat against monsters)

Strength: Carry 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

A dowmga's Zhoosha bonus applies during the Winter Season. See **The Winter Season**, below.

Becoming a Dowmga

Sooner or later, every female thraka will become a dowmga (unless she's killed before she gets the chance). When that happens, she's taken aside by the other dowmga of the Tribe and taught the Skills listed above. The easiest way to handle this is during the Winter Season. A female thraka enters the Winter Season with a thraka and begins the spring as a the Rank 1 Dowmga Zhoosha and the above listed Skills at Rank 1.



Creating Bodalay

Bodalay seldom interact with other orks – at least, in the waking world. Shaman spend almost all their time in the Otherworld, helping orks through troubled dreams. A Shaman's Starting Skills are:

Courage: Darkness 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

Cunning: Lore 1 (used for tests of knowledge)

Endurance: Walking 1 (used when walking long distances)

Prowess: Spear & Shield 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

Strength: Carry 1 (same as the Thraka Skill)

A bodalay's Zhoosha is used while Dreaming. Most characters only get to use 1 die while Dreaming. However, when accompanied by a bodalay, orks can use a number of dice equal to the bodalay's Zhoosha. The bodalay may use all Virtues and Skills as normal while dreaming.

Creating a Tribe

Large groups of players may wish to create an entire tribe of orks. In this case, each player creates a Household, complete with dowmga, thraka, dowmgaday and tala. Use the same rules as Creating a Household, but instead of 20 Points, each player gets 100 Points to create his Household.

Bashdowmga

Every Tribe has a bashdowmga, and yours is determined by who wants to spend the most points on their dowmga's Zhoosha. If there's a tie, it comes down to which Household has the most Thraka.

Secrets

Players may wish to invest equally in secrets such as iron working, or keep such secrets to themselves (thus paying the cost alone). This way, each Household has its own secrets to keep, share or steal. Adventures in such campaigns will involve the players working against each other as often as cooperating against an outside enemy.





THE WINTER SEASON

The Winter Season is an optional campaign mode for Households playing Orkworld. A lot happens during the cold months, and the charts below help players and Game Masters determine a Household's fate during the winter.

How Do I Use This?

Start at the beginning - **Determine Weather** - and follow along. But remember, more than anything else, Winter Season is a player/GM tool to create stories and situation during the eight months that Ghurtha is covered in snow. While many results on the following tables do not directly affect characters, the situations they create can always provide a new adventure for your household. Every Winter Season goes through five steps (listed below). Find the appropriate chart and roll them in order.

STEP ONE: Determine Weather

Weather either subtracts or adds to the Target Number for all rolls during the Winter Season. A Mild Winter is much easier to overcome than a Harsh one.

STEP TWO: Hunting

Hunting is important. Without food, the Household withers like the rest of the world.

Decide how many of your Household Thraka go hunting. (Remember that Thraka Advantage? Better go look at it again). Roll Zhoosha Dice for each Hunter and don't forget to include any Weather Penalties or Bonuses. Read the charts below.

Step Three: Dowmga

Most babies are born in the winter (winter is two-thirds of the year, remember) and, unfortunately, not all of them survive the season. In six winters, a child is old enough to join the ranks of the thraka (thus increasing your pool).

All dowmga make a Zhoosha Roll (remember to add the Weather Modifier) on the chart below and follow the results.

Step Four: Romance

How many thraka are love sick this season? Make a roll for each Thraka and consult the chart below.

Step Five: Monsters

Roll to see if any monsters attack during the winter. First, roll to see if the Hunters are out when the attack occurs. Then, roll for Monster Type.



Step One: Weather

Start here. Roll one die and consult the table to the right. Your result affects all rolls that follow this season.

Weather Table

1	Mild (+1 bonus to the highest die)
2-4	Average (no bonus or penalty dice)
5	Harsh (-1 die to the highest die)
6	Severe (-2 to the highest die)

Step Two: Hunting

Next, roll a number of dice on Hunting Table One equal to the thraka you send out. If you send out thraka with Hunting Skills, add their Skill Rank to their roll (use different colored dice for those thraka). However, for every thraka you send out to hunt, you have one less thraka to help protect the downmga when monsters show up (at the end of the Season).

The results of rolling on this table have less to do with game mechanics and more to do with opportunity. If you don't send out many thraka to hunt, the GM can play with the possibility of you going hungry this winter. Also, if your small household is part of a larger tribe, you'll lose Fana if you don't bring home something good to eat.

Hunting Table
One

0	Injured
1	Nothing
2	Poola (foul food) (1)
3	Fruits and Roots (1)
4	Eggs (1)
5	Mushrooms (1)
6	Fish (2)
7	Roll on Table Two

Hunting Table
Two

0	Injured
1	Fruits and Roots (1)
2	Fish (2)
3	Foul (2)
4	Deer (3)
5	Antelope (3)
6	Reindeer (4)
7	Roll on Table Three

Hunting Table
Three

0	Injured
1	Deer (4)
2	Antelope (4)
3	Reindeer (5)
4	Moose (6)
5	Elk (6)
6	Reindeer (7)
7	Sooeeta (8)

Downmga Task One: Make Babies

Roll once for each downmga, rolling a number of dice equal to the downmga's Zhoosha. You may also add dice for appropriate Skills (such as Birthing and the like).

Downmga Task Two: Crafts

Downmga also spend their winter making and repairing things around the winter home. Each downmga rolls her Zhoosha (plus any appropriate Skill) to make something for the household. Her Success Value is the number of objects she made this Winter.

For example, Daleena wants to make new clothes for her thraka. She rolls her Zhoosha (2) plus an appropriate Skill (Seamstress 2). She gets a Success Value of 3, meaning she's made 3 shirts for her thraka.

If Daleena wants to make objects of finer quality, she can put all her efforts into a single item or a few very good items. For example, Daleena decides to make one very good shirt. She gets a Success Value of 3. She decides to make two shirts: one has a Quality of 2 and the other has a Quality of 3. She could make one shirt with a Quality of 3 or three shirts with a Quality of 1. Clothing, spears and anything else a downmga makes last a number of seasons equal to its Quality (unless it breaks, gets torn, etc.) before it needs to be replaced.

Repairs on weapons and clothing work in the same way. Daleena can put Success Value toward existing items, thus increasing their Quality. She can even increase an item's Quality above its starting Quality. Every six points of Quality give a weapon a bonus die when attacking. At least one downmga must put time into maintaining the Household Spear so it won't break after its six seasons.

Finally, Winter Homes have Quality as well. A Winter Home needs no repairs until its Quality reaches zero. A downmga (or many downmga) must spend time repairing the Winter Home, or it will fall apart. Downmga can also spend time building additional structures in their Winter Home, allowing them to host wandering households. Repairing and building rules work just like Crafts.

Step Four: Romance

Romance provides orks what they need most: new mommies! Each thraka rolls his Zhoosha (plus any appropriate Skills) on the table below to see if he (or she) gets involved in any romantic entanglements this Winter. The results of romance come to call in the spring.

Romance Table

- 1-2 No romance this season
- 3-4 Short-lived affair (Fana Check for one; determine randomly)
- 5-6 Long-term affair (Fana Check for both + New downmga next season)
- 7+ Tragic love affair (2 Fana Checks for one; 1 Fana Check for the other + New downmga next season)





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Step Five: Monsters

Finally, it's time to check for monsters. First, roll one die to see if Monsters come when the hunters are at home (even) or away (odd). Second, roll to determine Monster Type. Finally, the GM chooses a story on the appropriate Monster Table below.

The tables below each contain six adventure hooks to get your GM going. GMs should invent their own tables for each season, just to keep the players on their toes.

Monster Table One

Hunters Away?

Even = when Hunters away.

Odd = when Hunters home.

Monster Type

1-2	Dwarves
3-4	Men
5-6	Elves

1-2 Dwarves

Two warring dwarven factions hire the orks to steal hostages. You'd think they'd remember what Bashthra did to them last time...

Dwarven mines wake up a dragon. Now, they're on the run, looking for a place to hide. Lucky there's a winter home to hide in...

3 Some unscrupulous dwarves decide to gather up giants to help them mine for steel. The local giant family has a magic item they're more than willing to trade for a place to hide.

Earthquake! Landslide! Half the forest is gone, covered in earth. But the dwarves don't stop, they just move on to another mountain.

It just so happens your Winter Home is built on a mine (silver, gold, you pick). Of course, that means the orks have to move... or fight for their land.

Dwarven steel is always in demand, but this time, it's by men. Men come to you, offering all sorts of promises if you can thwaku some steel from the dwarves. That means breaking into the iron fortress, thwaku the steel and get out without being seen. Easy, right?

3-4 Men

The men are on the march again, but this time, they're cutting down the forest to make forts. This makes the trolls angry, and since they can't take it out on the men, they turn to the next best thing...

It's in the middle of the coldest, nastiest winter you've ever seen. A small group of men - cut off from their main group - begs for hospitality. They have iron weapons and armor, but can they be trusted?

The elves are coming! And the men are running scared. A small group of men claim to have the cure for a magical illness... but they need a place to stay to hide from the elves.

The men are building a road... right over and through your Winter Home. Can you convince them how bad an idea this is? Will it require a war... or will a little thwaku do the trick?

A fort on the edge of man's empire has always been run by a man with at least a little brains. He stays out of your way, keeps his men in line and even trades with you on occasion. Unfortunately, his replacement isn't so ork. How do you deal with it?

5-6 Elves

Elven magic has spoiled everything in the area. Not only that, but orks everywhere are getting sick. Elves made the illness, they must have the cure...

One dark and stormy night, a group of elves wandered by while you slept. One of them ate your tala. But your tala's will is strong, and he still lives in the mind of the elf. Sometimes he's your tala, empowered with elven magic. But sometimes, he's not as strong...

The elves are coming! But a nearby tribe got thrashed by (men/dwarves/trolls) this year. They can't pack up in time. Your bashdownmga sends a group of thraka (guess who?) to help them pack out.

A camp of twisted and mutated elven slaves has been let loose on the world... just to see what happens. And guess who they find first? Of course, they also find a group of dwarven smiths out looking for steel. Allies come in the strangest shapes.

A flying elven city has fallen. It's a ghost town. You get sent in to investigate it. It's full of booby traps (like elves trust each other), but it's also full of magical goodies.







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"Players who complain about bad rolls..."



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Trouble

Every ork has his own share of Trouble, and it usually pops up when he needs it least. The following section is devoted to using Trouble in your Orkworld game. Game Masters are encouraged to not only use the rules presented here, but to be creative with Trouble, to develop new ways of throwing it at their players, just to keep them on their toes. After all, that's what Trouble is for.

Using Trouble

Every character starts with one Trouble Die that the GM keeps with him during the game. At any time during a story, the Game Master can use that die to make Trouble for the character. Trouble can manifest in any number of ways.

Mechanical Trouble

The easiest (and least exciting) way to have a character's Trouble manifest is for the GM to force a player to re-roll any of his successful rolls. Then, the GM hands the Trouble Die to the player. The player can use that die at any time during the game as a Bonus Die to a roll. However, if he doesn't use the die until the end of the session, he rolls it and gains that many more Fana Points.

Less merciful GMs can choose to cancel the success of any roll outright. No re-rolls, no trying over. Just failure. Of course, this may require the expenditure of more than one Trouble Die (I recommend three).

Players who complain about bad rolls, confusion in the rules or anything else that slows the game down, get a point of Trouble and lose their Action for that Round.

Whenever arrows get fired into a crowd of orks, the one with the highest Trouble gets hit.

Narrative Trouble

The Game Master can also use Trouble to cause bad situations for a player. For example, let's say a human archer hiding in the woods (coward) fires an arrow into a group of orks. Under most circumstances, the GM would roll randomly to see who got hit with the arrow. However, the GM can also say the thraka with the most Trouble Dice is the target. Of course, this would count as a use of Trouble, and the GM would have to surrender one of that player's Trouble Dice.

GMs can also use Trouble to make bad situations worse. A Trouble Die could make a man's attack roll change from 1 to 6. It could also turn one troll into a family of trolls



(they heard the shouting and came to investigate). Nasty stuff, that Trouble.

Trouble is My Middle Name

Game masters don't have to settle for one Trouble Die per character. After all, everyone is born with their own Trouble, right? So, instead of everyone starting out equal, a GM secretly rolls a single die for each player and records the result as Trouble Dice. This way, the players have no knowledge of how much Trouble they have... just like their ork characters.

Asking for Trouble

Each characters starts with a little bit of Trouble, but his actions can earn him more – sometimes more than he can handle. Listed below are a few suggestions for handing out Trouble Dice.

The Trouble Pool

First off, every GM should have a set of Trouble Dice, a special set set that he uses only for this special occasion. However, inspired GMs may wish to keep the distribution of Trouble Dice secret... or at least, a partial secret. Whenever a character should get a Trouble Die, look at him with your best villainous grin and write something down. It doesn't matter what it is, just write it down. It might be a Trouble Die, or it might be whether you like anchovies on your pizza. What matters is that the player has to wonder if he's earned himself a Trouble Die. And wondering is always worse than knowing.

Hubris

You could say the HMS Titanic was a Ship of Troubles. Everyone on that ship was certain nothing could hurt it. Every ork in the world knows that everyone on that ship was just asking for Trouble to sink her.

If the ancient Greeks had ever met the orks, they would have had their own word for "Trouble." They called it "hubris."

Whenever a character belittles a situation ("Oh, that troll doesn't look too tough"), there's a chance his Trouble hears him and decides to take him up on it. There are a few ways for the GM can do this. First, the GM could simply give the character a Trouble Die.

Mowgd

Sometimes, orks don't act like orks. Sometimes, they act like men. Sometimes, their fur turns yellow and they run from a battle, leaving behind the chance to die beside their brothers. Sometimes, they think too much of themselves and say or do things that





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He earned that Trouble, he gets to carry it.



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attract Trouble.

Whenever an ork is mowgd ("yellow," remember?), he earns himself a Trouble Die. Of course, that's not enough, is it? Not truly enough. If an ork has a mowgd tongue, I make him keep that die in his mouth (children, get your parents' permission first) until he uses it. If he's got mowgd feet, I make him wear it in his shoe until it comes back to bite him on his backside. If he's got mowgd brains... well, there's not a whole lot I can do there.

More Trouble Than You Can Carry

Some characters earn *too* much Trouble. Game Masters may wish to penalize Troublesome orks with this option. If a character ever owns more Trouble than twice his Zhoosha, those extra Trouble Dice go to other members of his Tribe.

A GM can do this secretly, or he can do it publically, letting everyone know exactly where that excess Trouble is headed. In fact, when a player does earn excess Trouble, give him the Die and have him hand it to someone else.

He earned that Trouble. He gets to choose who carries it.

Conclusion: The Tree of Troubles

Have fun with Trouble. Use it in every way you can find. It's such a profound part of ork culture that it deserves a profound role in the game system.

And so, as a final thought, here's a bit of fun.

First, invest in a plant – plastic or otherwise – and put sinister looking dice at its roots. Whenever a player earns his character some Trouble, he gets it from the same Tree Pugg limbed when the world was young.

Truly adventurous GMs may wish to plant little folded pieces of paper at the roots of that tree. Let the players know that each scrap of paper has a bit of Trouble written inside. Whenever they *earn themselves some Trouble*, they have to go to the plant and pick one out. They hand it to you, you open it up, read it quietly to yourself, giggle, and continue on with the game.

Wa

During a battle, some orks experience a euphoric trance. During that time, they cannot call any actions, but their comrades do. An ork under the spell of wa moves faster than any ork you've ever seen. He ignores wounds and fights as if he was possessed by ashthraka himself.



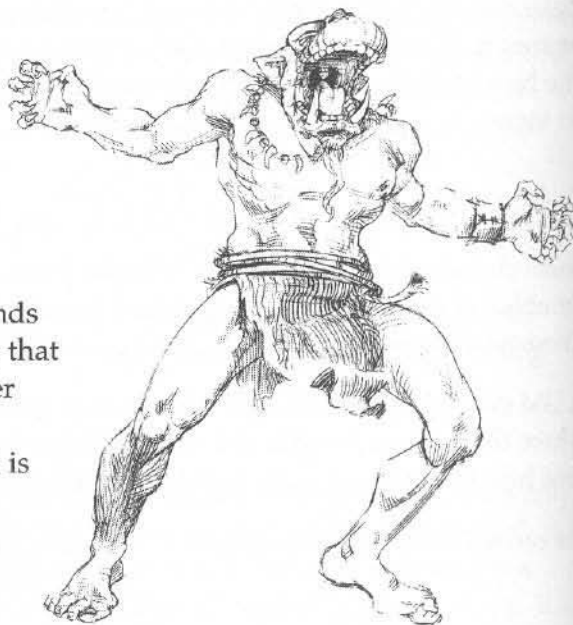
Maybe he is.

Player orks may experience wa during the game. At the beginning of each game session, the Game Master makes a secret roll for each player. He rolls ten dice and finds the Success Value (don't forget Doubles). Then, he records that number for each player.

If, during combat, a player makes a roll that is higher than (not just equal to) the Game Master's secret roll, that player ork enters Wa.

The effects of Wa last for a number of Rounds equal to the Zhoosha of the thraka. During that time, he may make a number of Actions per round equal to his Zhoosha, adds his Zhoosha to all attack and defense rolls and is immune to any effects from Wounds.

When the Wa is over, the ork falls down and cannot move for a number of Rounds equal to his Zhoosha. He's entered into a trance and can take no Action at all.



Magic

When primitive man tried to make sense of the world around him, he didn't have mathematics, science and physics to guide him. Instead, the forces and phenomena he couldn't understand he attributed to magic and he based these "magic systems" on intuition rather than logic. Full of contradiction, they lacked internal consistency... but no one really cared. The people understood the world was a place of mystery, vast beyond imagining, and unexplainable by man.

As man's capacity for reason changed, so did his understanding of the universe. His methods of observation became more rational and less intuitive, and so did the world around him. He began to classify the world, using terms such as "elements" and "spheres." While these systems still had vague shadows of an intuitive understanding of the world, there was no doubt that man was looking for a unified system to define the world around him.

Even today, scientists strive for a unified theory of existence; a single set of rules defining the universe we live in. Gone are the days of intuition: reason is modern man's key to understanding.





The modern resurgence of magical study is an interesting one, because it shows the dichotomy of modern and ancient thought. Books claiming to hold "mystical truths" classify and categorize them into neat packages, using modern concepts such as "cause and effect"; as if magic could be bound by man-made rules.

Roleplaying games have fallen into this trap: the belief that magic is a rational, observable and repeatable process. Even the language sounds scientific, full of "-thurgies," "-mancies," spell lists and grimoires. And while man tinkers with his "scientific magic" the world according to the orks is still a wild, untamable, unfathomable mystery. Ork metaphysics are a mess, full of the unexplained and unexplainable. Ork shamans know they will never fully understand the universe, nor were they ever meant to. The world doesn't make sense, things happen beyond orks' control and Trouble is always around the corner, ready to stomp orks with their own vain assumptions.

This Author contends magic that is scientific does not convey the same sense of wonder as magic that doesn't follow rules – at least, rules that men (or orks) can observe and define. Faerie tales, myths and legends are bound by a set of rules that simply don't work in a roleplaying game. They are intuitive rules, unbound by task resolution systems or easily explained metaphysics. In short, the magic of Orkworld does not conform to orks' will, but rather, orks are subject to the will of magic.

Now that's all well and good for writing faerie tales and folklore, but it's not very useful for Game Masters and players hoping to invoke the powers of magic in a roleplaying game. Worry not, Faithful Reader. Orks may spend a lifetime learning these secrets, but you can figure them out in a couple hundred words.

Two Magic Systems

Listed below are two magic systems: simple and mythic. The simple system involves numbers, dice and Fana Points. The mythic system is more narrative, more intuitive. Game Masters are encouraged to take a look at the systems, try them out and utilize the strengths of both.

Part One: The Simple System

This system uses Fana Points and Bonus Points to invoke the powers suggested by ork myths and legends. It is simple and to the point. In short, orks empower items with stories. When an ork receives Fana Points from his bard, he invests them in a specific item, giving that item Bonus Dice he can roll when using that item.

Spears, Armor and Other Weapons

To enchant spears and other weapons, an ork simply spends Fana Points to empower





the weapon with Bonus Dice. For 5 Fana Points, an ork can empower his weapon with General Bonus Dice that roll whenever the ork uses the weapon. However, for 2 Fana Points, the ork can roll Specific Bonus Dice against a specific race. Specific dice must be assigned to a specific race, such as dwarves, trolls, humans or giants.

For example: Baladoo's player has eight Fana Points to spend. He decides he wants to invest some of his Fana in his spear. He spends 5 Points for a General Bonus Die and 2 Fana for a Dwarf Specific Bonus Die. Now, whenever Baladoo uses his spear, he has one Bonus Die that rolls whenever he uses the spear and another die to use when he faces dwarves.

Miscellaneous Items

Enchanting other items gives the user Bonus Dice as well. Looms, anvils and pots are all good examples of magic items. When using such items during the Winter Season, make sure to include your Bonus Dice.

Eating

If an ork eats another ork (using the ritual described in the *Ork* Chapter), he gains some of his virtue. Use the following mechanics to reflect the virtue passing from one ork to another.

Passing on Virtues

If an ork eats an organ that symbolizes a Virtue (Strength, Cunning, etc.), he gains a number of Fana Points equal to the dead ork's Rank in that Virtue. These Fana Points may only be spent to increase the appropriate Virtue.

Just so you don't have to look it up, the organs associated with the Five Virtues are: Courage: spleen, Cunning: brain, Endurance: lungs, Prowess: hands, Strength: heart. If you kill an ork specifically to eat his parts, you do not gain these bonuses, but instead earn a number of Trouble Points equal to his Zhoosha.

A Game Master Note

Game Masters: create your own "eating tables," making players roll for anything (or anyone) they eat. That way, players are never quite sure what they're getting when chow down on an old friend. In fact, why not make a table for each thraka? That way, each death – and dinner that follows – is unique. You can either make the charts yourself, or enlist the help of your players. Letting them make their own Eating Charts lets them invest in every aspect of character creation – even death.

Eating the Stomach

Eating an ork's stomach is a dangerous affair (you eat everything he ever ate). Game Masters should reward (heh, heh) orks with the courage to undertake such an epic task.



Part Two: The Mythic System

The magic system presented here has nothing to do with game balance, points or numbers. It's an attempt to emulate the magic found in folktales, legends and myths. Game masters and players should use it with discretion.

Every magic item should have a story. The "powers" invested in it should be based on that story. Listed below are some of the most famous magic items in ork history, along with an essay discussing the item, it's owner(s) and how to use them in your campaign.

Shala's Spear

Shala knew she was dead.

Her spear broken, her shield stolen by the swamp, her legs cramping as she ran. But she dared not stop. She heard the click-clack, click-clack of the things behind her, the sound of hungry mandibles biting at her back.

Rain and sweat burned her eyes. It was only a matter of time before she stepped wrong, broke her ankle and fell under the weight of the horrors behind her.

She whispered her mother's name.

Lightning flashed, reaching down from the sky, blinding her eyes and blasting her backward. She slammed into the carapaces behind her, smoke in her eyes and her nose. Something hot fell on her belly – a limb of flaming oak. She took it in her left hand, burning from the bone, and held it between her and the creatures.

"Come on!" she shouted at them. They skittled and scuttled, trying to dodge the flames. She pounced forward, pushing them back. Then, the flames sputtered. The creatures grew bold.

"You have eyes," she told one of them, and thrust the burning end into the soft place. It squealed and backed away, smoke and pus oozing where it's eye had been.

The second one charged and she spun a side-step her mother taught her, bringing the spear to her side, thrusting back. It caught the thing in its maw.

It choked. She twisted.

It tried to scream. She pushed the shaft deeper.

The jagged end burst through the back of its head, and it fell lifeless into muck.

Shala fell to her knees, the smoldering limb resting on her legs. It was only after she caught up to her breathing that she felt the wounds on her hands. She looked at them, licked them and smelled them. "I'll have scars," she said. Then, she looked at the limb. "I guess that means I have to keep you." And for a moment, she considered using the limb as a walking stick. Only for a moment.



So begins the legend of Shala, one of the greatest downgadays. Her spear – Gift From the Sky – is one of the most legendary weapons in the world, partly because it was Shala's and partly because it was made from the branch of a tree struck by lightning that never touched the ground.

In fact, it fell right into her lap.

It also burned her hands – wounds that never completely healed. Do the burns represent the weapon binding itself to her: blood mingling with blood? Or perhaps they represent the weight of the weapon? Each bard has his own answer to that question, and the answer sets the theme for the rest of Shala's story.

And, just as each story changes, so do the "magic powers" of her spear. In some stories, the spear speaks riddles to her in her dreams. Others tell how it whispered to her when she was in danger. Some stories skip the whole speaking shtick and tell how it struck with the force of a lightning bolt, leaving burns on the skin of Shala's enemies. Some stories don't give the spear any powers at all.

However, one element of Shala's story remains constant, no matter who tells it: she never became a downga. She took this as a sign that she would die with her spear in her hands. She was wrong.

When a human army was spotted marching towards her winter home, she took a small cadre of thraka to a mountain pass to block the army, giving the other orks time to pack up the home and hide. Her army fought bravely, and nearly turned the humans back... until she stood face-to-face with the human general in personal combat.

That's when her spear broke.

The human army slaughtered Shala's thraka down to the very last ork, but her bold stand allowed her tribe to escape. They say a single thraka survived because he ran at the very last moment. One thraka less, one thraka more: would it have made a difference?

Depends on who tells the story.

Adventure Hook

Shala's Spear may be broken, but fragments of it show up from time to time. Many thraka claim to have pieces of the spear, each performing some magical feat. Slivers supposedly make a thraka lucky in war (+1 Prowess?) while larger pieces of the shaft make a thraka's strikes hit like thunder (+1 Strength?). However, those who possess true pieces of Shala's Spear report hushed, disembodied voices. Strange visions haunt their dreams, dark figures whispering words they can't quite make out.





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Her thraka brought her something amazing...



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One day, a thraka arrives in the winter home. She's got black marks, one eye and no spear or shield. But what she does have may interest the downmga: the head from Shala's spear.

Only the downmga gets to see it, and that's under one condition: the tribe gives her hospitality for the winter. If the downmga agrees, she'll give the tribe the spearhead when spring time comes.

If this is a thwak, it's an intriguing one. What thraka wouldn't want Shala's spearhead at the front of his own spear? And it's only one ork, after all. How much Trouble could one ork be carrying?

Breendoon's Cauldron

Breendoon was the oldest downmga in the world. She lived through seven human invasions, four dwarf attacks and even an elven lord looking for slaves. She had many scars, a walking stick, and fifty-five hands of thraka to help carry her weight.

One day, her thraka brought home something amazing: a dragon's head. With her downmgaday, she cooked up the meat, boiled the eyes and broiled the tongue and made tall drinking cups from the teeth. Then, she cleaned out the skull and plugged up the holes with tree blood. She kept the brains in a cold, cold cave and stewed them up in the skull. Her thraka ate well that winter.

The skull became known as Breendoon's Cauldron, and every winter, she cooked up hearty stews inside it. One thraka who visited her winter home had the chance to eat one of her stews, and said it was the finest he ever tasted. All that winter, he said, he never once felt a single chill. As word of its power spread, many downmga sent their thraka to thwak the cauldron. Only one succeeded. Two seasons later, Breendoon's thraka thwaked it back.

When Breendoon died – after five hundred and fifty seasons – her daughters inherited the cauldron. It took only two more seasons for another tribe to thwak it... and no one has seen it since.

Nearly every large tribe claims to have owned Breendoon's cauldron for at least a short while. All who eat from the cauldron claim supernatural benefits from the meal. Some say eating from the cauldron extends life. Others say it makes an ork stronger, faster and more vital. One tale tells of an ork who eats a meal from the cauldron and gains the ability to smell gold.

Whatever blessings the cauldron gives, it never stays in one place very long. It's difficult to hide (nearly ten feet in diameter) and made of bone. One particularly brave ork once tried to destroy it; he burst into flames that slowly burned him to death for a week. He was alive and awake the whole time.



Adventure Hook

While your thraka are out on hunt, they stumble across a group of thraka moving something huge and heavy. It's under a large tarp and they refuse to let the hunting party see it. They claim to be on the way to their winter home with a hunk of meat, but the whatever's under that tarp doesn't smell like meat... it smells like soup.

Sooner or later, the hunting party will thwak the cauldron (you didn't believe their story, did you?) and bring it home. News gets out quick, and before they can say "Shasha's Spear," there's a dozen or so households on their doorstep, all eager for a taste of stew. Now we have a group of tribes willing to protect the cauldron and a group of tribes willing to kill for it.

The Walking Stone

Its surface is smooth and a fire of ten thousand colors burns within it. Some say its a piece of the Great Grey Stone that fell from the sky with the elves. Others say it was a rock in Gowthdukah's shoe during his long journey to the Well of Wisdom. Some even suggest it was once a diamond swallowed by a dragon, transformed over thousands of years in his belly.

* * *

Whatever its origins, the Walking Stone allows orks to travel to the Otherside... without dreaming. Using the Walking Stone doesn't require any kind of concentration or willpower. It's a compass, directing the holder toward the Otherworld. As he walks in the right direction, the stone grows colder and the blue glow increases. As he walks in the wrong direction, the light dims and the stone grows warm. Eventually, if the ork continues in the right direction, the compass becomes so cold it freezes to naked flesh. Best to wear gloves when using the Walking Stone.

Adventure Hook

Kill a downmga, any downmga. Throw her from a reindeer, stick her belly with a dwarf sword, skewer her with a human spear. However it happens, she dies.

Or does she?

She breathes, but her body is cold. She does not respond to pain, but her heart beats. Her soul was shoved from her body before it was ready to go. Now, it wanders down to meet Gorlam... unless some brave thraka are willing to chase her spirit down to the Otherworld and save her from the toad. But how do they do it?

Rumor says a local shaman has the Walking Stone. But he won't want to part with it. You'll have to find something to trade... or you'll have to thwak it.

Either way, getting the stone is only the first part of the adventure. Finding your downmga and saving her from Gorlam is the middle. Making your way back to the Wakingworld... that's an adventure all in itself.





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... or you'll have to thwak it.



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Daytada's Lyre

Once upon a time, a young tala named Daytada fell in love with a tall, strong and beautiful thraka named Oothan. Their love affair inspired Daytada to write songs and stories of such beauty and power that tala came from all across the world to hear them. One winter, the coldest that any tala could remember, Daytada waited for Oothan to return from a hunting trip... but the party did not return. After several weeks, the tala took a group of downgaday into the snow and ice to find the missing thraka. Many days later, they found the hunting party. All but three of them were dead, including Oothan. Daytada and the downgaday brought the hunting party home and prepared the dead.

Daytada made a lyre from Oothan's remains, using the breastbone for the body of the lyre and the thraka's tendons for the strings. And when the tala was done, the song pulled tears from every thraka who heard it.

Daytada's Lyre has not been seen for hundreds of years... but then again, neither has Daytada. The tala wandered away from his tribe one day, never to be seen again. Daytada sightings are rare, but convincing. Orks who claim to have seen Daytada say the bard appears to be consumed with remorse, singing songs of a lost love. When the bard plays the lyre, the strings seem to sing along, making beautiful harmonies that make the stomach sink.

Adventure Hook

A bodalay appears one Winter Season with a beautiful harp. The songs he plays make every head swoon with emotion. Soon enough, the entire tribe is falling in love (or, at least, falling in something that resembles love). Endless nights of debauchery lead to endless squabbles and unfriendly fights over affections. The food stores begin to dwindle. Thraka and downgaday break noses, arms and legs. All just in time for a friendly (and unplanned) invasion from a rival tribe... whose bodalay happens to know every thraka and downga's name and every last inch of your tribe's winter home.

Szooszhum's Loom

When Szhooszhum was a little girl, she wandered into the Spider Forests. When she emerged, she was covered in webs, her hair the same dusty gray color as the webwork that entrapped her. She never spoke of what happened in the Forest, but she kept the webs until she became a downga.

Then, she made a loom.

It is said Szooszhum's loom produced clothing that was so light, so flexible, yet so strong, no blade could cut it. Only three living orks can claim to own shirts made from Szooszhum's loom. Before she died, she took her loom with her into the Spider Forests. "I have a promise to keep," she said. No one ever saw her or her loom again.



Clothing made from Szooszhum's loom could have many properties. A shirt could provide armor points beyond mortal-made armor. Silk boots could make the wearer as silent as a shadow. A veil may even allow its wearer to see things creatures with only two eyes cannot see...

Adventure Hook

One of Szooszhum's great-granddaughters wants to know. She asks a group of thraka to come with her into the Spider Forest to find out what happened to her great-grandmother. Just as they walk ten paces into the woods, the downmga begins to giggle.

"I can hear her," she says. When the thraka look at her, they see a gleam in their eyes they just don't like. As it turns out, Szooszhum sacrificed not only herself for the loom, but every first-born daughter thereafter. She's still in the forest, hoping that some brave thraka can save her from the terrible bargain she made so long ago.

The Blood Tree

Great Daldoon Elfbane. That was his name. And he stood here, under this very tree, and slew two hands of elves with his spear. And when he was done, he sat down, and he died.

His tribe's winter home was over that hill, in the valley we now call Shadow Valley. No tribe makes its home there now. Not now, and not ever. The elves came, looking for slaves. They came in their flying chariots, each shining like a sliver of the sun. Daldoon made a deal with the Wood Spiders, and they strung webs between the trees. When the elves struck the webs, the thraka of Daldoon's tribe pulled them down and held them while the spiders bit into their skin, filling them with poison. Then, the thraka watched the spiders drag the elves away, their paralyzed bodies trembling with fear.

Only two hands of elves made it through those woods. When they stumbled out, their chariots ruined, their bodies half-paralyzed with spider poison, they saw Daldoon, waiting for them under this tree. This very tree.

He fought them. The elves with their flaming swords and Daldoon with his spear and his shield.

When his helmet was knocked from his head, he laughed. "Now, I can see your ugly faces!" he told them, and he fought on.

When his shield broke, he laughed, "It weighed too much," he told them. He gripped his spear with both hands, and he fought on.

When his spear broke, he laughed. "Elven bones break easy enough!" he told them, and he fought on.

And when the elven flame took his right eye, and when the elven sword smashed his right arm, and when the wound in his belly nearly spilled his guts to the ground... he laughed. And he fought on.





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"Remember what I did here..."



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And when the battle was over, and all the elves were dead, he saw his cousins running toward him from the forest and he fell with his back to the tree where he stood.

His bodalay knelt beside him, whispering comforting words.

"Remember what I did here," Daldoon coughed, his words spackled with blood.

"I shall remember," the bodalay nodded. "And thousands others as well."

Daldoon's chin touched his chest. "This is when I die."

And he did.

The limbs grasp for any who fall within their reach. The bark is black and slick, like leather. It is surrounded by tiny black flowers, like stains on the green grass. Fruit unlike any other fruit in the world grow from those black branches. If you look closely, you can see angry, tortured faces in the twisting roots that break the ground.

The Blood Tree haunts the valley with spirits of elves who just won't rest. No ork ventures into the Shadow Valley. At least, not voluntarily...

Adventure Hook

A group of thraka have been captured by dwarves/men/elves (take your pick). As they trudge along in shackles, they notice their path leads straight into Shadow Valley. Soon enough, everyone starts dying. Hungry spirits bleed the captors and captives alike, indiscriminate in their slaughter. The orks and their captors have to work together to get out of the valley... or they'll all end up a feast for hungry elven ghosts.

Elven Sorcery

Elves aren't "magic-users." Rather, they are creatures of pure magical energy. Trapped here in this dimension, however, their powers are greatly diminished. The metaphysics of Ghurtha don't allow for the kind of magical miracles they are capable of in their homeworld. However, that doesn't make them any less dangerous to orks.

Using Sorcery

Elves are terrible creatures of raw power, capable of destroying the world if they so wished. What follows are guidelines and examples for Game Masters who wish to have elven sorcery play a part in their campaign. These rules are not "balanced," nor should they be. So, instead of giving you a regimented magic system, what follows are guidelines for sorcery effects.



Life Force

Elven sorcery uses the life force of animate creatures (orks, humans, dwarves, etc.) as its source of energy. The process is simple: the elf kills the creature and uses the living energy to empower the spell. Sorcerers can also store this energy in a special container (called a "aeldrondoo") for use at a later time.

Every living creature on Ghurtha has some Life Force (called "Life" for the rest of this chapter) expressed in points. To determine an ork's Life (or any other living creature), roll his current Wound Dice. The sum is his Life Pool.

Every elf has 100 points in his Life Pool. In order to use sorcery, he must use points from that Pool. Every point he spends allows him to roll one die to meet the Target Number of his spell (see below). The more dice he rolls, the better his chances of success.

Casting Spells

Sorcery is divided into three disciplines and five techniques.

The Three Disciplines

Minor Sorcery (TN = 2)

Minor Sorcery only affects the caster himself.

Greater Sorcery (TN = 3)

Greater Sorcery allows the caster to affect inanimate objects.

Grand Sorcery (TN = 4)

Grand Sorcery affects living creatures other than the spellcaster.

The Five Techniques

Sense (TN = 2)

Control (TN = 3)

Alter (TN = 4)

Destroy (TN = 5)

Create (TN = 6)

Elves use combinations of the disciplines and techniques to create sorcerous effects such as Sense Fear Other (Greater Sense), Sense Injury Self (Minor Sense), Control Fear Self (Minor Control), Create Fear Other (Grand Create), Create Fire (Grand Create), and Destroy Ork (Grand Destroy).





A spell's Target Number is the sum of the discipline and technique. Therefore, a Minor Alteration is a TN 6 effect (TN 2 + TN 4 = TN 6).

Also, for every 2 Life Points spent, elves may add 1 to their Success Total instead of rolling dice.

However, as an elf's Life Pool depletes, he becomes weaker. The flesh of his borrowed body becomes tainted by the corrupt nature of elven sorcery. As the elf's body dwindles, so does his power. When an elf's Life Pool reaches 10 Points or lower, he needs to find a new body. The elf must spend at least 10 Life to cast the Ritual of Transference (TN 10; the spell that puts an elf's energy into a new body). If he's unsuccessful, he reverts to his pure energy form. If an elf's energy is reduced to zero or lower, he is destroyed.

When an elf enters a new body, he rolls the body's Wound Dice, adding that sum to 50 (and any Life remaining from their previous body). That is the new body's Life.

Other Sources of Life

Obviously, elves are always on the lookout for sources of Life that are not his own. This is where the rest of Ghurtha comes in. You see, an elf can use his own Life Pool to empower his spells, or he can use someone else's Pool instead.

Getting the picture?

Determining Life

To determine an ork's Life Pool, roll his current Wound Dice. However, this is not a standard roll (keeping just one die). Instead, count all the dice rolled. Add one point to the total for every double rolled. This is the ork's current Life Pool.

Stealing Life

There are two ways to steal points from an ork's Life Pool. The first is to slit his throat and catch the energy as it slips from his body. This is a sloppy and unreliable technique, however. If an elf tries to steal an ork's Life with this method, roll his Wound Dice as you would any other roll (keeping the highest die, counting doubles).

"Um, Isn't this a little too powerful?"

No. It's a whole heapin' helpin' of "too powerful."

Elves are not something orks should ever be messing with. They are monsters. If you don't like the rules, change them. Tone them down. Make the Life Point costs bigger. And before you go thinking, "But I can't put an elf in my campaign! He's unbalanced. It wouldn't be fair," just remember this: an NPC doesn't do anything you don't want him to do.



The second method is far more reliable. Using a aeldrondoo, the sorcerer can steal as much Life as he wants. Activating an aeldrondoo costs only 1 Life.

Examples of Sorcery

Listed below are a few examples of sorcerous effects. Use these as guidelines for your own sorcerers.

Death Spell (Grand Destruction – TN: 9)

Kills the target instantly. Destroys any Life Points, making the body useless.

Fire Spell (Greater Alter – TN 7)

Creates fire in any object. The Damage Value of the spell is equal to the Success Total.

Flight Spell (Minor Alter – TN 6)

Allows the caster to fly. Duration equals Success Total.

Invisibility (Minor Alter – TN 6)

Turns the caster invisible. Duration equals Success Total.





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Welcome to the hardest job on the planet.



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Game Master Section

Welcome to the hardest job on the planet.

Players have it easy: they only have one role to play. As a GM, you have to play three: Storyteller, Referee and Author. You are the players' eyes, ears, noses, tongues and skin. Everything they sense is through your description of the world. Every first impression, every voice, every slight scent of troll droppings comes from you. Their fate is, quite literally, in your hands. Their successes, their failures, their tragedies and triumphs are all planned out in advance by you. Finally, you have to know every single rule in this book and execute those rules with fairness and objectivity.

Like I said, it's the hardest job on the planet.

At least, that's what the players think.

But in this section of the book – the one the players are not allowed to read – we're gonna talk about The Big Secret: GMing is really very easy if you know a few simple tricks.

"I'm a Beginner Too!"

If you've never run an RPG before, relax. We're all friends here. Just let your players know that you're still a little new at this RPG thing, and you're bound to make mistakes.

If you've never run *Orkworld* before, the same goes for you. *Orkworld* isn't your typical RPG; there's a lot of new stuff to learn. Let your players know that you're going to fumble around while you figure out what's going on, and you'll do just fine.

Preparation

Watching improvisational actors is like watching a magician: nobody should be able to move that fast. However, as any improv actor (and magician) will tell you, the real secret lies in preparation.

The *Orkworld* Golden Rules

When it comes to rules, these two supercede every other rule in this book:

Golden Rule #1: Have fun.

Golden Rule #2: If someone isn't having fun, fix it.



"Know Yourself!"

These words were written on the Oracle at Delphi and inspired Socrates to become one of the world's greatest philosophers. These same words can help you become one of the world's greatest Game Masters. Take a good, long look at your abilities. Know where your strengths make you shine, and know where your faults trip you up. Armed with this knowledge, you can make accommodations for your weaknesses and focus on your strong points.

For example, I know that my biggest weakness as a GM is in description of geography and architecture. I wouldn't know Art Nouveau from Post Industrial to save my life. Also, I have no clue how to identify birds, plants and animals. I have a problem identifying breeds of domesticated dogs, for Pete's sake. So, when I know that kind of detail is on its way, I grab the Encyclopedia Britannica CD and look some facts up. I print out the pages and keep them nearby so when I need 'em, they're within reach. I also keep a laptop beside me with the Britannica open, so if I need something I haven't had time to research, I can take a second and find it out.

When I'm with my regular group of players, I rely on my "GM Encyclopedias." These are players with knowledge I don't have. If someone asks a question, I turn to them for an answer. They drop out of character and give a brief (did I mention it was brief?) answer and we move along with the story.

"Know Your Players!"

These words weren't written on the Oracle, but they're just as true. The better you know your players, the easier your GMing time will be. Be familiar with how they like to play. Know what they like to get out of your weekly sessions. By knowing their strengths and weaknesses, you'll be able to set them up for challenges that they can overcome... with a bit of hard work, that is.

For example, let's look at four players I know and play with on a regular basis. Two of them, Al and Becky, have much in common. Both of them enjoy a "troubleshooting-style" of play. So, I set up situations for them that are like physical puzzles. Half the fun for these two is sitting down for an hour or two with maps and plans while trying to figure out the best way to solve the problem.

But my other two players, Cindy and Don, would much rather spend that time "in-character." These two could spend hours talking to each other with their characters' voices. What's more, they allow their characters to make flagrant mistakes – because that's what the character would do. Al and Becky never make those kind of mistakes, but then again, the characters they play are not a whole lot different from their real personalities.

But the differences aren't just between the two groups. Al and Becky, despite their similarities, are still two very different players. Al likes taking the mantle of team leader. He likes being the spokesman of the group and does a very good job of it. Becky, on the other hand, likes to stay in the background and provide advice to the other characters when they need it. Cindy's characters





won't use guns, while Don's first stop on the road to a finished character is always the weapon list.

Because these players are so different, I have to come up with scenarios that satisfy them all. I need situations that challenge their planning skills and their roleplaying skills. Knowing this, I create a situation that will utilize Al and Becky's planning skills while adding an extra dimension while giving Cindy and Don something to chew on as well. That means I have to create a scenario that not only challenges their thinking and planning abilities, but also challenges their ethics as well.

Three Zhoosha: A GM Job Description

While the players get to play orks with only one zhoosha, you get to play three.

Writing the Story

First and foremost, the GM is a tala. He creates plots, situations and characters for the players to encounter. He plans ahead, using the same tools that authors do – foreshadowing, symbolism, theme – to give the players a sense of drama, that they're a part of something epic, something great.

Guide through the Otherside

Just as a bodalay escorts orks through the strange and mercurial dreamworld, so does a Game Master guide his players through the fantasy world of Ghurtha. Orks are helpless in the dreamworld without a bodalay, and so are players without a Game Master. All through the game, the GM is their senses. He tells them everything they see, everything they taste, everything they hear and everything they touch. Also, through his words, players form first impressions of every character they meet. In many ways, the GM's words are the players' only sense.

Keeping the Peace

Lastly, the Game Master is the bashdownmga, the final authority on the rules of the game. She makes certain every ruling is fair, clarifies rules when players get confused (that happens a lot) and makes snap judgements when situations the rules don't cover pop up (that also happens a lot).

That's your job. It's a dangerous one, but you know that going in, and knowing is half the battle.

The Tala: Creating the Myth

You carry the Tala Zhoosha when you sit down and plan out stories for your players. So, let's go over the basic elements of a story, what kind of stories you can tell with Orkworld, and how to make your own tales sing.



Basic Ingredients

Making a story is easy. In fact, it's as easy as ... baking a cake.

Every cake includes the same basic ingredients: eggs, flour and sugar. However, bakers don't stop with just the basics. There are so many different kinds of cakes, all with their own unique flavors: chocolate, raspberry, angel food and even peanut butter cakes. (Orks like honey cakes the best.)

Likewise, every story has its own basic ingredients (including theme, scope, plot, and narrative). However, in order to make your story special, you'll have to find out what kind of flavorings you want to use. Listed below are only some of the cakes – I mean stories you can make with Orkworld. However, remember this: I can give you the ingredients, I can show you how to mix them, I can even tell you how long to put it in the oven... but there are simply no words to tell you how that cake is gonna taste. You have to find that out for yourself.

Three Styles

Something you'll have to discover all on your own is how you want to run *Orkworld*. There are a lot of different ways to do it; listed below are three examples of how I've run the game.

Realistic Orkworld

When you play Orkworld as written, you're playing in the "realistic style." Orks are flesh and blood, fragile and mortal. As the Solarian Empire expands, as the dwarves strip more resources, as the elves irradiate the land, orks have to cram their growing numbers into a shrinking landscape.

In realistic play, you'll find games center on basic needs: food and shelter. Politics will also come into play as the tribes feel the crunch of dwindling territory. Larger tribes envelope smaller tribes, sometimes wiping them out all together. Orks are a very idealistic race, but as times change, cynicism grows in the heart of even the most noble ork.

Story Seed: Coyotes & Hedgehogs

Set up your players as a small household in a large tribe – let's say it's the Coyote Tribe. On the way to its Winter Home, the Coyotes encounter the smaller Hedgehog Tribe. The bashdownga decides she wants their Winter Home and her thraka order a raid. No, not stealing, a raid. She sends no bard to warn them. She tells her thraka to offer no mercy. Make it quick and simple: kill the Hedgehogs and take their land.

Now, the players' household is ordered to take a role in this raid. How do they respond? Do they refuse? Do they go along with it? Or, do they send a scout ahead of





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Epic & Cliche Orkworld



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the Hedgehogs to warn the unsuspecting Hedgehogs? What happens if that scout is captured? What happens if the Coyote bashdownga finds out before the scout is sent?

Epic Orkworld

Imagine walking in the world when it was still young, when all the creatures spoke the same language and nobody made war without a good reason. Imagine meeting Gowthdukah on the road (they say any ork who meets him is allowed to ask one question). Imagine Pugg coming to you, all whispers and grins, as he explains your role in his "Biggest Thwak Ever!" Imagine thunder on the ground as you watch Bashthraka's army storming across the countryside. Suddenly, he stops and says, "You are Bashthraka's new shield bearer!"

This is Epic Orkworld: roleplaying in the time when the gods still walked with the mortals. The time before Gorlam sat before the gates to paradise, the time before Solaria became an Empire, the time before the sky grew weary and began dropping her stars on the world.

The rules don't really change for epic style play, although you probably want to give players more points to build their Household. Daring GMs may even give each player 1 Legendary Virtue – but don't allow any repeats. One ork is the Strongest, another ork is the Bravest. Read a couple of Grimm's stories or take a gander at Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* and you'll get the picture.

Story Seed: Bashthraka's Shieldman

Not just a member of any old household, you're a thraka in Bashthraka's household. You spend long winter months with the Thunderer, drinking his sooeeta, chasing his downgadaday and singing songs so loud, you wake dragons.

Of course, waking dragons is never a good idea.

(Oh, and hanging out with Bashthraka isn't such a great idea, either. You'll get a whole lot of Fana, but not a lot of lifetime to use it.)

Cliche Orkworld

It's all about testosterone. It's all about loud music. It's all about having a little too much to fun and making a little bit too much noise.

You're an ork. Play the cliché to the hilt.

There's nothing in the rules that every session of Orkworld is dour, dramatic and depressing. In fact, some of the best sessions I ever ran were at conventions, where all the players wanted to do was shout, stomp, beat their chests and kill lots and lots (and lots) of monsters. No, "Woe is me! We're an endangered species!" No, "What will we do?!? There's monsters all around us!!!"



Nope. None of that. Just perfectly good ranting and raving, stomping, grunting and more than anyone's fair share of mead. (Of course, that last bit was when I ran the game in Scotland; and the Drinking Version of *Orkworld* is only for the grown-ups, kiddies.)

This is a perfectly correct way of playing the game. Live in a cave! Drink the blood of humans! Act like a bunch of beastly frat boys on Friday night!

You still protect the downmga (yowza!), you still hunt down game (killin'!) and you still deal with monsters (more killin'!). It's just a bit more light-hearted. Sometimes, a lot more light-hearted.

This kind of *Orkworld* is best-suited for a one-shot game (that is, a game you play one night, then pick-up something else next week) after you've burned out on a more serious game.

There are a whole lot of other ways to play *Orkworld* as well. There's "Romantic *Orkworld*" where sex and romance are the politics of the day. There's "Evolving *Orkworld*" which focuses on the progress of technology and its effect on cultures. You can even play "Civilization *Orkworld*" (inspired by Syd Myer, of course) where each player takes the role of an entire race, moving armies across the map of Ghurtha, making allies and crushing enemies.

Don't feel limited by the way the game is presented here. Have fun with it. Mix it with other games. *You* are the Final Authority. Don't forget that.

Theme

Writing a story is like walking through a dark forest. You know the way in, and you know the way out – it's getting through that's the hard part. What you need is a compass, something to keep you on course. That compass is a theme.

The theme of a story isn't what happens in the story (that's "plot"), it's more what the story is about on a philosophical level. Theme can usually be summed up in a single word. *Hamlet*, for instance, is about revenge, *The Star Wars Trilogy* is about redemption, and the Arthur Cycle is about hubris.

Picking a theme helps you plot out your story. If you keep your theme in the forefront of your brain as you begin to plot out key story elements, you'll sense when an element you've chosen doesn't quite fit. There are many themes to choose from; let's take a look at a few.

Action

Choosing "Action" as your theme means you'll spend very little time on plot, dialogue and character development. Instead, the characters in your story will spend a lot of time in motion. They'll be chasing this, running away from that and trying not to get hurt or





killed in the process. Not a lot of time is spent on what the characters think or feel, but a lot of time is spent what they're capable of doing.

One of the best executions of this theme is *Die Hard*. While the majority of screen time is devoted to what the hero's actions, the storytellers also give you a deep sense of character without spending a lot of time away from the action. In other words, the characters reveal their emotions and thoughts in their actions. They don't respond to the other characters and plot with words, but with deeds.

The Hunt: An Action-Themed Story

A group of thraka in the middle of winter chase after a bear. As they cross an ice-covered field, the ice breaks, revealing a deep crevice. Cut off from their household, they must now find a different way back. Unfortunately, a group of elven slavers finds their tracks. The question now is: How do they make it to the household without bringing elves back with them? Of course, there's still a very large, angry, and hungry bear out there...

Discovery

The use of knot work in ork art is an expression of the Riddle of Life. Life is like a huge puzzle, a puzzle so vast that you can't see it all in one glance. It's a puzzle so complicated, it takes an entire lifetime to figure the thing out. We humans also use a puzzle to symbolize the Riddle of Life, but we use a walking puzzle: a labyrinth. A puzzle so vast, you can get lost in it if you aren't paying attention.

When the Greek hero Theseus was faced with the daunting task of descending into the labyrinth, his true love Ariadne gave him a string to keep him from getting lost in the vast puzzle that lay below the city of Minos.

We are Theseus.

The labyrinth is the Riddle of Life.

The minotaur is our fear.

Mythology is our Ariadne string.

The theme of discovery can be more literal – exploring the world, finding new truths, and capturing land for your tribe, but it can also be about descending into the darkest forest of all: our own souls.

The Goolealah: A Discovery-Themed Story

The best time to tell the story of your tribe's goolealah is not your first session. Give your players some time to get to know their characters. Let their personalities grow and evolve. After a few months of playing, throw them into a situation so dark and bleak, it looks like there's no way home. Something like...



They've been captured by elven slavers. They're on their way to the black glass desert. They have runes tattooed to their skin that burn their brains if they try to escape. Could things be worse?

Yes. And they survived that, too.

Nothing in the world is more terrifying than Gorlam. Not dwarves, not men and certainly not elves.

They kept Gorlam at bay with their courage. They can escape. So what if the tattoos burn?

Pain is only pain.

If the orks were strong enough to survive Gorlam, they're strong enough to survive this. Suddenly, a simple "escape" story becomes a re-telling of their greatest trial, told through an experienced filter.

Love

During Europe's middle ages, men and women argued endlessly about the nature of love, and bards made those arguments immortal as stories. The tales of Lancelot, Gwenevere, Tristan and Ysolde are echoes of a time when Europe pondered the questions of love.

Is it an illness? Is it Divine or Damnable? Is it a more noble passion than loyalty and duty? And what role – if any – does sex play in the love of a man and woman?

Sound a little antiquated? Think modern man has love all figured out? Well...

Is the love between a man and a woman any different than the love between a man and another man? Should you hire a woman if her husband is an employee? Is pre-marital sex sinful? Do two people in love really need to get married?

The Courts of Love are alive in well in modern culture... and ork culture as well. Thraka and downmga fall in love every day without quite understanding what it is. Stories with a theme of Love ask these questions and search for answers in the households, tribes and hunting grounds of Ghurtha.

However, ork love is very different from the love we know. Our society is patriarchal. We *know* love is a biological function of the brain. Orks *don't* know what love is, and their culture is matriarchal; it's the downmga who chooses her mate for the season and male orks have to *prove* their devotion before they're offered a reward.

Because orks have so little taboos on sex and love, the best conflict to throw in to the mix (rather than duty) is jealousy. If two thraka are in love with the same downmga, what happens? Remember, the link between sex and conception doesn't exist, so orks don't "own" downmga in the way primitive man owned his woman; instead, it's the





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Who sleeps in the dowmga's bed?



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woman who owns the man.

You can even raise the simple question: "Should an ork fall in love?" Or, are the consequences simply too high. Love is a lot like Trouble, if you can't handle it, it'll handle you.

The conflicts are different from our own, but they are still there, ready to be sewn into stories.

Who Sleeps in the Dowmga's Bed?: A Love-Themed Story

It's winter time again, and the question is on the tip of everyone's tongue: Who gets to sleep in the dowmga's bed. Every thraka in the household starts posturing. If this doesn't cause conflict in your household (re: build story), nothing will.

Redemption

While orks are generally forgiving when it comes to mistakes, their laws are merciless when it comes to crime. Trust is a commodity orks can't afford to give away. When someone betrays that trust, they're thrown out of the tribe, marked forever with black tattoos that show their shame.

Playing a group of orks who carry these marks is a challenging story to tell. They have no dowmga (unless she also was implicated in the crime), no winter home and no tribe will accept them. They are truly alone in the world: a dangerous place for an ork to be.

Stories of redemption are also stories of transformation. An ork capable of crime doesn't wake up one day a different person: something has to happen to make him want to change.

One Dowmga's Love: A Redemption-Themed Story

A group of thraka have been outcast from their tribe. They come across a dowmga alone in the wilderness and rescue her from a family of trolls. Her own household was killed off by the trolls, and now she's alone as well. Can she redeem them?

Revenge

Stories of revenge are dangerous: the climax almost always involves death. Knowing that going in, a thraka can focus his attentions on one thing: avenging the death of a loved one. Every action, every decision, every breath that thraka takes is devoted to fulfilling that goal. Revenge-themed stories are simple in that way; complications almost create themselves, leaving little work for you.

My Cousin's Keeper: A Revenge-Themed Story

It's late. It's dark. You're drunk. As you stumble back to your household, you see two thraka arguing. One of them is your cousin, Sheeloo. You can't make out who the other one is. As you make your way closer, the words become more heated. Then, there's the





sound of ripping flesh and your cousin falls to the ground. You rush forward as quickly as your drunken balance can carry you, but you arrive too late. Your cousin's lifeblood spills for the ground to drink. As his soul slips away to Gorlam, he whispers a name to you: the name of the bashdownmga's favorite thraka.

He's dead and there's nothing you can do. The bashdownmga will never turn the law against her own household, and your own household is too small to challenge her authority. There's only once choice: you have to change the circumstances. Your household must gain the Fana it needs, so you can challenge the thraka who murdered your cousin.

Or, you could kill him in his sleep. This option is available to orks who have no other option. You murder him, and you send his soul to Gorlam. Does *any* ork deserve that?

Plot

If Theme is the compass that keeps you on the right path, plot is the machine that pushes you from the beginning of the story to the end. A plot's beginning establishes the rules of the story, introduces characters and situations. The middle of the story complicates situations at the beginning and presents the "climax" of the story: the true, hidden problem the characters must overcome. Finally, the end of the story resolves all the problems presented in the beginning and middle of the story and gives the reader (in this case, the players) a sense of fulfillment. It's that last part that's hard.

Here's a list of sample plots to get you going on building your own.

Hunt the Fish

As they wander, the household stumbles on a Bear Tribe (one of many). The tribe's thraka are huge, larger (and stronger - Strength 6) than any other orks they've ever met. When it comes time for hunting, the Bears bring back only fish; they eat no meat the visiting downmga makes. "Poison," they say. "Only fish."

So begins a long session of learning how to spear-fish. The Bears refuse to eat anything else, and will not offer hospitality to "poison eating fools." If the player thraka don't know how to fish, it's time for them to learn.

But there's a catch to all this: the fish are indeed magical. Specifically, the waters were blessed by a mad elf lord. The fish caught from the lake (under a waterfall, down a steep cave into an underground cavern where the white, blind fish breed like rabbits) make the Bear Tribe bigger and stronger. Any ork who spends one month eating the fish gains 1 free Fana Point to put toward his Strength Virtue.

Complications arrive when dwarves find out about the cavern. They've been eating the fish for quite a while as well (the cavern connects to one of their underground maze-castles) and want the lake to themselves. They aren't interested in sharing, not even



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Bad Mommy



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with persuasive player thraka.

Bad Mommy

The players' downmga asks them to hunt for a rare herb. They know where to find it (it's a household secret), but when they get there, another group of thraka are waiting in ambush. If the player thraka manage to capture one and ask him why they attacked, he says nothing. Even if they bring him back to the tribe, he still remains silent. However, he and his comrades all have one thing in common: black stains on their tongues; the sure sign of a witch.

The problem lies in the fact that only the player thraka and their downmga knew the hidden location of the secret herb. Is their own downmga a witch?

Thwaking Hearts

One cold, winter day, your downmga – more than a little happy with sooeeta – reveals a dark secret: she once knew true love. He was a thraka in another tribe, and the two were separated by tribal rivalry. As the thraka watch her cry herself to sleep, you all know what you have to do.

Word has it the tribe's winter home is just a handful of days away. Maybe he's still there? Maybe he still thinks about her? Maybe... he's still in love, too.

You set off to find your downmga's true love, only to find he's been accused of a murder he didn't commit. The thraka can stay and try to help him clear his name (fat chance), or... they can thwak him. Thwakiness ensues...

Alien Skin

You wake up one morning, and everything is different.

You're men. Every last one of you. Trapped in mowgd skin. Obviously, this is the work of some evil elf. Something has to be done about it. Until you do, you're cast out of the tribe, disgraced and disowned. You have to live as men for a while, walking with them, talking with them and... other things.

As you fall into a legion of soldiers, you discover they plan on raiding one of the biggest winter homes in the southern lands. There are ten thousand man-soldiers. There are five of you. Can you warn the winter home before the onslaught? Can you find the cure to your curse?

Too Many Mouths

The player thraka find an abandoned ork baby on the road. Your downmga already has children – twins – and can't take care of another infant. The baby cries and screams, kicking and flailing about in its tiny, half-ruined crib. A quick investigation of the area show three dead thraka and a dead downmga – half eaten by trolls.



So, not only are there trolls in the area, but you have three babies, screaming for all the world to hear. So much for sneaky.

Deal with the Devil

The PCs hear of a distant tribe – the Eagle Tribe – who manage to fight off human and dwarven armies and keep their winter grounds safe. A dwarf army is on its way to the player thraka's household and the downmga begs them to go to the Eagle Tribe and discover their secret. After many difficulties along the way, they get arrive and learn the reason the tribe doesn't have any problems from monsters is because they sell their old, dead and dying to a local elf sorcerer so he can eat them.

Of course, this secret can never leave the walls of the Eagle winter home, so the player thraka must be killed – unless they're willing to make the same deal...

Deadly Dreams

The downmga (or even the household's greatest thraka, or even their tala) doesn't wake up one morning. Her eyes dart back and forth between tightly closed eyelids. The thraka need to find a shaman. Fortunately, they're in luck; there's a shaman in the mountains just above their village. When they arrive, the shaman helps them through the Otherworld to where their downmga is trapped – by a dragon. Think dragons are tough in the Wakingworld...?

Starting Over

The player thraka's downmga is killed in a dwarf raid/troll attack/human march. Now, they're on their own with no downmga. Do they try to join another household, become outcasts... or thwak a downmga from a rival tribe?

Lone Mother

On the road, a household runs into a downmga. At least, she's almost a downmga; she's still pregnant. In her belly is a growing ork life. On her conscience is her crime: she betrayed her tribe to men in exchange for her own life. What do the thraka do?

The Bodalay: A Guide through the Otherworld

Travelling in the world of dreams can be a bit challenging. Surrounded by symbol and metaphor, a thraka can become confused very quickly... unless he has a guide. The bodalay is that guide. And just as the shaman guides orks through the strange world of dreams, so will you guide your players through the bizarre world of Ghurtha.

You are the players' only communication with their characters and the world around them. You are their five senses. You aren't just a storyteller, you are the whole wide world.





The Three Fives

Orks measure nearly everything in fives, so its only appropriate we do the same thing. First, we'll discuss five questions that make every GM's job a little easier. Then, we'll talk about how to use the five senses to make Ghurtha truly come to life. Finally, we'll talk about how to use five different methods of communication to impart information to your players.

The Five Questions

While running your game, always consider what some journalists call "The Five Holy Questions. Ask yourself "who," "where," "what," "how," and "why." These questions help you fill in the details of the world. For example, consider a simple plot: a group of dwarves raids your players' household. Easy enough. The event causes conflict (dwarves want to kill the orks, orks want to stay alive), but throw the five questions at that simple plot, and things become interesting. What's more, once you start asking one question, you'll find answers for the others present themselves.

Simply asking "Who are these dwarves" starts the ball rolling. The dwarves come from the northlands. North means snow. Snow means no green. No green means no food. No food means... they're hungry.

So, why are they raiding the ork encampment? Because they're hungry.

But there has to be more to it than snow. Dwarves are pretty dumb, but they're smart enough to stock up for the winter... most of them, at least. So, what ruined their food stores?

Dwarves live in mountain halls. Something must have come up from under the mountains. Something awful. Something so bad, they're steel wasn't enough to handle it. It ate all their food (and a few of their kin), and now they're starving. What do they do? Come down and raid the orks, of course.

That would make the leader of the dwarves pretty unscrupulous. If he was an honest and honorable dwarf, he'd trade for the food. But, since he's a bastard, he just wants to kill the orks off and take it. Come to think of it, maybe he has some lieutenants who disagree with his position?

(Warning: Having disagreeing lieutenants presents the dwarves less as monsters and more like orks. Proceed at your own risk.)

So, just asking "Who?" also gets us "Why?," "Where?" and "When?" How about "How?" They'll either be clever dwarves or clumsy dwarves. Clever dwarves attack at night in skirmisher units, throwing fire for confusion, then charging in with real firepower. Clumsy dwarves attack during the day, disregarding the fact that orks really can fight (and a few of them even have magic weapons to deal with such situations).





So, what if the lieutenants insist on sending in a small scouting party first? The scouting party gets estimates on how many orks there are, how well-stocked they are... and are secretly instructed – by the lieutenants – to steal the food. That way, they won't have to raid the household.

Of course, this goes all wrong and the orks kill the scouting party. That sends the commander into a bloody rage and he orders every last ork's throat cut.

The conclusion of the story comes when the lieutenants refuse to fight and ride off to warn the orks of the incoming danger. They stand with the orks, defeat the commander's forces, share food and earn allies with the dwarven encampment to the north. Of course, those same dwarves might mention they need help with a nasty cave monster...

A simple scenario transformed by five simple questions. You can add tons of detail by asking questions. Are all the lieutenants against the raid, or just one? Is the cavern monster really an insane elf who's possessed the body of the commander, capable of horrible magics, killed only with a shaft of steel from the Holy Stone? Keep asking questions, even when you're running the game. You'll be surprised where your answers take you.

The Five Senses

When you describe a scene to your players, you do so in one of two ways: you tell it to them, or you show it to them. Let's look at both methods.

(Telling)

Winter is cold. Snow is everywhere. There's no movement to be seen. Then, a big bear rushes out at you. It's covered in blood. What do you do?

What else do the players need to know? It's winter, there's snow and there's a blood-covered bear. Everything the players need to respond to the bear charging them is in those sentences. But there's so much more you can show them...

(Showing)

It's a cold, bright winter day. The wind bites so hard it makes your teeth ache. You can barely keep hold of your spear for the shivering in your joints. Your feet crunch through frozen snow as you march along, hoping to catch some sight of food.

It's only after a few moments that you realize the only sound in the forest is the sound of your crunching footsteps... save one.

You spin about, realizing a little too late where that sound comes from. The snow atop tree



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Telling and Showing



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branches falls and hits the ground with a wet "thump." Something is moving, and it's moving fast.

(You point at one of the players.)

Jandon – your keen ears tells you whatever this thing is runs on four legs.

(Point at another player.)

Oodaltha – your pointy nose tells you it's got blood on its breath.

(Point at another player.)

Sheeshoo – you see its shape beyond the shadow and shape of the trees: large and black.

(The players all look at each other and shout: "Bear!")

Right you are. It breaks through the trees, charging straight towards you. It's covered in blood, screaming so loud, even sleeping Bashthraka can hear it on the other side of the world.

What do you do?

The showing example conveys the same information as the telling example, but the way the GM conveyed the information is much more dramatic. He used different senses to make the players feel the cold (so cold, it makes your teeth ache). He used three different senses (sight, smell and sound) to describe the charging bear. People don't just experience things with their eyes. Use every sensation at your disposal to convey information to your players. Also, let your players participate in the sensation. Telling individual players what they perceive makes them feel like they're actually there.

The Five Voices

A GM has five different methods of conveying information: with action, description, dialogue, exposition, and thought.

Action

"He listened to the bashdownmga's decision in silence, but I saw his fingers clench around that spear, and I knew he gripped his anger just as tightly."

Sometimes, a character communicates emotion not with his voice, but with his actions. A blushing smile from a downgaday says much more than any words can. The clenching eyelids of a thraka after a particularly jolting insult speaks volumes. Bards cannot summon words to match a downmga's gentle, reaffirming touch.

Use actions. Let them compliment your character's words. Or, better still, let their actions speak for them.



Description

Three thraka climb a mountain. The brisk, cold air fills their lungs, the hint of pine fills their noses. The rocks are chilly, and one thraka regrets forgetting his gloves by the side of the river yesterday. They stop for a moment, and the tala pulls out three honey apples their downmga sent along as a surprise. When they reach the top of the mountain, they look over what they must think to be the whole wide world. Rivers look as thick as fingers. Mountains are so small, you could hold them in your hand. Everything is so far away, and yet, so close.

When you use description to show your players the world around them, use every single sense at your disposal. Go out into the wilderness for a day and just sit down and listen. The forest is so tranquil, so peaceful... and so full of sound.

You can't sit in one place without ants finding you. There are no synthetic fibers, the water is ice cold, you can't find a single patch of perfectly flat terrain and when you lay down at night, rocks always find a way under your mattress.

This is the world of the orks. Go live it for a while.

Dialogue

"No matter, no matter. It's no great matter. Someone must tell the – I'll tell the downmga. Someone must stay – why don't you stay here? The dwarves will be coming – be ready for those dwarves."

When your players speak to other characters, make sure they don't sound like you. It's the oldest trap in the author book: all your characters sound like you with an accent.

Avoid this trap.

When you create an NPC, come up with a view verbal quirks for him. Give him habits (we all have them) he just can't break. Don't use the clichés (stuttering, shluring hish eshes, etc.), find something truly unique. A thraka with a broken jaw speaks a lot differently than a tala with a penchant for perfectly phrased passages of prose.

Exposition

GM: "The bodalay tells you..."

Player: "What's a bodalay, again?"

GM: "A bodalay is a bard."

Player: "Right. I forgot."

Exposition is conveying information directly to the players without use of any dramatic techniques.





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A Woman Without Her Man...



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In other words, you're breaking the "show, don't tell" rule. Unfortunately, some information must be conveyed in this manner. Players need rules questions answered by the Game Master, not an NPC. However, try to avoid exposition as much as possible.

Thought

Some books are written from a first person perspective, which means you see things from inside that character's head. In other words, you get to read their thoughts as you go through the book.

Communicating another character's thoughts to the players can be a bit tricky. Showing thoughts as actions is a cleaner way of handling the situation, but if you'd like to break from the action and show the player's an NPC's thought process, make sure it's quick and to the point. The characters really don't have any business inside someone else's brain. However, thoughts can show more than actions can. Showing the players the inside of an insane character's brain can be both disturbing and revealing.

The Storyteller's Toolbox

While running a game, you have two very important tools to use: your voice and your body. How you use them sets the tone for the game.

Voice

How you say something is equally important as what you say. For example, take the following sentence:

A woman without her man is nothing.

Now before you slam the book down and throw eggs at my house, take a gander at the same words, only with two new pieces of punctuation.

A woman: without her, man is nothing.

See? Same words, slightly different punctuation, completely opposite meaning. Punctuation presents us with pauses and articulation, which are just as important (if not more so) than the actual words we speak. Using a sarcastic tone changes everything you say. A soft breathy voice is much different than a loud, thundering one.

Use your voice to bring dramatic moments to life. Don't tell your players about the roar of the bear; make the bear roar! Don't tell your players about the rolling thunder; make that thunder roll!

Make each NPC come to life with his own unique voice. Make the crunching sound of snow under their footsteps, make the sigh of a disgruntled dwarf, let them hear the cheer of an army.



Use your voice. It's the most powerful musical instrument in the world, capable of more sounds than any other creature in the world. Use it.

Body

Just as every NPC in your world has a distinctive voice, so should he have distinctive body language. If the orks are out shivering in the cold, you should be shivering. In fact, make the players shiver, too. If it's a hot, summer day, loosen that collar and wipe your brow with a handkerchief.

Putting it Together

Using your body and your voice in concert makes the whole world come to life. An old downmga walks with a limp, her hands stiff with age, her voice almost gone. She sits next to a younger downmga, holding the child she just brought into this world two days ago. Her voice is high and shrill, still tired from the experience. Her hands still shiver with excitement. Her voice still breaks when she speaks of the experience. The old downmga smiles softly, a little sad that she will never know that moment of pain and joy again.

You can play both those characters at once, showing the players who's speaking with just a little change of body language and voice.

Environment

Some Game Masters like to change their environment, to give players a complete roleplaying experience. Others find this a little silly. You'll have to find out where you land between those two extremes.

As I said earlier, I like to use candles and blackness to show the players what their thraka went through when they were younger. Try it out. Find a room with no windows and turn out the lights. Sit there, in utter darkness and complete silence, for a few minutes. Set an alarm clock outside the room and sit there. And just sit.

No sound. No lights.

Now, let your imagination stir some of that blackness. Imagine the Man With Long Fingers that haunted you when you were a child. Imagine him in the closet on the other side of that black room. He's right behind the closet door. He's smiling that smile you know. He's standing perfectly still. Waiting. Waiting for the moment you're certain he's just a figment of your imagination.

Do whatever it takes to creep yourself out. Go on. Try it out.

Then, consider how much easier that experience would be with someone you trust. How about five or six someones? How about if you had a light? How much easier would that make it? How long could you stay in the dark now?





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The Bashdownmga Zhoosha



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Putting your players in that kind of environment can either strengthen or invalidate your roleplaying experience. Know yourself. Know your players.

The Bashdownmga: Keeping the Peace

The tala tells stories, the bodalay guides the players, and the bashdownmga makes sure they don't get out of line. However, she also ensures they understand how to do things. Confusion slows everything down, and if one thing is certain, you don't want the rules to slow anything down.

When it comes to rules, you need to remember the "Five F's." (Notice how everything comes in fives? It's easier for orks to remember it that way, so I figured it'd be easier for gamers, too.)

Final

Almost 90% of game mastering is decision-making. Every time a player asks a question about the world, an NPC, or even a rule, your voice is the final authority. Your word is the Final Word.

If your decisions are made quickly and confidently, your players will gain confidence in your authority. If not, your players' suspension of disbelief will fade; not only in the game, but in you as well. If you don't speak with authority, if you backpeddle, if you don't appear confident in your decisions, players start arguing.

That slows down the game. We don't want that.

So make it plain from the start: You are the Final Word. Players don't argue with you during the game. You make a decision (good or bad) and after the game, you can talk to the players about it.

Fast

When you make a decision, do it quickly. Don't spend more than five seconds on any rule question. When in doubt, default to a simple test of Zhoosha + Skill. Don't accept advice from the players, don't let someone look the rule up, and don't waste time arguing with other players about the "Right Way" to run the game. The only "Right Way" is to make sure everyone has a good time. As soon as arguments start, the good times stop.

Make a decision and move on.

Flexible

This is the same advice you'll find over in the Tala section: be prepared to improvise. Creative players come up with wild and unpredictable ways to stretch the boundaries of the rules.



Let them. Don't ever let the rules limit a player's creativity. Come up with a quick solution for the player's action (again, usually *Zhoosha + Skill*) and throw them a Target Number. You may also want to reward more creative players with bonus dice. After all, if you didn't see that action coming, why should your NPC?

Fair

Finally, let's spend a moment or two talking about the difference between "fair" and "arbitrary." There's a lot of people who will try to tell you a GM is arbitrary.

This is Bad.

Players already have one arbitrary force against them: the dice. Dice don't care if a player's action succeeds or fails. Dice don't care about a character's motivations, needs, pains and fears. You roll the bones, you get a decision that's completely independent of all circumstances. That's arbitrary.

A Game Master, on the other hand, is fair.

A GM always considers the outcome of his decisions. He always considers the consequences of bonuses and penalties. He always has the players (and their characters) foremost in his mind.

Let me say this again: the players are depending on you to have a good time. Their enjoyment is in your hands. Making random, arbitrary decisions is no way to win their favor or trust. You lose those two things, you lose your players. And then nobody has fun.

Friendly

Finally, remember that even if you aren't among friends, you're still among comrades with a common cause: you all want to have fun. If tempers start to run high, if players start snapping at each other (and you), stop the game and take a ten minute break. Don't confront troublesome players directly, take them aside and calmly explain that their behavior disrupts the game.

And don't forget that: this is just a game.

The Dice

While there's been a lot of talk about cooperative storytelling, epic, theme and other literary devices, its important to remember that *Orkworld* is still a storytelling game. *Orkworld* uses six-sided dice to add a sense of chance and danger to your stories. Without dice, every element of chance is in the hands of the Game Master, and for some players, that's a bit too much control for anybody. However, some groups want an environment where story elements aren't handed over to an arbitrary force. Like I said before, you're an entertainer now and you have to know your audience.





There are really two schools of thought when it comes to using dice. Both are discussed below. You'll probably fall somewhere in the middle – just like the rest of us.

The Story GM

A "Story GM," on the other hand, sees dice as an interfering factor, throwing arbitrary chance into a carefully constructed plot. He likes to improvise as much as the Dice GM, but prefers when that improvisation is forced upon him by player choice rather than dice rolls. He still uses dice to help him mitigate certain situations, but he doesn't rely on them for decisions.

The Dice GM

A "Dice GM" is someone who relies on the dice to make certain decisions for him. He likes that elements of his game are out of his control because it lets him play along with his players. It also allows him the opportunity to improvise around circumstances beyond his control. Dice also have a way of turning against a player – even the Game Master. Enforcing his own characters' bad rolls put him at even odds with his players; even his best villain can screw up every once in a while.

Target Numbers (Difficulty and Drama)

Target Numbers give you and your players a sense of the difficulty of an action. Exactly how hard is picking up two hundred pounds? Is it harder or easier than picking up a beautiful woman in a bar? Both tasks are difficult, but some people are better at one than the other. Some are lousy at both. You determine how difficult the action is, the player's roll determines his character's success.

When setting a Target Number, consider two things. First, consider the average roll for a six-sided die is 4 (3.5, actually, but who's counting?). Second, consider that how often you tell your players to roll says a lot about your GM style. Some GMs make their players roll for everything. This represents the philosophy that failure can occur at any time, no matter how mundane the task. On the other hand, some GMs only make their players roll when it's dramatically appropriate. That is, mundane actions – those not crucial to the plot – don't deserve that much attention and detail. Only when a character's actions truly count does the GM call for a die roll.

Again, when and how you make your players roll says a lot about your game – and your world.

Drama Dice

For GMs who like a sense of drama in their game, consider the following option. Drama Dice are extra dice you make your players roll; they have no choice in the matter. Of course, this also means they get a bonus at the end, but we'll get to that later.





Whenever you feel its dramatically appropriate for a character to succeed or fail, throw a few Drama Dice at your players. For example, if its dramatically appropriate for a player's action to succeed, give him a drama die (usually one or two). A Drama Die adds directly to the total of the roll. For example, if a character's total roll is 4 (3,3,2,1), and his Drama Die rolls a 3, his total roll is 7 (4 + 3).

On the other hand, if you feel its dramatically appropriate for the character to fail, make him roll a Drama Die that does the exact opposite: it subtracts from his total roll.

However, Drama Dice should only be used in the most extreme dramatic circumstances. The more you use them, the less dramatic they become.

Other Worlds

One of my first intentions with *Orkworld* was to design a race that could be compatible with any RPG setting. Let's take a look at how our little green friends would fit in other people's worlds.

After all, no-one said orks can't get along with other races; it's just that on their home planet, the other races don't get along with them. However, if circumstances were a little bit different, you could see an ork in your typical high fantasy adventuring party.

Out for Revenge

He could be a thraka who got kidnapped by evil slavers and separated from his tribe. When he escaped and got back, he found his Winter Home burned to the ground. Now, he has no tribe, no household, no family. He shackled up with a bunch of other ex-slaves (the player characters) in hopes of finding who killed his family, so he can bring them to justice.

"Thwaku My Death"

Or, he could be an outlaw who's looking for death. He met up with one of the non-ork player characters and vowed to thwak his death. He keeps by the PCs side, never letting down his guard or his spear & shield. One day, he'll find death. There's always hope he'll find a reason to keep on living first...

Tala on the Town

Maybe the ork is a tala, representing a tribe who's Winter Home is just a stone's throw away from an expanding city. He's there trying to bargain with the Lord-Mayor, hoping to convince the humans to expand the other direction. The Lord-Mayor is resistant at first, but after listening to the tala's stories, after hearing what that territory means to his tribe, he's changed his mind.

That was before he was murdered.

Did we mention the tala's blood-soaked spear was found with the body?



Now a group of sheriffs (the player characters, of course) have to find who killed the Lord-Mayor before an angry mob lynches the innocent tala.

A Different Kind of Ork

"Those other orks, they live up where it's cold. They live different lives, speak a different language, believe in different gods. We don't get along with them, they don't get along with us, and we likes it that way."

There are many fantasy roleplaying games (and some science-fantasy games) that already have orks as player characters. Who's to say there's only one breed of ork?

Orks In Space

Assume for a second a group of space travellers (sic) lands on Ghurtha. They take a few orks with them when they return home. Bingo! You've got star-bound orks.

And who in the world says those travellers (sic) have to be human?

What if the reason the Solarians have no record of orks in their history (remember from the opening fiction?) is because a starship came back to get them. In fact, a whole legion of ships arrived. Turns out the orks on Ghurtha were part of an advanced scouting team who got shipwrecked on the planet. When their ship was destroyed, it caused a temporal rift, pulling a group of elves from their home dimension into this one. The orks have been on this planet for ten thousand years, their history degenerating into mythology. "One day, Pugg will come and kill the Great Toad," says ork legend. Well, it was right.

Pugg came (the rescue ship landed) and killed the Great Toad (the other races). Now, it's time to return to Paradise. Once you've got them in space, they can start travelling to all kinds of different worlds.





Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is not to give you a detailed mile-by-mile walk through Ghurtha. Rather, it's to give you enough information to get you started on building your own version of the world. You'll find descriptions of some of the more prominent areas (the elven desert, the dwarf mountains, the Spider Forest, etc.), but otherwise, the world is pretty much a blank slate for the GM and players to create as they explore it.

How to Use This Chapter

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part describes the physical features of Ghurtha, its anomalies and idiosyncrasies – each with its own adventure hook, of course. The second part details the creatures of Ghurtha. For the sake of convenience, the RPG rules for the monsters are included in this chapter. That way, Game Masters can find all the information they need on monsters in one place, rather than dividing them up by chapter themes.

One of the first things you'll notice is the map on the preceding pages is blank; there are no names for geographical regions. Following the map is a list of places. Game Masters and players can work together to design their landscape as they design their household, creating an *Orkworld* that's custom tailored for them.

The GM can even bargain with players. Some places are obviously beneficial, while others are downright hazardous. For every beneficial place the players pick, they must also pick a hazardous region. That way, players can populate their environment with advantages and disadvantages. If players want their Winter Home next to the Burning Lake, they also have to put it near Spider Forest.

You'll also notice the islands and continents surrounding Ghurtha are entirely blank. That's for GMs who want to insert different races or cultures into *Orkworld*. Want an island of centaurs? It's just there, on the eastern shores. How about an island of vampires? You got it, just off the southern coast. All modular, all ready for you to tinker with.

A Final Tip of the Hat

Much of the geography of Ghurtha was designed by (and with) Gentleman John Bacon. John drew maps (which Thomas turned into illustrations for us) and built a world based on some rather far-fetched premises of mine. Any errors in geographical theory, plate tectonics or other such knowledge are entirely my own.





PART ONE

Places of Note

Found below are a number of interesting places for orks to visit. Each has a brief description as well as an accompanying adventure hook.

The Bleeding Lands

Its not as vast a desert as the one elves live in far to the east, but it is a treacherous place nonetheless. The most remarkable part about it, however, is that at night, blood oozes up from the sands as the wild wind rips at travellers like the hands of wild, desperate women. Orks believe the place to be haunted. They're right.

Long ago, elves fought massive wars here. The result is a land that has no life left in it; the ghosts of the fallen suck that life down below the sands as the blood of their loss and pain is pulled up by the sweet siren song of the moon.

Travelers who wish to cross the Bleeding Lands must rest on rocks at night, lest they be sucked down by the ghosts that still haunt that blasted place.

Adventure

Orks could seek a way to bring peace to the elves trapped in the desert. Some elven magic might put them to rest. Some say the ruins of a great city lay in the center of the desert, but none have traveled far enough to know.

Broken Spear Pass

It was here that Shala and her thraka fought against an army of men until her spear broke. It was also here that another great hero – Toola – fought against an army of dwarves... until his spear broke. A third hero – Oolthala – fought here against a wave of elven slaves. He broke three spears before he fell under their weight.

Adventure

Orks hate this place and try to avoid it. Unfortunately, their Trouble keeps bringing them back here again and again.

You are no exception.





Winter is on its way. You can smell the storms. You have a choice: go through Broken Spear Pass and make it home before winter, or take the long way around and forage for poolah for weeks. Trouble either way around. You just have to make up your mind what kind of Trouble you can handle.

City of Blood

Sitting in the center of the Bleeding Lands (see above), the City of Blood was once a great elven center of commerce (cheating) and learning (poison, treachery). Then, one day, an elven princess committed the ultimate sin: betrayed her family for love. Thus, the warring began. It didn't stop until every elf in the city was dead or trapped in the jewels that lay beneath the sands of the desert.

Adventure

The ghost of that princess cries out for release. She's willing to trade anything for cold, eternal oblivion. Unfortunately, she's trapped in a jewel. In order to be free forever, that jewel must be smashed. So, she's visiting a dowmgaday with visions and omens, driving her slowly mad until she figures out that she has to go to the City of Blood and free the elven princess. If she doesn't, the princess will just drive her insane before she finds someone else to do the job.

Cold Wind Cave

It is said that these caves reach all the way down to the other side of the world. It's also said it was in these caves that Gowthdukah found the Well of Wisdom.

Adventure

All bodalay dream of making the journey to the Well of Wisdom. Some have nightmares about it. Whether these caves are the ones that led the Silent One to the Well is up for debate. No one's proved or disproved the theory in recent memory.

And a quick reminder for all you bodalay out there: don't forget the Thing that guards the Well. And don't forget the price it demands...

Dowmgaday Lake

In a glass coffin, at the bottom of a crystal blue lake that never freezes, lies the perfect body of an elven dowmgaday, preserved for all time. The grass around the lake never dies. The trees surrounding the lake never die. The animals who drink from the lake... well, you get the picture.



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Dragon Mountain



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Adventure

Drinking from the lake does make one immortal... for a short period of time. Continued draughts from the lake are necessary in order to maintain the temporary immortality. At first, the draughts must come once a year, but as time moves along, rejuvenating the immortality requires more draughts. Finally, the drinker must leap into the waters himself and swim down to the bottom where the maiden waits for someone to free her from her immortal slumber.

Don't forget: someone put here there for a reason.

Dragon Mountain

This mountain got its name from... well, from the dragon that lives in a cave on the top of the mountain. It's name is Trudontalunrow and it doesn't like to be disturbed. However, it loves riddles (even dragons get bored) and is willing to make a trade from its treasure horde for a really juicy one.

Adventure

It's said that Gowthdukah once wrote a riddle-poem for Trudontalunrow but the beast never figured out the answer. Having been vexed by the riddle for a few thousand years now, Trudontalunrow would probably appreciate some help. Who knows: it may even trade some of that breath (against an army of men or dwarves, of course) in exchange for an answer.

Dwarf Mine Mountains

The face of this mountain range is riddled with stairways, ladders, pullies and buckets. The caves smell of flesh and the sound of hammering echoes off the sweaty walls. The dwarves have mined the life out of these mountains, but they won't stop until they reach the soul.

Adventure

The dwarves need a few strong backs. You were perfect for the job. You don't know how long you've been down here, all you know is your skin grows more mowgd with every hammer strike. Then, someone's hammer hits the wrong way at the wrong time and forty-four loads of soil and rock fall down on you. Now, you're trapped deep in the ground with only a single dwarven slave to guide you out. And he says you have to go down even deeper before you can climb back up.

Can you hear Gorlam?

Rest assured, it can hear you.







PLACES

Forest of Black Beasts



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Elven Desert

The sands are not white as salt; they are as fine as ash and black as a moonless night. Once, shards and sheets of glass filled the empty plain, but that precious material is gone now, forged into weapons and looking glasses. The Mountains surrounding the desert are likewise blasted and blackened, their glass faces staring back at the elves who live in the center of this mess.

Travelling through the desert is not healthy; even the elves who created it try to avoid the journey. However, ruins of ancient elven cities remain, filled with magic and treasures beyond imagining... for those who have the strength and courage to seek them out.

Adventure

You're on a simple trip to visit some old relatives in their Winter Home when you see black smoke rising up from the place their homes used to be. The elves are long gone... at least, most of them. One elven lord remains, wounded and bleeding his stolen blood into the ground. The thraka weep, for their downga has an equally fatal wound; her blood oozes out as thick as winter honey, and as blue as the sky. Something's wrong.

"She has only days to live," the elf lord says. "But there's a cure."

He explains that a ruin in the desert is rumored to have a counter for the spell, but he can't go by himself: he needs a new body. He agrees to show the orks to the city and get the antidote, but they have to provide the body (a player ork or a non-player ork will do; he isn't picky).

Forest of Black Beasts

They stand on two legs, carry spears with two hands, have ten fingers and ten toes, but their eyes glow in the dark night and they don't walk like any other creature on Ghurtha. They worship a beastly goddess and hang the bodies of their enemies on crooked crosses. No ork has seen one and lived.

No ork.

Adventure

No tribe is foolish enough to build a winter home near the Black Forest, but some are foolish enough not to warn their children about it. On your way to your own winter home, you come across the Fisher Tribe whose children have decided to prove their worthiness by going into the forest with stolen spears.

It will be night soon. Too soon.



Fort of Blood

Two seasons ago, men built a great fortress in a valley overlooked by the Black Forest. They moved into the forest... and never returned. The fortress stood empty for a season before another army moved in. They went into the woods... and never returned. Now, a new commander has moved an army in... and he watches the forest, his curiosity eating a hole in his patience.

Adventure

Whatever's out in the woods, it's sending the commander nightmares. It says it will end the nightmares if he sends the army into the woods. Sooner or later, the commander will succumb to the thing in the woods. However... maybe – just maybe – he can send an army of orks to satiate whatever's in the woods before he sends an army of his own.

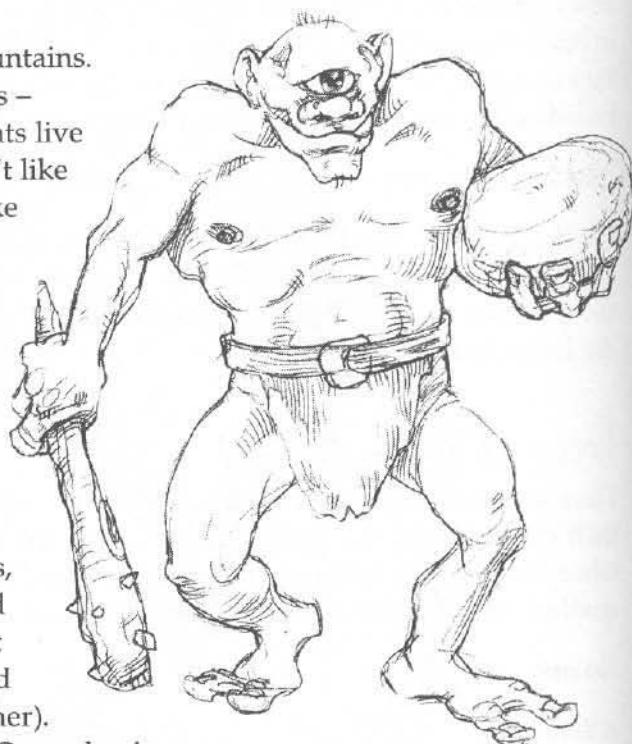
Giant Pass

"Giant Pass" rests between two large mountains. Two caves – one on either side of the pass – overlook whoever walks below. Two giants live there, Groond and Moond, and they don't like visitors. As a matter of fact, they don't like each other. But they hate strangers more, so whenever someone tries to move through their pass, they drop big, heavy rocks. Then, they pick through the squashed remains for pretty, shiny things and usually end up fighting for who keeps what.

Groond and Moond can be bargained with, but at a price. They like shiny rocks, silver and gold. They're particularly fond of jewelry. They also like food (they can't bother to hunt for themselves; that would leave the cave open for theft from the other).

Groond and Moond love good cooking; Groond enjoys reindeer while Moond has a particular taste for bear. They both like sooeeta.

Nobody's sure how long Groond and Moond have been there, but men can't climb high enough to get to them and they can throw a lot of rocks, so it looks like they'll be there for a long time.





Adventure

Groond is missing. Or maybe its Moond (even they loose track every once in a while). His things are in place, there's no sign of a fight. Where could he have gone?

Well, late last night, a lady giant came lookin' for a little lovin', and she found Moond - er, Groond. However, in order to find that out, the player orks and Groond have to go through trolls, dwarves and men. All that to find a love-struck giant.

Great Old Bodalay Mountain

It isn't the tallest mountain in the world (we'll talk about that one later), but it sure has a chance for second place. And at the top of that mountain is the world's oldest bodalay. Living in his cave for (some say) three hundred years, Taldootha (remember him?) lays asleep, dreaming eternally. Orks cannot speak to him, they must sleep in his cave, surrounded by his seven apprentices, letting their lungs fill with strange smoke, and speak to him on the Otherside.

Adventure

Taldootha is very close to death. However, his sleeping self is trapped on the Dreamingside. He needs a group of thraka to travel to the other side of the world and bring his spirit back to his body. The apprentices give the player orks a magic potion that will allow them to do so, but they still have to face many dangers... the least of which is the Great Toad. An elven sorcerer has discovered Taldootha's spirit and wants it for himself. And so the chase is on, both parties looking for the bodalay's sleeping self.

Great Gray Anvil

In the middle of a dense forest sits an anvil made from a gray stone not found anywhere else on Ghurtha. Neither the elves nor the dwarves know of its existence. Thraka have used the anvil for generations (it currently falls in land owned by the Wolf Tribe) to make weapons. Any blade hammered on the Gray Anvil is sharp enough to cut through stone.

Adventure

It's gone. Thwaku by a group of men who stumbled across it. They snatched it up, tied it to a cart and are carrying it back to the Great Wall where it will stay in the clutches of men forever.

Whoever thwaks it back gets to keep it. And don't think you're the only household on the prowl.





Home of the Dancing Downmgaday

A winter home in the middle of a foggy glen. Grass that crunches under your feet, frozen but still green. The sound of laughter and dancing feet. Red lights. Stars that move through the sky as fast as reindeer run.

You've found the home of the dancing downmgaday. They wear white linen and no shoes, even when walking hip deep in snow. Their braided hair falls down, down, down. Their hands are soft and strong. Their voices can squeeze spleens. Every thraka dreams of finding the Dancing Downmgaday. Those that do never return to tell the tale.

Adventure

Oh, come on! If you can't figure out this one for yourself...

Hot Summer Caves

Steam rises up from the caves with a thick, unmistakable smell. The walls are smooth and warm. Deep in the belly of those caves lie hot pools that make an ork want to slip away into the land of dreams.

Orks hate caves, but the Summer Caves are... tolerable.

Adventure

Not only are they tolerable, but they make you drop your guard as well. Every tribe in the area wants to claim the Summer Caves as their own, but keeping them means fighting, and hot springs are just not worth fighting over.

Until recently.

The Coyote Tribe has decided that any ork who wants to bathe in the Summer Caves must pay a toll (a new concept introduced by men). Guards stand at the mouth of the cave, ready to shed blood over the right to use it. They won't let anyone pass, especially those looking to thwak a bath. If anyone does that, it proves they don't have the right to own it.

Iron Lake

Long, long ago, when the world was still beardless, a great iron stone fell from the sky. Some say it fell with the elves. Others say it fell before the elves. Either way, it landed in a lake and made the waters burn and boil. There it stood, simmering like stew for thousands and thousands of years.

Then, one day, orks found it.





Since then, orks have guarded Iron Lake from the other races. It is the only land that no tribe has ever claimed to own: for it belongs to the entire orkum.

The waters of the lake still burn when moonlight falls upon them, burning with a cold, blue fire. A brave ork named Shoolahnook walked into those waters under a full moon once and disappeared. He reappeared the next morning, but his hair was gray and his skin was mowgd. He told his cousins he'd been to the Otherside, speaking with Keethdownmga, Pugg, Bashthraka and Gowthdukah. He said he learned the fate of all orks, but his tongue would turn into spiders if he even whispered the secrets.

Ever since then, Iron Lake has been regarded as a place of mystery and danger. Those who fall asleep at the shoreline wake from strange dreams that leave marks and scars in their skin. Those who drink from the water either go mad or suffer maddening visions of the future. One weaponsmith tried cooling a spearhead in the waters of the lake; the spear burned with an inner blue fire. He was found a week later, his chest open, bleeding and burning, the spear broken at his side... but such stories are not for the weak of heart.

Adventure

Iron Lake is one big symbol for the price of hubris. Its power cannot be controlled or contained by orks. The weak are broken by such power and the strong still suffer for it. Toying with the power of the Lake is not only asking for Trouble, it's calling your Trouble names.

No, check that. It's calling your Trouble's downmga names.

Player orks (or NPC orks) who dabble with the power of the Lake deserve whatever they get. If they approach it with respect, fear and awe, they will likely survive any encounter with it. If they approach with disrespectful cockiness, they'll end up getting burned by blue fire.

Kurdur Crossroads

There's a place where two roads cross. On the south side of those roads is a tree whose branches reach down so low, when the wind blows, its almost as if they're scraping at the ground, trying to dig up whatever might be buried there.

Maybe they are.

An ork is buried at these crossroads, his body soaking in the red hot heat of fire and ash. When he was caught, a small group of thraka went to Dragon Mountain and traded heavily for a favor: they asked the dragon to breathe its flame on seven stones, to ensure those stones would burn forever. Then, they dug a hole under the crossroads, threw in the stones and threw in the ork who sleeps there today.



His name was Kurdur. He murdered his cousins so he could thwak their spirits. He murdered and ate children. He murdered and ate downmga. He murdered and ate anyone who got in his way.

When the Bear Tribe finally caught him, it took two whole hands of thraka to hold him down and bury him. Here. At the crossroads. Where the wind blows through the long branches, making them scrape along the ground as if they were trying to dig up whatever might be buried there.

Adventure

No ork in his right mind sleeps under that tree. No ork in his right mind even comes near that spot. Maybe that's why there's a hole where the grave should be...

Kurdur is stronger, faster and more cunning than any living ork. To say the very least, he's the most dangerous ork that ever lived. Given enough time and trust, he could devour an entire tribe before they knew what happened.

Any tribe at all.

Your tribe.

Long Drop Cliff

If you drop a stone into the great gorge that seems to fall all the way to the other side of the world, and you wait long enough... you'll never hear it hit bottom.

Long Drop Cliff is vast, reaching nearly seven hundred feet across at its widest. It runs almost two miles long. Not even sunlight can reach deep enough to reveal the bottom.

Adventure

Does it go all the way to the Dreamingside? Of course not.

But almost.

How many different kind of nightmares can climb up Long Drop Cliff to reach the Wakingworld? How many orks can climb down its sheer walls to reach the Dreamingworld? If orks ever do need to make it to the otherside, this is at least one place to start.

Long River

"Life is the Long River," Taldoothah once wrote. "It begins smaller than a finger, and ends in a loud and violent rush, flowing out to join the vast, still, deepest waters."

As wide as the Mississippi at its grandest, the Long River runs the length of Ghurtha (at





least, as far as the orks understand it). It twists and turns, but never runs dry. Starting in the remote northern mountains as a tiny trickle, and ending as a raging torrent, flowing out to the ocean, it is a source of some of the greatest ork poetry.

It's also a source of great danger, which is why orks don't partake in boating sports. The rivers of Ghurtha are filled with carnivorous beasts the orks call "pumpa." They range from tiny (as long as your finger) to massive (as big as a man); pumpa grow to the size their environment allows.

They are smart, capable and deadly. Their mouths are filled with thousands of tiny, razor-sharp teeth. They hunt in schools. They communicate with sounds (much like dolphins). Organized, lethal and hungry, orks stay as far away from rivers as possible.

Adventure

The quickest way overland is over water. So, to make things simple, you're at Point A. You need to be at Point B. The only way to get there in time is rafting down the river.

Don't get wet.

Long Winter Glen

Quite simply, it's the best place to spend the winter. Reserved for households without Winter Homes, the Long Winter Glen used to be a place of solace from the harsh months.

Recently, however, the peaceful glen has found more than its share of refugees. As man expands his empire, the dwarves destroy the forests and elves corrupt the land with their sorcery, households and tribes are left without a place to stay. And each season, the once peaceful glen is filled with more homeless households.

Adventure

Your household arrives in the glen... but there's something else already there. A large, carved blue jewel lodged halfway into the ground. It pulses with life. It's warm. Something liquid moves through it. Late at night, you could swear you can hear it breathe.

Is it some kind of elven trap? A dragon's egg – the first in ten thousand years – ready to hatch? A nightmare that dug its way through the world from the otherside?

Sounds like three very possible answers to me.

Mad Moggy

She lives in the hills and never comes down. She eats poolah with the joy a young



thraka finds in his first sip of sooeeta. She has more fingers than teeth... and she only has four fingers.

And she is a complete, raving lunatic.

But there's a reason orks climb the hills, braving trolls and giants to listen to her mad ramblings. Out of the hundreds of false prophecies this old bodalay gives every day, exactly one of them is correct. One a day.

Adventure

A thraka and his reindeer, both bruised and bleeding, ride into your household. "I carry a prophecy from Moggy," he says. "Either I die or your downmga's favorite dies."

"Which is it?" your downmga asks.

He shakes his head. "I don't know. But on my way to tell you, I ran into a family of trolls. They're right behind me. And I think they're bringing cousins..."

The Memory Trees

A circle of trees standing in the center of a petrified forest, the Memory Trees contain the memories of tala from across the generations. Carved into the living flesh of each tree are the stories of brave thraka, noble downmgaday and steadfast downmga. It is one of the largest collections of ork stories in the wold, a treasure beyond compare.

Adventure

Pick a monster... any monster.

The dwarves want to cut the trees down to make scaffolding and supports for a new mine.

The men want to cut them down to build more forts and roads.

The elves want to cut them down because they like breaking things.

Can you save the Memory Trees? You may have to face a harsh truth... in order to save the Trees from the (elves/dwarves/men), you may have to cut them down yourselves. Better to carry them on your back than watch them get carried away.

Mountain of the Dwarven Lords

Their great iron citadels are carved out of the mountains themselves, the stone etched with runes and melded with magical fire and steel. Walkways leading up to the castles only allow one at a time – a safety precaution against invasion. They are taller than the mountains that support them, as if they reach for the sky itself.





Here the dwarven lord-barons sit, locked away in their castles, preparing for invasions that never come, waiting for a god they believe has forsaken them, planning to teach said god a lesson he'll never forget.

Adventure

After seeing an ork Household Spear pierce a breastplate of dwarven steel, a dwarven smith has become obsessed with discovering the secret of ork magic. He's kidnapped a few orks and brought them back to his castle in order to learn their secrets. Of course, one of them is the only blacksmith downmga in the region. The household that saves her wins her favor... and her smithing abilities.

Red Rock

The orks of Red Rock mark themselves with tattoos painted from the dust of the stones that surround their winter home. They're a cocky bunch, for they know a secret recipe for sooeeta that's the envy of every tribe on Ghurtha. Some tribes have been known to trade as many as two hands of reindeer for a single bottle. Their bashdownmga, Suroonah, is slender and beautiful. She was a mighty downgadagay in her time, and she has no plans of laying down her spear any time soon. She leads her thraka into battle, acting as the zhoonthraka, carrying her spear Doomdala ("Scarmaker") with a lusty battlecry that's only matched by her ferocity after battle.

Adventure

A tala from the Red Rock Tribe arrives, announcing that Suroona is on her way with seven bottles of sooeeta. It's obvious she wants something, but what could it be? Your downmga makes preparations; Suroona's appetites are known far and wide.

When the famous bashdownmga arrives, she announces that she's willing to trade the sooeeta for thraka. The best, bravest, handsomest thraka the tribe has to offer: one thraka per bottle. Your bashdownmga's willing to trade for the sooeeta... but thraka?

Suroona has a plan behind all of this. Once she has the best thraka under her control (and once the tribe is good and drunk), she'll unleash an ambush army against your tribe, forcing them to surrender everything.

It's a good plan. Can the captured thraka (no doubt at least a few of them are player orks) stop the plan in time? Or, will the brave thraka left behind (no doubt at least a few of them are player orks) be able to outwit one of the most famous – and ruthless – bashdownmgas in recent memory?

Ruin Forest

The trees of this forest glow with an inner light when the moon shines upon them. You





can hear whispered moans as you move between the trees, as if they were begging for salvation. If you look up, you can see the limbs reach out to each other like bridges spanning a vast crevice. That's because the elves built a city here once, a city among the limbs and branches of the trees. They left the city long ago, but there's one small detail they left behind.

The trees are hungry.

The limbs reach out for any source of life, devour it, and digest it. The plump, red fruits that grow on the trees sometimes contain what the trees can't devour, so don't be surprised if you take a big, juicy bite... and find some teeth.

Adventure

Moving through the forest isn't a pleasant experience. You can hear the whispers of the trees as they try to lure you just a little closer. You can also hear the whimpers of the souls the trees devoured (last week, last month, ten thousand years ago), begging for release.

Give those souls what they want. Give them what they deserve.

Burn it, baby.

Burn it down to the ground.

Singing Forest

Another clever elven invention (a little less carnivorous than the Ruin Forest), the trees of the Singing Forest are mostly hollow, and when wind blows through them, they sound like voices. The leaves are razor sharp, making them perfect reeds. Dangling branches chime in perfect harmony. It's a beautiful sound, and if you listen long enough, you'll fall to sleep to the magnificent sounds of the trees.

Adventure

Want to know how long it takes for the roots to reach up from the ground and pull you under once you've fallen asleep? Try minutes.

Sleepy Swamp

They say dwarves don't sleep. They also say dwarves traded their sleep here, in this swamp. The bargain they made took their sleep away, but it gave them something else. That something else is a secret you'll have to learn on your own.

Adventure

But downmga know another secret about Sleepy Swamp: a root grows here that makes a



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perfect sedative. Of course, you have to go deep into the swamp to fetch it, avoid the trolls who also know about the root (they rub it under their fingernails, making a scratch from a troll a very dangerous thing) and guard it well.

One more complication: much of the swamp floor is covered in tar, making retrieving the root a doubly sticky situation.

Spider Forest

Some believe the spiders of this forest can communicate without speaking, throwing their thoughts like spears. The truth of the matter is much more simple. Spiders can communicate by vibrating their webs. They pick up those vibrations with the tiny hairs on their bodies.

Doesn't make it any less creepy, does it?

The spiders in this forest are about as large as a man's hand, sometimes a little bigger. They can leap up to twenty feet. The webs they spin can hold an ork if he hits them at the wrong angle. They hunt in packs, live in families and understand the eco-balance of their forest. They are selective in their killing and share a captive with the rest of the family.

Men have tried to burn down spider forest for the last ten years. Their success rate is margin; only about fifteen percent of spider forest has gone up in flames.

Although orks cannot communicate with the spiders, they do respect them and stay out of their forest. If they must move through it, they usually bring along something (much bigger and fatter) to leave behind. The spiders recognize the offering and leave the orks alone as they pass through, taking whatever they leave behind.

Adventure

One of the men has decided it's up to him to get rid of Spider Forest. He has enough manpower to keep a sustained fire burning. He has enough pitch to make that fire. He has more than enough torches to start that fire.

Now, the question is, should your tribe help the spiders? Are they even intelligent enough to recognize you're offering them help? Or, will they assume you're with the men and attack?

Aw, who cares about some spiders, anyway? After all, it's not like men burn down ork villages and winter homes. It's not your problem, right?

The Standing Stone of Turdoon

In the middle of a fast-moving river is a flat, grey-black circular (magnetic) stone.





Around the smooth rim of that stone are runes that no tala or bodalay have been able to decipher. They don't look like elf runes, nor do they look like dwarven carvings. For a few hundred years, orks left the stone alone. But then one tala, Turdoon, got it into his head to fiddle with it. It took him many years to discover what he did, but in the end, it became one of the orkum's most useful advanced scouting tools.

Standing on the stone is difficult to say the least. It's only thirty-three inches in diameter, perfectly smooth and wet from the water rushing about it. However, if you stand on the stone from sunrise to sunset (12 hours), you can demand a vision from the stone from anywhere in the world. The vision usually lasts about ten seconds before it fades. Sometimes the vision shows the present, sometimes the past, and sometimes (albeit rarely) the future.

Adventure

Any vision the stone grants is an adventure hook in itself – especially visions of the future. An ork sees his best friend's death. A dowerga sees her children captured and enslaved by men. A tala sees his tribe ambushed by trolls. A bodalay sees the end of the world. All these visions provide the main ingredients for plot: 1) a goal (prevent the future), and 2) a motive (stop the future). That, of course, begs the question: can you stop the future?

Summer Well

The Summer Well lies in a peaceful green patch of forestland. The water of the well glows with golden sunlight, no matter the time of day. Even water carried from the well continues to glow with a golden light (making it a prime lighting source for underground or midnight adventures). However, like most wells, the water isn't endless. So many tribes have learned of the well's secret that the waters may run dry very soon. And if men discover the well...

Let's examine that, shall we?

Adventure

Men discover the well (or dwarves, if you like). They bring in teams to pull up as much water as possible in as little time as possible (they don't want those pesky orks messing this up).

However, what the men don't know is a secret cavern leads down into the underground spring. You and a few others have to find a way to stop the men from thwaking all the water, even if it means thwak the water yourself.



Swamp of the Bone Witch

"The Bone Witch" is a legend downmga tell their children to make them stay in bed. "If you go wandering around at night, the bone witch will get you."

Unfortunately, it's not just a legend.

The bone witch lives in a swamp not far from ork lands. During the day, she looks like an ordinary downmga, but by night, she slips out of her skin and flies through the night sky, all bloody muscle and bone. She hides her skin during the night, then when returning to it in the morning whispers very quietly:

"Skin, skin, let me in. You know me, let me in."

The bone witch has been known to sneak into households as a downmga, then steal small children. She eats them whole, an act that makes her look pregnant as she digests her grisly meal. When she's done with the child, her stomach recedes and she goes looking for another one.

Adventure

When a child is stolen by the bone witch, a tribe usually counts them as lost. After all, she is not easy prey. The bone witch cannot be killed by spears (magical spears hurt her, but do not kill her). The only way to kill the bone witch is to find her skin while she's flying around and salt it. The skin shrivels and cannot protect her from the sun. If she's not wearing her skin during the day, she's as mortal as anyone else.

Finding where she hid her skin is next to impossible. But that's your downmga's child she's got, now isn't it? And what wouldn't you do for your downmga?

Tallest Mountain in the World

Here is where Pugg found the Tree of Troubles. Here is where he thwaku the giant to carry him up the mountain. Here is where he learned that no ork is bigger (or smarter) than Trouble.

Adventure

Remember the giant that helped Pugg up and down the mountain? Well, he's back, and the elves are very interested in him for some reason. So interested, in fact, they're willing to send out search parties to hunt him down and bring him back alive.

Now then, what tribe *wouldn't* help the giant that carried Pugg? Besides, the reason elves want him is because he's got something from the Tallest Mountain in the World...



Thraka of Two Spears

Long ago, a thraka named Doolay won a prize from a stranger. Little did she know how heavy that prize was.

She met another thraka on the road while traveling with her household. He was clothed in dark robes, his face hidden from the sunshine. In his hand, he held a spear of such beauty, no ork could look upon it directly. "This spear," said the stranger ork "is for the most worthy thraka in the world."

"How do we know who the most worthy thraka is?" Doolay asked.

"The one who can take it from me is the most worthy."

And so, the household took turns trying to best the stranger, and one by one, they fell to the ground and did not get back up. When it came time for Doolay to test herself against the stranger, she paused.

"Must I fight you for the spear?" she asked.

The stranger shook his head.

"What can I offer you in exchange?"

"The thraka who carries the spear also carries its weight. If you are willing to take its weight from me, I shall allow you to take the spear as fair trade."

Doolay extended her hands and took the spear. The moment it left the stranger's hands, he dropped down dead.

The spear was made of the finest wood, carved with intricate runes. The head of the spear shone like a star and its balance was perfect. She carried it wherever she went, earning herself the nickname "Doolay of the Two Spears."

But with the beauty and power of the spear came its weight: Doolay could not die. Nor could she be defeated in combat (personal or otherwise). However, everywhere she went, she found violence. And no matter how well she spoke, no matter how she tried to win peace, Doolay found her years drenched in blood.





Her winter home is here, nestled between two forests. No troll bothers her winter home. No giant, either. Men occasionally try to make Trouble, but they all end up on the sharp end of Doolay's spear.

An elf tried to cause Trouble once. He took one look at Doolay and one look at her spear and left her alone.

One would think Doolay would be happy to carry such a weight. One would think...

Adventure

The weight Doolay carries is terrible. The spear not only grants her invincibility, it also brings her Trouble. Death surrounds her every moment of every day. Orks who would normally treat her well view and speak to her with contempt. She can't make friends, for that requires respect. The only thing she can earn is fear.

She sees it in the eyes of every thraka, every downga and every tala. Bodalay flee from her when they see her. She's the most powerful ork in the world. And the loneliest.

But not for long.

She left her tribe yesterday, set on a single goal: to find someone worthy enough to carry the weight of her spear. Obviously, she wasn't the right choice for the job. Maybe there's someone out there with the will and determination required to carry it. Maybe she'll wander the world forever, looking for the right thraka. All she wants now is to find peace, and there's only one way to do that.

Trouble Well

An army of a thousand orks died here, their blood oozing into the ground and the waters that ran deep under the soil. Trees grew up from the battlefield, their limbs long and twisted. They say something guards the well in the center of the field, but there's no life to be seen for miles around.

Only the brave (or mowgd brained) drink from the well. Which one are you?

Adventure

Right now, one of your thraka is reading this text. In his head, he's thinking what a great idea it would be to drink from the Trouble Well. I mean, after all, it's like eating a thousand stomachs, isn't it? What a great idea. Don't you wish you'd thought of it?

And as soon as he does drink from that well, he'll bring all that Trouble back with him. And guess who gets to carry the excess?



Weeping River

It starts in a cave, high in the mountains. It starts in the home of Derthoolowin, a dragon of no small consequence. You see, a few thousand years ago, Derthoolowin tried to eat an elf. That elfen lord got stuck in the dragon's throat and has been there ever since.

He's choking the dragon, nearly killing him with pain. Derthoolowin can't move, can't eat, can hardly breathe. All he can do is weep for the pain.

Sooner or later, something has to give. Either the elf goes down into the dragons stomach, or the dragon hacks up the elf like a hairball. And when that happens, Keethdownga save anyone within forty miles of the place.

Adventure

Your Winter Home isn't too far off from Dertholowin's cave or the river he cried into existence hundreds of years ago. It's the only salt water river on mainland Ghurtha and also is rumored to have powerful healing powers.

But recently, the river has run low, coming close to drying up. What could that mean? It could mean the elf has made his way out of the dragons throat, or it could mean he was swallowed down into the dragon's stomach.

Either way, someone has to go up there and find out.

And guess who's job that is?

PART TWO: Monsters

Two Warnings

The first is for players.

If you read this section, you'll know nearly everything there is (for an ork) to know about the monsters of Ghurtha. If you're the kind of player who enjoys knowing everything there is to know about a game, spoiling the joy of surprise and suspense, please feel free to continue reading. If you're the kind of player who can put such knowledge out of his head while playing and not take advantage of "out of character knowledge," please feel free to continue reading. If you're the kind of player who likes





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to discover things on his own, you'd better stop reading now.

And now, a word of warning for Game Masters.

The monsters in this chapter are *dangerous*. If left to their own devices, they'd kill every last damn ork they could could their hands / talons / claws / teeth on. Remember: if a monster's Virtues and Skills are *double* those of your player orks, it probably means that monster is one tough cookie. Most of these beasts can handle an entire Household on their own. Keep that in mind before you decide sending an entire family of trolls against your players is a good idea.

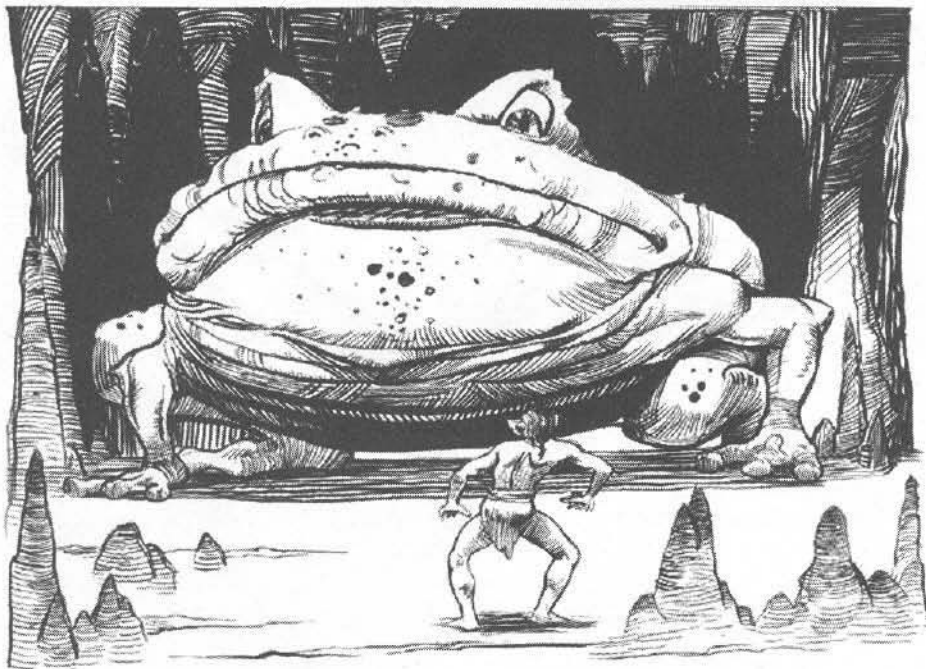
Some monsters have Skills. Some don't. If you want your monsters to have skills, realize the consequences of doing so: you get skilled monsters. The choice is up to you.

Rules

Instead of placing the rules for these beasts in a separate chapter, I've included them here, next to their descriptions. That way, all the information you need on any monster is in one place.

Natural weapons (such as Claws, Teeth, etc.) are listed as if they were weapons like swords, knives and spears. Any natural weapons serve as such in terms of rolling dice. In other words, if a monster has a 5 Strength and 2 Claws, those claws serve as Weapon Dice, acting exactly as if they were a spear, sword or dagger, employing the same rules.

And now, without any further ado... the monsters of Ghurtha.







Dragons

Appearing: 1

Virtues

Courage 8

Cunning 4

Strength 10

Prowess 10

Endurance 12 (acts as armor)

Special Abilities

Dragon's Breath: 10 Dice

Claws: Strength +2

of Attacks: 4

Dragons do not get penalties for fighting groups.

Dragons are ancient creatures, born when the world was formed from the mists of Nothing. It is said that they are the spawn of the Old Gods, a story that many tell and Dragons never deny. They speak and write their own language, are very capable sorcerers and live in caves high in the mountains or deep under the ground. Occasionally, an ork hero has made his way into a Dragon cave for advice, but never to hunt the beast. Only humans are so vainglorious.

Despite their size, dragons small wings can carry them aloft. They are either immortal or so long-lived that the few that saw the birth of the world are still around to tell the tale. They are also able to spit a liquid that men mistake for fire, but this "liquid fire" more resembles a thick, viscous fluid than actual fire. A dragon regurgitates the fluid from its stomach after eating stones, then spits the fluid on its victim. It is so hot, it burns skin and melts stone. Only a few objects can actually hold the fluid – one of them being a flask made from a dragon's anatomy. The other is gold.

Dragons value gold over almost anything else; it's like honey for orks. When a dragon eats gold, it enters a kind of "waking sleepiness" for days. Devouring gold also allows dragons to use their unique kind of sorcery. Dragons are capable of seeing both the future and the past, making them powerful oracles.

Dragons enjoy their solitude, and not for entirely selfish reasons. Whenever a dragon





enters the company of another of its kind, the two enter a kind of furious madness and attack each other with brutal and bloody frenzy until one of them is dead. Dragons cannot explain this behavior; at least they won't explain it to orks. No one knows how, or if, dragons mate.

Orks do not visit dragons regularly, but when they do, they always bring gifts of gold. Even with gifts of humble gratitude, a dragon may eat the ork and his gold just out of spite. Within a dragon's lair are many treasures – most of them objects from human heroes who thought that their virtue and Courage alone were enough to conquer the foul wyrm (the human word for "dragon"). Dragons have been known to trade their trophies for gold, although only the bravest, most Cunning – or most foolish – orks ever brave a dragon's lair.

Shtoontee

Appearing: 1-100

Virtues

Courage 3

Cunning 2

Strength 4

Prowess 5

Endurance 5

of Actions: 2-4

Special Abilities

Skills: Sword +4

Sword (4 WV), Armor (4 Steel)

Shtoontee live in the mountains behind great walls made out of stone, iron and steel. Their average lifespan is anywhere between three hundred and six hundred years. They grow long, thick beards that they braid in pretty patterns. The tallest dwarf in the world stands at four feet, while the average is around three. However, dwarves are nearly as wide as they are tall, with an average shoulder span of around two and a half to three feet.

Dwarf noses are huge, taking up most of the dwarf face. Their eyes are small and shiny, like a shark's eyes. Dwarven eyesight is poor in daylight and perfect in moonlight.



Their sense of smell is odd; they can smell a diamond at fifty paces, but can't smell their own stink to save their lives.

Dwarves don't bathe. They think the dirt keeps them attached to their god who sleeps in the ground. To make matters worse, dwarves wear one set of armor wherever they go. They never take it off. It all has to do with an obsession that started a long, long time ago...

The Perfect Warrior

For dwarves, Paradise is a place of perfection, home to the the Washtung ("icon"): the Perfect Ideas. The Perfect King, the Perfect Father, the Perfect Mother, the Perfect Lover, the Perfect Sword, the Perfect Citadel, all reside in Paradise. Dwarves believe that these ideas are reflected in their dreams, but they are corrupted by contact with imperfect creatures – namely, the dwarves themselves.

Therefore, dwarven culture seeks to recreate the Washtung on Ghurtha. Carpenters spend centuries perfecting their craft, blacksmiths spend their entire lives trying to make the perfect sword, and musicians seek the honor of one day stumbling across the perfect song.

For members of the ruling caste, the icon of the warrior is the most noble achievement. (Coincidentally, the dwarf word for warrior is "shtanday", which sounds remarkably like "shtoontee," the ork word for "runt.") Every moment of every day, a dwarf devotes himself to coming as close to that icon as dwarvenly possible. He never removes his armor and wears his weapon at his side at all times.

And for dwarves, that weapon is the sword.

The Riddle of the Sword

Dwarven warriors devote themselves to studying something they call "the Riddle of the Sword". Like all devotions, the sword presents its student with many riddles. Which is superior: the left-handed or right-handed grip? What is the best defensive stance? Is there a perfect, unblockable thrust? All of these questions (and many, many more) are parts of the Great Riddle that dwarven warriors live with each and every day of their lives.

As their studies progress, shtanday reach levels of understanding. However, the Perfect Warrior must guard against laziness ("the Great Enemy") which can creep into his bones with the stealth of assassins. Simply maintaining his current level of skill is a failure all unto itself. No, a dwarf must seek to better himself at all costs – even at the cost of his own life.





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Steel & Advantage



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Steel

Dwarves discovered how to mine iron centuries ago, but dwarves have discovered an important step in refining that process.

The reason orks haven't figured out how to make iron is because they're still using wood fires. In order to properly process iron, a coal fire must be used. Coal fires are much hotter than wood fires, and allow ironworking. Unfortunately, the carbon from coal also makes the iron brittle. Dwarven smiths tried removing the carbon, but that makes the iron too soft. Finally, dwarven engineers figured the proper mixture of iron and carbon, thus creating a much finer product: steel.

Recently, a smith by the name of Bruner Ban Brunerban developed a method of making steel that's even more efficient. He uses a bellows filled with ice to blow cold air over the iron while its in its molten state. The cold oxygen combined with the carbon makes the molten iron even hotter. The timing must be perfect, but when he's done, he produces the finest steel any dwarf has ever seen.

Advantage

Dwarves, even more than humans, realize the value of commodity. Steel is not just a technological advance, it is an advantage. Whenever you have what someone else wants, you have advantage over them. Therefore, precious metals such as gold, silver and platinum are all advantageous to have simply for the fact that others want them. Granted, these materials are nearly useless onto themselves (wait 'till dwarves stumble across the concept of electrical current), but because people want them, dwarves must have them.

This understanding influences nearly every aspect of dwarven culture. (Elves also practice gaining advantage, although they do not attribute it to anything as mundane as metals.)

Dwarves make coins out of nearly every precious metal (gold, silver, platinum) but they do not make coins out of steel. Steel is too precious a commodity to melt it down into coins. Instead, dwarves keep it in long, slender bars.

Government

There is no dwarven high monarch. Instead, each dwarven cities has its own "Lord-Baron" who govern their cities according to dwarven law. The dwarven Code of Law is ancient and revered, unmovable and unmerciful. "Eye for an eye" is the word of the day. Even the Lord-Baron isn't above the Code of Laws. If a grievance is brought against him, the Lord-Baron of another city must be brought in to mediate the trial.



Doom

It is said that every life is a story. The dwarves say that story was known at the beginning of the world, and life is just the telling of the tale. This concept, that every destiny has already been written and is as inevitable as every sunset, is what dwarves call "doom".

They believe that the story of the world is already known, and every living creature is merely a puppet of his doom. Sooner or later, no matter how fast you run, no matter how well you dodge it, your doom will catch up to you. Even your efforts to avoid your doom were foretold in the great story.

The great dwarf philosopher, Gurlam Gurlamsson of House Gurlam, was one of the most influential voices in establishing the dwarf psychology toward doom. He wrote:

"The problem with doom is simple: all action is already known. That means all suffering is already known, all injustice is already known, every crime, every lie, every death, every lost hand, every butchered child. The Author knew these things, knew the suffering he would cause and wrote it down anyway."

("The Author," by the way, is the best translation for the dwarf word for "God".)

In other words, everything you think, feel and choose is not up to you: it's already been determined by a third party.

Right now, as you and I speak, there's a dwarf who's dying from a poisoned liver because he can't stop drinking. He can hardly breathe because his lungs are filled with cancer from the pipe he smoked since the age of twelve. He doesn't even know what cancer is. Both the cancer and the liver disease came from The Author.

A dwarf sits in the dirt, gibbering and drooling. He lost his mind because he watched his wife, son and daughter ruthlessly murdered by men. He could have done something, but he was a coward, and he hid while he watched them beg for mercy. He'll never recover. He'll wander the world with only a cracked shell of a brain and die from dehydration. Those men were sent by The Author.

Each and every disaster is caused by The Author. Every moment of misery is caused by The Author. Every ache in your bones, every failure of character, every moment of weakness that led to you losing a friend, family member or loved one was a direct and deliberate choice.

Knowing this, the dwarven race decided to let The Author know they aren't very happy with the story he decided to tell. And so they complain, and they complain and they complain. They know it won't do any good. They know The Author couldn't care less what his characters have to say to him.





But what else can they do?

Anatomy

Dwarven sight is poor and their smell is worse – except when it comes to metals; dwarves can smell precious stones and materials from a mile away (that's an exaggeration; really only five hundred yards). Dwarven skin is as tough as leather and their teeth can bite through soft stones.

Dwarves are tough. Their bones are thick, their muscles hard and their center of gravity low. A dwarf can – with some effort – lift four times his own weight (dwarves typically weigh three hundred to five hundred pounds).

Finally, dwarves do not feel pain. This is both a boon and a hindrance. Because they can't sense injury, dwarves must spend moments of every day checking themselves for injuries. Even a tiny scratch, if unchecked, could lead to serious infection and death.







Ahlvsees

Appearing: 1-1000

Virtues

Courage: Your highest PC +3

Cunning: Your highest PC +3

Strength: Your highest PC +3

Prowess: Your highest PC +3

Endurance: Your highest PC +3

Attacks per Round: Highest PC +3

Special Abilities

Armor and weapons: Anything short of dwarven steel

They stand six feet tall, slender and perfect. Their eyes are the shape and color of almonds and their breath is as sweet as honey. They have perfect teeth, perfect eyes, perfect fingers. Their sorcery is beyond orks' capacity of understanding and their power is only matched by their cruelty.

These are the elves. Creatures of such might, they can destroy armies, nations, even worlds if the fancy takes them. But they are not native to the world of orks, dwarves and men. They came here a long time ago, and they are eager to leave. However, certain measures must be taken first. Three things must be achieved before they can leave:

The destruction of the men, the destruction of the dwarves, and the destruction of the orks.

The Aelvendroonalvreensheeloodadanan

Elves do not have "anatomy" like other creatures. Like everything else in their world, the bodies they inhabit are creations of magic. Elves are creatures of energy living in bodies fashioned to their liking. They do this by capturing bodies they favor, then using magic to perfect that body to the ideal image. This is why elves resemble humans; dwarves and orks are simply too ugly. Elves capture humans, eliminate their souls (see below) and warp the flesh and bone until they're satisfied with the shape. Then, they inhabit the body for as long as it lasts – usually a thousand years. When the body's flesh is worn out, they capture another body and begin the process again.



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Anatomy (or lack thereof)

However, the spell elves use to transform the human body also makes the flesh stronger. Elven flesh is tough like thick hide while remaining as soft and subtle as silk. Their bodies are also fast. Most organic creatures have to carry around heavy flesh, while the bodies of elves can move with the speed of thought. Elves' perception is also beyond the limits of flesh. Elves do not rely on sight, sound or smell, but a magical intuition that acts almost like a radar. Elves are aware of everything that surrounds them in a 360 degree radius.

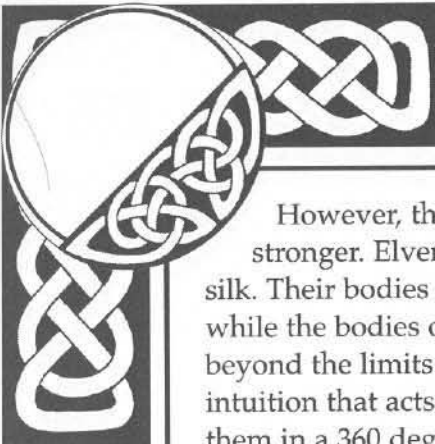
The elven body does not need to have nourishment to sustain itself; the energy of the elf keeps the body fresh and active. However, elves must eat, and they can only find nourishment in the souls of living creatures. Fortunately (for the rest of life on the planet), elves only need to eat once a year (see Elven Calendar, below). Unfortunately (for the rest of the planet), elves enjoy eating, and do so whenever they can.

An elf can be killed, but not by mundane means. Destroying the body is not enough; his spirit must be disrupted. This can only be accomplished in one way: with a weapon made from the meteor found at Iron Lake. The Iron Lake meteor, like the elves, is not from this dimension, but from their own. It arrived as they did, through a dimensional portal, and has irradiated the area with its energy. Any weapon made from the iron found in the meteor can harm, and even kill, an elven lord.

The word elves use to describe themselves is *ælvendroonalvreensheeloodadannan*. For convenience, we'll continue to use the ork word. The elves found in Ghurtha are a single household cast out of their own universe by an eldritch vendetta. The world they came from is a hotbed of political intrigues and machinations between warring households that span millennia. These elves were on the losing end of one of those machinations.

They were trapped here many thousands of years ago, only able to return when the stars were in a specific alignment. Unfortunately, when that alignment came, the spell went wrong. A large portion of the planet was ripped up and thrown into the atmosphere while the area the elves colonized was blasted into black sand and glass. The "magical radiation" (see Elven Sorcery, below) that remained made the region completely uninhabitable for any form of life... except elves.

The error not only transformed the region, but the sorcerers as well: the next time the stars would be in the proper configuration would be one hundred thousand years. With the realization that they were trapped on an alien planet with no hope of seeing





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"And now, they want to blow it all up."



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home, the elven race sank into a deep despair from which they never quite recovered.

Many thousands of years later, the elves are still the melancholy, dispirited and decadent people they've always been. The elves have seen it all. They've played political games against their siblings, turning allies into enemies, then turning enemies into allies, and back again and back again. They've held great tournaments of blood with thousands of men, orks and dwarves fighting for their lives just for the chance of pleasing the populace, for the slim chance of mercy from the crowd. They've watched the birth, life and death of hundreds of nations and peoples. They've created life. They've destroyed life. They've done it all.

And now, they want to blow it all up.

Culture

Every day is a new opportunity to be rid of an enemy.

– Elf Proverb

A quick look at elven religion will explain much of elven culture.

Long, long ago, the universe was created by a single deity whose name cannot be spoken. The servants of this deity were tall, beautiful and perfect. They loved their god and served him in all ways. Then, one day, he commanded them to create life. The servants created the elves. Unfortunately, the elves didn't quite come out the way god wanted, so he got frustrated and went away.

Immediately, the servants began bickering amongst themselves, throwing blame at anyone who got in their way. But it didn't take long for them to figure out who was really responsible for the god's departure... the elves.

The servants of this god grew angry with the elves (after all, it was their fault the god left in the first place) and decided to make them pay. Did they torture the elves for untold millennia? No. Nothing so simple. Instead, they gave the elves unlimited power and put them at the top of the world. Instead of torturing the elves, their newfound gifts allowed them to torture themselves.

And so began the elven culture we know today. Elves have everything they could ever want. They have immortality and unlimited power... at a price.

Each household devotes itself to one of the servants (called *Ældandoovrushtalen*, but we'll just call them *Ældran*, eh?) taking it aboard as a kind of patron. The household serves the *Ældran*, destroying the mortal servants of its own enemies: the other *Ældran*.

The *Ældran* are in the same boat as the elves. They're immortal, all-powerful and very,



very bored. And so, they use the elves as pawns in a great game that spans thousands of generations. The elves know this – some even secretly plot a way to overthrow the Ældran – and don't really care. After all, they have everything they could ever want. Most elves serve the Ældran without question... although some secretly seek a way to overthrow the Ældran and usurp their position as second most powerful beings in the universe. After all, if god does return, won't he be pleased to see how his little creation usurped its creator? Won't he be pleased?

Won't he?

For elves believe that god will come back some day. What he'll do when he returns in anyone's guess.

Strength and Weakness

A few million years ago (who's counting?) a young elf rose up from the nobility and claimed he had found the Creator's Lost Truth. Life wasn't about ambition and politics, it was about forgiveness and serenity. It's about introspection and being better than what's expected of you. He said, "When your enemy strikes you, turn the other cheek." He explained that passive resistance was the method to communicate this truth. "If our enemies see that we are unwilling to fight, they will become consumed with our cause and join us. The brutal beauty of watching an elf refuse to fight his enemy will stir the people's souls. They will see that we are willing to bleed to prove that we are right, and they will join us!"

They caught this lunatic, hung him on a tree and that was pretty much the end of that.

Elven society is not based on any kind of primitive "good and evil" beliefs. Instead, elves believe in two entirely different standards: Strength and Weakness.

All vice comes from Weakness. The reason you don't accomplish everything you want is because of Weakness. Think about it. Think about all the people you know who say, "I just don't have the time to exercise," or "I just don't have the time to go back to school and finish my degree." They say this, of course, while they watch television, or play video games or indulge in some other pointless recreation.

That is Weakness.

Think of all the times you could have gotten away with something, but your conscience kicked you in the pants. "No," it said. "That's not the right thing to do."

That is Weakness.

Think of all the people you've met who say, "You know, I've always wanted to be a (insert dream profession here)..." and then their voice trails off as their eyes look





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Thou shall not kill. Why?



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dreamily to the stars. "Well, why didn't you?" you ask. "Oh, I don't know," they answer.

This is Weakness.

Think of every attractive girl (or boy) you couldn't muster the courage to ask out.

Weakness.

Think of every boss who ever chewed you out and you just stood there and took it because you "aren't very good at confrontations".

Weakness.

Think of everything you wished you could do, but you didn't because your gut instinct told you that it just wasn't safe, or ethical, or moral.

Weakness.

The people who actually accomplish something in the world do so because they are Strong. They aren't afraid of failure. They aren't afraid of being yelled at. They aren't afraid of confrontation. They aren't afraid of rejection.

They aren't afraid of getting what they want.

This is Strength.

The elves revere Strength. It gives them what they want. So much so, in fact, that elven culture has no Code of Laws. None. Not a single law to break. Not a single law to uphold. Why?

Because laws are the tools of the Weak to protect them from the Strong.

Think about it.

Thou shall not steal. Why? Because I'm too weak to keep the things I own by myself, so I need to have a law that protects me from someone who's stronger than me and can take my stuff away.

Thou shall not lie. Why? Because I'm weak and I don't have any courage and I'm not very good at conversations and other people are so much better at lying than I am and I want to know when someone's lying to me because I can't quite tell because I'm a pudding-for-a-spine person and I need something to watch over me.

Thou shall not kill. Why? Because I'm weak and I can't protect myself and I need to invent some kind of higher power to enforce this rule because if I don't, the Strong are going to kill me and take what I have and I just don't have the will to take a life, even if it means someone's going to take mine.



It all comes down to will. What are you willing to do?

Are you willing to steal from your enemy? He's willing to do it to you.

Are you willing to lie to your enemy? He's willing to do it to you.

Are you willing to kill your enemy?

Think about every historical figure you've ever known who's said, "Why don't we just all get along?" What happened to them?

Shot. Stabbed. Beaten to death. Hung on a tree.

Every success is a story of someone who had Strength. Maybe it's the Strength to live off rice and ramen every day, writing until your fingers bleed, writing until your perfected your craft, keeping every rejection letter as a trophy until you finally got that big break that only came because you had the Strength to stick it out. (His name is Stephen King, by the way.)

Or maybe its the businessman who goes to Vegas with his company's payroll, walks up to the roulette wheel, and puts the whole thing on black for the 50/50 chance that he'll be able to pay the bills this month. (That's the founder of Fed-Ex.)

It all comes down to one simple concept:

The Strong eat the Weak.

(By the way, it is because elves understand this concept so well that orks scare the hell out of them.)

Society

As mentioned above, elves do not have any kind of legal system or code. What you can get away with is what you can get away with. But, an elf doesn't just walk up to an enemy in broad daylight and slash his throat. Such an action has consequences. After all, that elf has allies.

So, in short, you could say the only "elven law" is, "Don't make an enemy you can't kill".

The society of the elves is based on dynastic lineage. Technically, a single monarch who passes his throne to his first-born child rules elven society. Elven procreation is a lengthy, boring magical ritual that has nothing to do with any kind of sexual contact. However, it is a very painful and necessary process; an elf can die if it does not create children. What's worse, the parent cannot simply kill its child. An elf child is born with many (but not all) of its parent's memories, experiences and capabilities. While this can make a child sympathetic to its parent's causes, it's also born with all the spite and





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Secret Treaties



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hatred the parent carries. And, let's face it, how many carbon copies of yourself do *you* want walking around?

Elves in Ghurtha, however, do not follow such an ordered structure. Instead, the kingdom is divided into many families, each declaring themselves ruler of the world. They spend all their time building monuments to themselves, throwing lavish parties of extravagance and plot the downfalls of their relatives. The members of each family are trained in sorcery, personal combat and poison. They're trained to deal with any contingency, with any manner of enemy.

While households practice ruthless warfare on each other, there is one factor that keeps them in line: treaties. In a society where lying is the standard and a stab in the back is only a matter of time, an elf lord's promise goes a long way. And so, elven households keep secret treaties with each other, promises to come to each other's aid in times of danger. It is because of these treaties that households aren't always at war. When an elven household makes war on another, it really doesn't know how many enemies it's really taking on.

Households have been known to break treaties, but such an act is a dangerous one. After all, if you break faith with one treaty, it invalidates any other treaties you've made.

"I'm sorry, Lord Donadanallanon, but you broke faith with the Cuchaldrandoondanan House. I'm afraid I cannot honor our own treaty. How will I know you won't do the same with me."

Or,

"I'm sorry, Lord Uthardrenndandalor, but you broke faith with House Balintanindaninor with whom I held a treaty. I'm afraid I cannot honor both, so I must break faith with the one whose word means less than nothing."

It's tough being an elf lord.

Sorcery & Elven Mortality

Elves are capable of nearly anything. Their powers come from the gods (or, at least his servants) and are limited only by the imagination. There is a price for using their magic, however. It seems that elven magic leaves a kind of "fallout" that eats flesh. The more they use their magic, the more thin, pale and sickly they become. Soon enough, they must find a new body to replace the sick, diseased one their sorcery burned out.

And this is where elves are vulnerable.

If an elven body dies while the elf is still within it, the energy has nowhere to go. If



there isn't a proper vessel available, the elf's "soul" (if it has such a thing) dissipates into nothing.

This is why poison is such a popular weapon among the elves. It's easy to put into food and drink and kills the body quickly, leaving the victim little time to prepare a new host body. Also, the older a vessel is, the quicker the poison works.

Ghanta

Appearing: 1 or 2

Virtues

Courage 1 or 2

Cunning 1

Strength 10

Prowess 4

Endurance 10

of Attacks: 2

Special Abilities

Armor: None

Weapons: Trees (WV 4), Rocks (WV 1-5), Fist (WV 3)

The typical giant stands nearly four orks high (twenty-four feet on average) and two orks wide (six feet on average). Giants also have only a single eye in the center of their foreheads. While they are very large, giants are not very bright. They are also prone to fits (epilepsy) and severe bleeding (anemia). About ten percent of the giant population are sterile hermaphrodites.

Giants are the result of cruel elven experimentation. Centuries of genetic manipulation and magical contamination have made giants what they are. The vast majority of them are insane, inbred and highly violent. There are isolated tribes of giants that have maintained a small degree of sanity, however. These civilized giants generally get along with the ork race. Giants as a whole are not very accomplished hunters (they're just too big and noisy), so many ork tribes hunt for them in exchange for protection from larger threats. Each giant typically eats seventy pounds of food a day. This is mostly vegetation, but occasionally (with a little ork assistance), they dine on meats as well.

A strange side-effect of the giant's history with the elves is their immunity to elven





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magic. Sorcery has little or no effect on giants, a fact that many elven lords have learned the hard way. While ork shaman are quick to share this secret with their cousins, the word hasn't gotten all the way across the world quite yet.

Giants use large branches, small trees and large rocks for weapons. Their skill is great, but they are still rather clumsy when throwing their weight around.

Giant culture is rather simple. Each tribe consists of anywhere between five and ten giants. Quite confused about the notion of religion, giants worship no gods. The giant tribe protects its members against threats such as men, dwarves and elves, and has little trouble dispatching creatures such as trolls.

Manoo

Virtues

Courage 2-4

Cunning 2-4

Strength 2-4

Prowess 2-4

Endurance 2-4

of Attacks: 1-3

Special Abilities

None. Humans are average in every way.

Swords (WV: 3), Armor (Iron 2)

The armies of Empire of the Sun (Solarians) move across Ghurtha like a wildfire. Generals conquer enemy armies every day, pushing orks further back into the mountains – right into the territory of the dwarves. They capture trolls, giants and ogres (as well as orks) for their gladiatorial games, forcing them to fight to the death. All for the enjoyment of the Emperor and his subjects.

While the Solarian Empire looks to be at the height of its glory, the center has begun to rot. Ten years ago, the Emperor survived an assassination attempt involving belladonna; he hasn't been the same since. Some in his court speculate the Emperor may be mad... but no-one speculates too loudly.

And so, for ten years, the Empire's wealth has gone to feed the stomach of the army as



it pushes further into the world, seeking gold, silver and iron. The Emperor feels that if he can steal the dwarves' secret of steel, he can challenge the power of the elves. The Senate has advised the Emperor against such an action... quietly, of course.

And as the Emperor's madness stills the senate, the military continues growing in strength and influence. The richest citizens in the Empire are its officers, and the loyalty of the men they command is shifting. A great change is on the horizon, and only a few can see it.

The Sun's Children

The mythology of men surrounds All-Father Sun who created the world and all its inhabitants. Of course, this story met a severe challenge when the armies of the new-born Empire met dwarves, halflings and orks (what happened when they met the elves is a different story for another time). Men panicked, and in that panic, they destroyed the race orks call "Rhuntee" (more on them below). The Iron Citidels of the dwarves proved too formidable for the armies of man to assault, and orks were too quick and clever to capture (they simply ran away). However, man's conquests disrupted tribal migratory patterns, forcing orks to fight for their land. Unfortunately, the armies of the Sun were too much for many tribes, and they were wiped out completely.

(A famous human tale tells of an ork army that inexplicably laid down its weapons and walked away. The human general didn't hesitate. He ordered a massive attack at the retreating army's flank and killed every last ork in a matter of minutes.)





The Empire Today

The center of the Empire, a city called "Centrus," is an architectural marvel. It took fifty years to build the city – even with (or perhaps, because of) the aid of enslaved dwarven engineers. In the center of the city is the Circus, a vast, circular building that houses the greatest spectacles ever witnessed by man (but not elf). The building is large enough to run chariot races along the top: a common occurrence in the spring.

To the right of the Circus is the Senate. Here, men (not women) elected by fellow men (not women) make decisions regarding the Empire's destiny. To the left of the Colloseum is the Emperor's Palace, where all those Senatorial decisions are ripped up, burned and thrown away. The Emperor hasn't listened to the Senate in many years, and if it wasn't for the fact that he commanded the largest army in the world, they might be able to do something about it.

In the meantime, the Empire's citizens (not women) enjoy baths, drink wine, eat lots of food, lose that food in the vomitorium, then eat some more before the nightly orgy. During the summer, they retire to the Circus to watch the Emperor's Games of Death as slaves (both human and otherwise) kill each other for the Emperor's pleasure.

Soldiers and Armies

The Solarian Army (as mentioned above) is the largest in the world. General Julius Claudius Salvius commands over fifty thousand men, all seeking glory and fortune. The Emperor has shown great interest in non-humans, declaring that any man who captures a monster (ork, dwarf, ogre, troll, etc.) and brings him to the Circus will receive a special Imperial Dispensation. Needless to say, this incentive has driven the army further north with every man seeking captives for the Circus.

Anatomy

Humans stand anywhere from five feet to six feet tall. They are seldom smaller or larger. Their hair is usually black, curly and short. Their eyesight is powerful but the rest of their senses suffer. Their lifespan runs from thirty to eighty years, depending on the health of the individual, although longevity is rare.

Recently, birth defects have become common in human children. This has nothing to do with the human habit of incest, but rather is a side-effect of the radiation leaking from the elven kingdoms to the north.







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Trolls



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Trolls

Appearing: 2-12

Virtues

Courage: 2

Cunning: 2

Strength: 8

Prowess: 7

Endurance: 3

Wounds: 6

of Attacks: 3 (Claw / Claw / Tail)

Special Abilities

Claws (WV 2), Tail (WV 4)

Poison (if more than 2 Wounds done by Claw with one blow, target is paralyzed for Rounds equal to Wounds done by hit); Regenerate 1 Wound per Round

Another example of elf breeding, trolls are nasty creatures that dwell in lakes, swamps and bogs. Trolls are amphibians, capable of spending up to a full day underwater. Their skin tone ranges from black to brown to green with variations.

Trolls stand nearly two orks high (around twelve feet). They are long, lanky and very strong. Their eyes glow in dim light and darkness. A troll's skin exerts a highly toxic, oily and poisonous substance capable of paralyzing any creature that touches it. Trolls rub their talons on their skin before a fight, making the poison even more dangerous. Like lizards, a troll is capable of regenerating lost limbs. A troll can regenerate lost fingers, hands, toes, arms, legs and its tail. Decapitation and evisceration are fatal. Trolls are highly susceptible to fire. Unfortunately, lighting fires in the areas commonly inhabited by trolls (bogs, swamps and marshes) is rather dangerous.

Trolls have no culture; they are independent creatures whose brains have little room for thought. They travel in packs (families), but have no language. They are excellent mimics, however, often luring stupid men into the bog with their talented voices (orks know better than to wander into marshlands after a disembodied voice). In a fight, trolls usually attack with their poisoned talons and a whipping tail. The poison takes a few moments to activate, numbing the limb infected, making it useless. Orks do not have a method for treating troll poison.



Rhuntee

Appearing: Never

Virtues

Courage ?

Cunning ?

Strength ?

Prowess ?

Endurance ?

No-one remembers what they called themselves. The word the orks used was "rhuntee" (little big foot). They lived in the foothills of Ghurtha in small caves called "warrens." They were a peaceful race that loved the simple things in life: a good meal, a good bottle of wine and a long drag on the wildweed pipe afterward. There was no record of war amongst themselves or any other race... until the men came.

The Solarian Empire knew precious metals lay in the foothills. They saw the rhuntee in their way. The Emperor may have spent half a heartbeat considering what to do. Then, he made up his mind.

"Kill them all," he said.

He placed a reward of a gold coin for every rhuntee head a soldier brought back. The slaughter was on.

The rhuntee had no skills at warfare. They didn't know how to make weapons or armor. They built no defenses to protect themselves from invaders. They had no standing army. They had no volunteer army. It took the men about as much time to crush the rhuntee as it takes a single man to crush a bug. Those that survived the initial attack ran into the mountains. A few soldiers made chase, catching them and cutting off their heads for the reward.

No-one has seen a rhuntee for six hundred years. If any do survive, they must be hiding in caves, far from the eyes of men. It is said that Gorlam ate those who fled the attack, but then orks must ask themselves, "Would even Gorlam eat a rhuntee?"





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Other Creatures



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Other Creatures

The rest of Ghurtha's creatures are divided into two categories: Small and Large. They're listed here with one very notable exception.

Small Animals

Rabbits, squirrels, hedgehogs, skunks, chipmunks, badgers, bees, cats, foxes, etc.

Appearing: 1-15

Courage: 1

Cunning: 1

Strength: 1

Prowess: 1

Endurance: 1

Special Abilities: As per species.

Large Animals

Bear, auroch, bison, elk, lynx, boar, horse, etc.

Appearing: 1-5

Courage: 3

Cunning: 2

Strength: 5

Prowess: 4

Endurance: 4

of Attacks: 2

Special Abilities

Claw (WV 2)

Teeth (WV 2)

Reindeer

Appearing: 1-1000

Courage: 2

Cunning: 1

Strength: 6

Prowess: 4

Endurance: 6

Wounds: 8

of Attacks: 2

Special Abilities

Horns (WV 2)

Hooves (WV 2)

Orks fighting from the backs of reindeer get to add their mount's Strength to their own when making Wounding Rolls. Second, they can use their mount's Prowess rather than their own when dodging blows. Third, a Glancing Blow has a 50% chance of hitting the reindeer rather than the thraka. Lastly, mounted combatants may consider one attack die a 6 when attacking opponents on foot.





The Ork Language

Spracha

Orks call their language spracha, roughly meaning "spoken words." The written ork language (we'll get to that in a moment) is called "wroota" and means "written words."

Spracha is easy to pronounce. They have no diphthongs (two sounds bunched together to make a third sound) and the characters are always pronounced the same way.

(However, there are approximately seventeen different dialects of spracha, each with its own character. Don't feel limited by what you find here; invent your own way of speaking spracha, create new words and have fun with the language.)

It's difficult for orks to make the same sounds as men. Consider speaking with a set of fake vampire teeth in your mouth (the small, plastic set with both upper and lower fangs). Then, put a pencil in as well. Now go through the alphabet, pronouncing each letter. That should give you a better understanding of how ork vowels and consonants sound.

"Explosive consonants" such as "b", "d", "f" and "v." These sounds require an ork to put his lips together and blow. Because of their tusks, orks have a great deal of problem with these sounds. Likewise, the ork language avoids these consonants. On the other hand, slurring sounds such as "sh" and "ch" are profound in the ork language.

The Non-Silent "H"

All ork consonants are pronounced almost identically to English consonants. However, whenever a consonant is followed with an h, the sound becomes much more pronounced. Likewise, the sounds "ch," "sh," and "wh" are very pronounced.

Vowels

When h follows a vowel, that sound is dragged out a little longer than usual. For example, tala ends with a quick "ah" sound, while talah ends with the same sound you make when the doctor needs to look at your tonsils.

The Written Tongue

Only tala know the ork written language. It's made up of symbolic runes, each with a spoken meaning (the sound), a written meaning (a word) and a secret meaning (you ain't a tala; too bad). The tala keep the meanings of the runes secrets, passing such knowledge on only to those who prove themselves worthy of it.





Balnodun: Bashthaka's reindeer

Bakharala: longest night of the year

Bala: honey mead

Baladrin: horn cup

Balana: "blackening"; gangrene

Bandoo: "the runs"; diarrhea

Bandoona: love band worn by a lover

Banta: formal duel

Bash: great; mighty; large

Basha: a clean wound

Bashdownga: "great mother"; head of a gathum

Bashorkum: great house

Bashthraka: god of warfare, storms and general troublemaker

Beeta: "the bite"; tetanus

Beeta: fast feet

Bhoola: "friendly fight"; informal fighting between friends

Bloogun: death by drowning

Bodalay: shaman

Bonaloo: mushrooms, commonly used by bodalay to gain insight

Bonay: holy stories

Byoobon: "purple tongue"; scarlet fever

Chochum: knowledge; literally, "to live"

Choolah: "the cold road"

Coombadoom: Bashthraka's shield

Coonoo: "cry baby"; one who is not clever enough for thwak

Dadoon: "back: stabber"

Dandoonda: lover

Dayla: maiden

Domdha: craftiness

Doo: false; wrong

Doodom: black magic, "false magic"

Dooladay: winter home

Doomla: witch

Doon: "treacherous death"; murder

Doonda: "inflamed"; infection

Doowampa: "knocked stupid"

Downga: mother

Downgaday: maiden

Dowoomdha: "yellow wits"

Dracha: death

Drachan: a corpse

Duna: sexual intercourse

Dunta: hunting

Eeniltroo: "he who knows the path"; a name apprentice dondalay call their masters

Eeshoola: "the final wound"

Eetalday: resting place

Fana: "hand"; "advantage"

Fanu: to have fana

Flahn: daughter

Ganala: ork code of laws

Gathum: tribe

Gayla: feast

Ghurtha: the continent on which orks live; also used when speaking of the world (orks don't differentiate)

Googan: "brown boils"; gas gangrene

Gooleeala: rite of passage

Goosha: "boogey man"

Gorlam: "the Great Toad"



APPENDIX ONE

Language



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who waits for orks when they try to enter the Otherworld

Gowthduka: God of Wisdom and Knowledge

Irika: foolish pride

Keerisboon: laughing without a spear; "courage"

Keethdownmga: "the All-Mother"; chief goddess of the ork pantheon and source of all children

Kowkow: "coughing"; pneumonia

Mowgd: yellow

Nathala: "day riddle"

Noodeema: the spirit world

Noona: love-sickness

Noonandoo: one who is love sick (see noona)

Orkum: household

Orkus: the ork race

Plahn: son

Poola: desperate food

Pugg: Trickster God of the ork pantheon

Sayshum: "the healing art"

Seethoo: "expecting mother"

Shanda: death by burning

Shandadan: "evil eater"

Shayla: a wound gained by a weapon

Sheeloo: "drinking illness"; drinking the blood of a patient to take the illness from him

Shela: chief valkerie

Shoona: game won from hunting

Shoondoo: to pull an arrow through the wound

Shotala: a cooking tool

Shusha: knowing what you don't have to be told

Sooeeta: honey

Soola: "smoking the cave"; filling a cave with smoke from the toodana plant

Suchee Pugg: "wandering Pugg"

Ta: to blow (on a fire)

Tala: foolish heroism

Talan: a tale telling of a hero who wins, not through his own wits, but by luck

Talda: bard; one who remembers

Taltoomo: "the flaming one"

Taltrup: "dumb one"; a name given to an apprentice bodalay

Tanda: "arrow wound"

Tandoo: to push an arrow through the wound

Tangodo: "wandering spirit"; an ork's spirit as he wanders the Otherworld

Thala: riddles

Thaloo: "belief"; the word orks use to describe their religion

Thanla: "small riddle"

Thraka: "warrior"; "hunter"; "protector"

Throondoom: Bashthraka's spear

Thudowmga: false mother; used during childbirth

Thung: gathering of orks to dispute legal matters

Thwak: to trick, befuddle, and/or bedazzle

Tilta: psychedelic drug given to youths during their rite of passage

Towma digda: heavy shoulders

Zoom: large bees



Courage
Darkness

BHA

Cunning
Make Fire

WAN

Endurance
Stay Awake

SHOON

Prowess
Spear & Shield

THRUN

Strength
Carry

ZHO

Name
Mother's Name
Household
Tribe

Trouble

Zhoosha

Wounds

Equipment

Fana

Orkworld