

# Escalati 6

The 13th Age Fanzine | Fall 2025

In Memoriam the  
Orc Lord

11

PLAYING AN ORC  
in 13th AGE 2E

BY İBRAHİM M. CELİK



# IMPERIAL DISPATCH



When I learned that 13<sup>th</sup> Age 2nd Edition featured only twelve icons, my curiosity was piqued. What would the Dragon Empire look like without the Orc Lord? Who killed the Orc Lord? Would orcs be forever changed? This issue of Escalation is all about exploring these very questions.

Orcs are quite varied in fantasy sources—from the pig-faced orcs of early D&D to Middle-earth’s corrupted elves to Warcraft’s proud, shamanistic people. The following articles reflect that diversity and encourage players and GMs to make the Dragon Empire’s orcs their own. What better way to remember an enigma such as the Orc Lord than to offer multiple “truths” about orcs and their leader?

This issue’s articles were created during the 13<sup>th</sup> Age 2E playtest phase, so you’ll notice some authors stuck with the familiar 1st Edition rules and assumptions about orcs while others were inspired by the 2E playtest drafts. We appreciate your patience with this transitional issue and can’t wait to see what the full release of 2E inspires in the future. We want to give a huge shout-out to everyone who contributed to this issue. Your passion for the community is what makes this fanzine possible!

Gratefully yours,

Tim Baker



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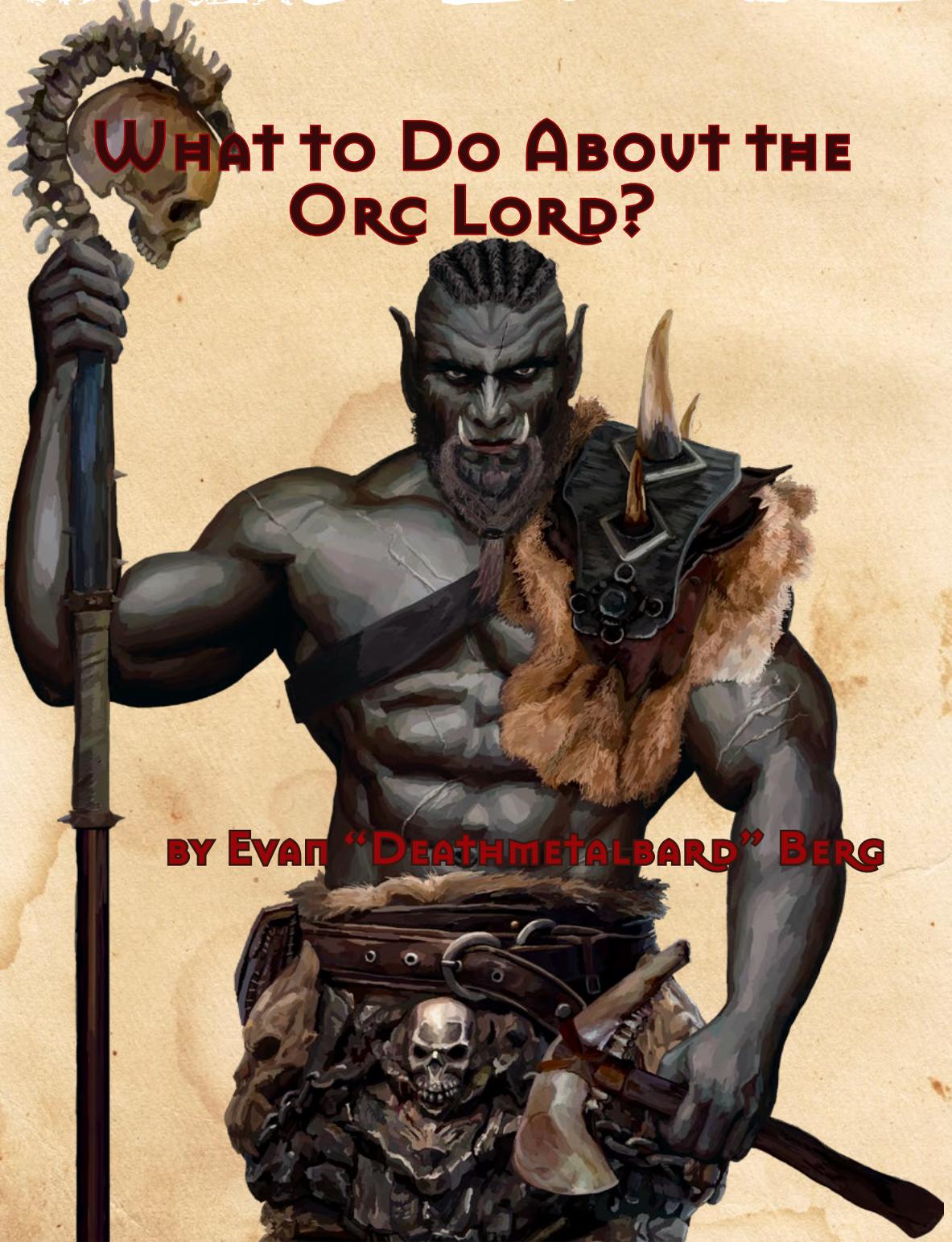
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# WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE ORC LORD?



BY EVAN "DEATHMETALBARD" BERG

# WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE ORC LORD?

BY EVAN “DEATHMETALBARD” BERG

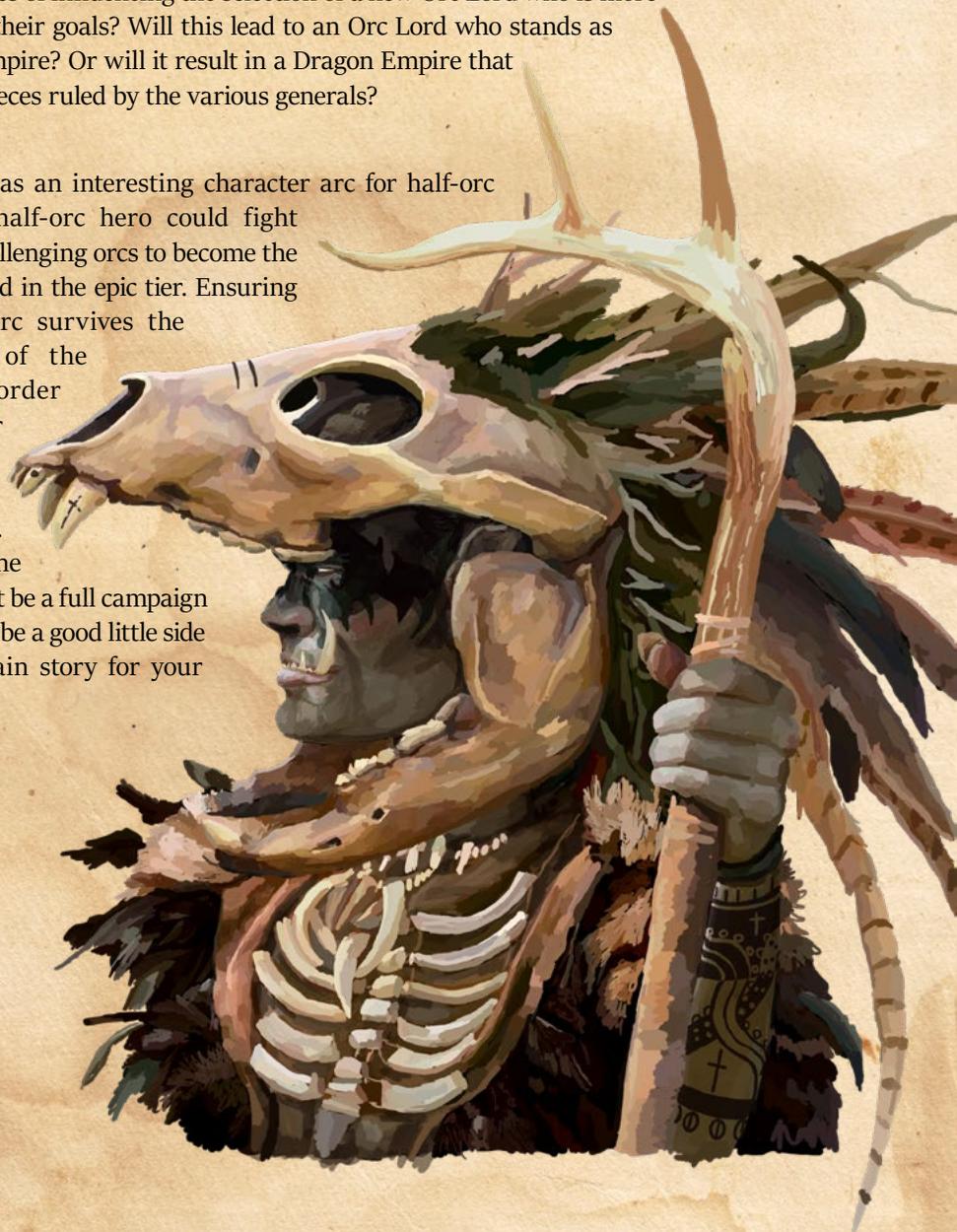
The orcs of the Dragon Empire were a force to be reckoned with under the guidance of the Orc Lord. While appearing as nothing more than a murderous horde, the Orc Lord understood that only by tempering the horde with cunning tyranny could they overcome the Dragon Empire and gain the delicious spoils that lay within. It's said that the Orc Lord of the past was the one to put down the Wizard King, thus ending his reign and ushering in the creation of the Dragon Empire and the 1st Age. How will the Orc Lord's death in the 13<sup>th</sup> Age impact the Dragon Empire? How did he perish? The answers will of course vary from table to table. Perhaps the most important question is: how will you use orcs now that their iconic leader is no more?

One answer can be to just remove orcs entirely. With the death of their leader, the orcs return back to whatever homeland they had and the Dragon Empire can enjoy some relative peace within its borders (the empire is still plagued by demons, monsters, and other such problems). While this could be an easy way to move away from orcs as threats, the Dragon Empire would feel quite lonely and empty without them. Orcs are some of the most important foes that players can go up against, and to simply remove them feels rather lackluster.

Another answer expands on what we know about orcish hierarchy. Throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> Age *Bestiary*, there are several interpretations of orcs: some are depicted as the more pig-like and brutish incarnations from the early days of dungeon crawling, and others are more modernized and vaguely humanoid with green skin and tusks. Looking at published 13<sup>th</sup> Age adventures, we know that the Orc Lord delegated commands to generals, such as General Gul (*Domain of the Dwarf King*, *The Elf Queen's Enchantment*, *Wrath of the Orc Lord*). It's reasonable to assume that the Orc Lord had myriad generals from the different orc types, all vying for his eye as a chance to expand their own influence among the horde. With the Orc Lord's death, the spoils belong to whoever is powerful enough to claim it; thus, the Blood War begins. Orcs are attacking each other, vying to become the new Orc Lord, thereby causing a great schism and weakening the already broken horde. Violence has spilled out across the empire.

With this scenario, we have the makings of an interesting campaign. The Orc Lord was defeated, but now you must deal with his generals who are rampaging throughout the Dragon Empire in the hopes of claiming that title for themselves. How do the icons react to this threat? Do they seek to utterly expel the orcs...or do they play one side against the other in the hopes of influencing the selection of a new Orc Lord who is more sympathetic to their goals? Will this lead to an Orc Lord who stands as an ally to the empire? Or will it result in a Dragon Empire that is carved into pieces ruled by the various generals?

This can serve as an interesting character arc for half-orc characters. A half-orc hero could fight increasingly challenging orcs to become the rightful Orc Lord in the epic tier. Ensuring that the half-orc survives the machinations of the generals in order to fight for leadership will require a party of allies. Dealing with the generals may not be a full campaign plot, but it could be a good little side story to the main story for your game.



# NATURE ABHORS A VACUUM



BY CINDY ROBERTSON

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BY CINDY ROBERTSON

**M**y name is Jiruz, and I've been a scholar for many years. Recently, the Orc Lord was defeated. I felt it necessary to find out how. The Dragon Empire should know. The problem is that the stories vary wildly. There are no witnesses that survived or are willing to talk about what happened. There is no trace of a body that remained. The corpse could have been completely destroyed, or worse, taken by forces more foul than the Orc Lord himself. May the Gods of Light protect us if it was taken by the Lich King.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and orcs have been a part of nature since before the founding of the empire. They are the brutal part of nature, and that makes their filling of the vacuum just as ruthless. Now that the Orc Lord is dead, someone is trying to fill that role, but who? Who is hoping to be the next Orc Lord? When he fell, a large portion of his armies were lost with him. Many of the leaders were also killed, so who could have the strength, courage, and ability to bring the orcs together? No one knows, but there are several who are vying for the position. One in particular has started gathering forces and slowly showing that they are at the top of the chain.

Who is this unknown orc? Did they cause the demise of the original Orc Lord? Did they contribute to it? Are they only now seeking power due to the void? There are rumors that they are a powerful warrior or sorcerer. With the way they move armies, they may be a commander or bard. It's impossible to know.

I began my search in the Frost Range. I surmised that since that's where the majority of orcs can be found, that would be the best place to begin. The tribes were scattered and fought amongst themselves. I was able to learn that this lord-to-be had gone out to prove their worth. The rumor was that they had gone to kill a Koru Behemoth! That would definitely be a feat worthy of an icon.

Now, I had to find out exactly when and where this encounter would occur. That's no

simple task. The Koru travel at their own pace and on their own time. The easiest way to find the Koru is to travel against their path rather than chase them. So off I went, with a plan to travel southeast to Forge, then Nomad, through the Queen's and Spider Woods, Drakkenhall and Cape Thunder, through the Blood Wood, south of the Wild Wood and through Eld, through the Red Wastes, across the Giantwalk, and through the Knee Deep, bringing me to the edge of the empire. My map doesn't extend beyond the empire, and I didn't want to risk going into the unknown. I was already doing something foolhardy and dangerous.

This was a 2,600-mile trek! I hoped that I wouldn't have to walk the whole thing. With important stops along the way (several icons might have information), this could take four to five months. I had to get started right away.

I met many who claimed that they saw this orc, but no two had the same description. Some said that they were male, some claimed female. Some claimed that this orc used powerful magic and others claimed this orc was bare-knuckle fighting dragons!

My first stop was in the Forge. The dwarves there told tales of a female orc that was 15 feet tall and carried the largest great axe they had ever seen. She had attempted to enter their great city, but they held her back. It cost the lives of over 100 warriors, but they were able to repel her attack. I could see the damage to the outside of their city. She was driven to the east—that helped confirm that I had chosen the right path. It seems that this orc champion may be trying to take on other icons to prove their worth in case they can't find one of the Behemoths.



As I entered the Queen's Wood, I stopped to speak with the court, hoping they would have more information. Courtiers spoke of an orc that was able to blend into the land. This orc had a huge tiger with sabers for teeth following their commands. Literal sabers! The elves had to join forces to push them back. While I was not able to speak directly with the queen, I was able to speak with Medrosa Veiregneh, a dark elf bard. She told me that the orc surprised everyone by attempting a full-frontal assault on the Citadel! They were severely wounded and had to flee. The elves managed to kill the saber-toothed tiger, but the would-be icon took the body and left. The battle was swift, but the elves lost many powerful guardians. The devastation is still present. They are working on healing the wood, but it will require years of effort. I was able to easily travel through the swath of devastation.

By the time I got to Drakkenhall, I had as many descriptions as people I had met. I sought an audience with the Great Blue Wurm. That was one of the most terrifying things I've ever done. While I was unable to speak with her directly, one of the Sorcerers of the Blue named Cyssilu, Champion of the Blue, was very informative. She mentioned that this orc had torn their way through Drakkenhall while she was out on business at the time. The orc had sought an audience with the Blue. After they were denied, they fought their way in and had taken out most of the city's guardians with ease. They withstood the blasts from sorcerers and the blades from barbarians. Their magic was strong enough to wipe out anything in their way in an instant. The only combatants that weren't afraid of this orc were the terrorcs (*Drakkenhall: City of Monsters*, p 123). As the orc entered the chamber, the Blue spoke with them for just a few minutes before sending them on their way. No one knows what was said, but there's a rumor that the Blue may be seeking to ally with this new Orc Lord. Whoever this orc is, they aren't powerful enough to take on an icon by themselves yet. The orc then headed south through the Koru Straits. After a short rest and restock, I headed out the next morning.

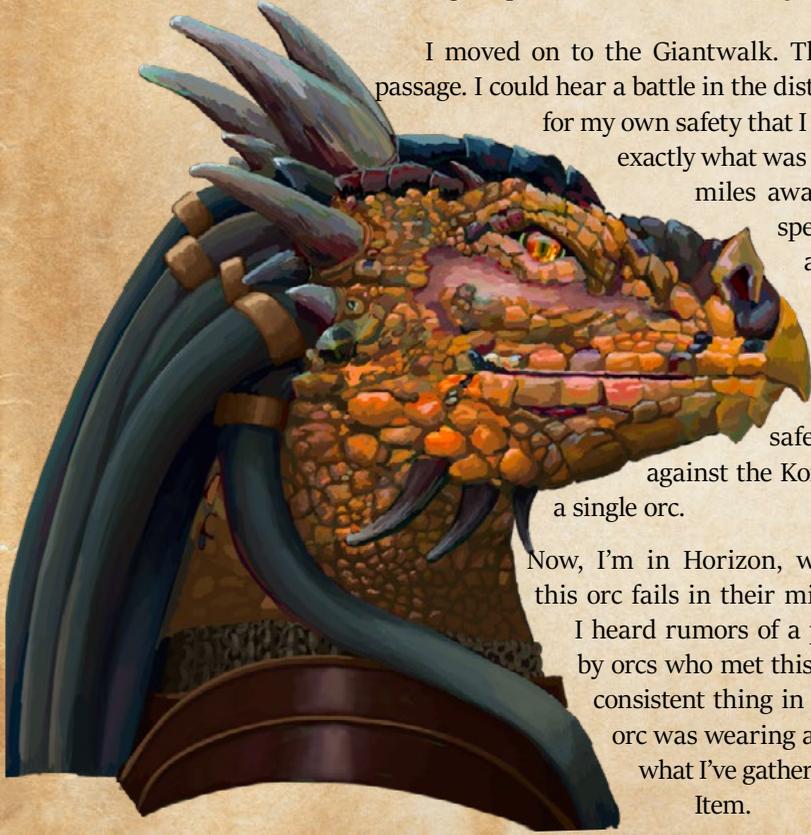
I traveled through the Wild Wood, next. The home of the High Druid was densely packed with old growth forest. I was unable to get very far before being forced out. I could see no evidence that the orc came through here. I spoke with the Grand Druid of the Grove of Whispers, an ent named Gentleherb. They said that there was an oversized orc that came through, but no matter what the orc attempted, they couldn't penetrate the forest. All of the flora and fauna were able to keep them out. They tried to chop and burn their way in, but nothing worked. Seeing the damage at the other locations and not seeing anything here, I find it likely that this is true. Then again, the High Druid could have literally moved the land around to make it look like nothing happened.

Here's what I'd gathered so far: this orc is incredibly powerful. They are physically imposing and have the cunning of devils. I have no physical description other than they are a very large orc. There is a rumor that they have acquired one of the tusks of the Orc Lord, and that's where they are getting their power from. I can't prove it, though.

Travel through the Red Wastes was incredibly difficult. It was dangerous, and the land was punishing. I spoke with a few inhabitants, and they all described a large, unarmed, male orc gathering forces to take on the Great Gold Wyrms. Killing the Gold would allow more of the magic from the Abyss to pass into the world and strengthen the orc and his forces. As I approached the Great Gold Wyrms, I was immediately met by a cadre of dragonspawn paladins. The Guardians of the Gold would not allow me to get close to the Great Gold Wyrms, but they did answer my questions. They told me that this orc managed to get close enough to attack, but was no match for their order or the Gold. When he couldn't proceed to the Abyssal rift, he succeeded in gathering some of the power from the Abyss for himself. They were impressed and scared that he was capable of such martial and magical prowess. After several days of battle, he moved on.

I moved on to the Giantwalk. The giants would not give me passage. I could hear a battle in the distance. They told me that it was for my own safety that I not be permitted. I don't know exactly what was transpiring, but the battle was miles away and still incredibly loud. I spent more than a week listening and trying to argue that I am a chronicler, and the empire needs to know what's going on. Nemza, a cloud giant, was adamant that it was not safe for me. There was a battle against the Koru and giants being waged by a single orc.

Now, I'm in Horizon, writing this and hoping that this orc fails in their mission. Along my travels here, I heard rumors of a potion that was being created by orcs who met this icon-in-the-making. The only consistent thing in the descriptions was that this orc was wearing an orc tusk as a pendant. From what I've gathered, it may be a new True Magic Item.



Now, I just need to organize my thoughts...

**BLOOD OF THE ORC LORD:** This potion is rancid, but drinking it gives you a burst of energy. If you are staggered when you drink this, you immediately use 2 recoveries and for the remainder of the battle you deal additional damage based on your tier (10/20/40), but you also take that much ongoing damage each round unless you are an orc or half-orc. You may attempt a save to end the ongoing damage, but if you do, you also stop dealing the additional damage.



**TUSK OF THE ORC LORD** (epic, recharge 16+): This is rumored to be one of the tusks of the Orc Lord. This not only provides a bonus to saves, but it also allows the wearer to turn a hit into a critical hit. If the hit was already a critical hit, then deal triple damage instead. You can also use this to turn a natural 1 into a normal hit. Quirk: You believe that you are a descendant of the original Orc Lord.

# PLAYING AN ORC in 13th AGE 2E

BY İBRAHİM M. CELİK



# PLAYING AN ORC IN 13<sup>TH</sup> AGE 2E

BY İBRAHİM M. CELİK

Having co-written a 400-page book about playing orcs and other “outsider” races, I couldn’t resist the urge to explore orcs in 13<sup>th</sup> Age. As I wrote this article, I reached out to Rob Heinsoo for feedback prior to the release of 13<sup>th</sup> Age 2nd Edition. Rob told me that the 13<sup>th</sup> Age 2E designers changed orcs from their 1E nature to something completely different and in tune with how other fantasy games portray them: sentient beings with nuanced morale and individuality. However, I wrote this article based on 1E and the Gamma playtest draft of 2E, and based on that, I wanted to keep it true to the original ideas. Maybe in the future, after the publication of 2E, I will revise it to reflect the new situation.

Even though they are sentient, D&D orcs and 13<sup>th</sup> Age orcs are fundamentally different. D&D orcs are just another species (or “race” in older terms) in the world. 13<sup>th</sup> Age orcs, however, are something else entirely—creatures that spawn from cursed ground, emerging as monstrous, demonic creatures bent on war and murder.

This makes playing an orc tricky, even in campaigns that revolve around the malign icons of the Dragon Empire. A creature that exists *only* to wreak destruction and mayhem isn’t exactly prime player-character material. Well, maybe for some, but not for everyone. So, let’s fix that.



## THE ORC LORD AND THE PATH TO PLAYABLE ORCS

In 13<sup>th</sup> Age 1E, the Orc Lord gave a *narrative loophole* that made orcs playable. If an orc was *different*—perhaps engineered for a purpose beyond war, or influenced by another icon to develop conscience and empathy—it could be a PC.

But in 2E, the Orc Lord is dead. And his death frees us to rewrite orc identity in ways we couldn't before. Here are some possible explanations for playable orcs:

- **The Curse Was Lifted:** Some orcs rebelled against the Orc Lord, and with his death, they were freed from their monstrous nature.
- **Iconic Intervention:** Other icons may have experimented with orcs to create new, heroic warriors or undo the curse entirely.
- **Orc Martyrdom:** The Orc Lord sacrificed himself to *free* orcs from their cursed origins—an *orc messiah* figure, if you will. Perhaps orcs can now even reproduce naturally instead of spawning from cursed ground.
- **A Cosmic Accident:** The Orc Lord's death created unforeseen ripples, and suddenly, some orcs just... aren't monsters anymore. No one really knows why.



- **A Trick of the Prince of Shadows:** Maybe this is all the work of the Prince of Shadows, who activated an artifact that is *changing* orcs. What happens when he turns it off?
- **The Order of Nature is Shifting:** Old heroes turn to villainy, dragons become guardians, and orcs... become pacifists? The High Druid certainly thinks something unnatural is happening.

Ultimately, your orc PC's story is yours to tell. Maybe your character is the *only* anomaly. Or maybe they're the first of a new breed. The choice is yours—and your GM's.

## ORC CULTURE IN A POST-ORC LORD WORLD

Even as cursed creatures, 13<sup>th</sup> Age orcs were never mindless. They strategized, bartered, and found ways to survive. Some even farmed between raids, waiting for the next war.

Now, though? With the Orc Lord gone, orc culture is evolving fast:

- **Orc bards** sing about things beyond war.
- **Mercenary bands** accept payment in art and treasure, even decorating their strongholds with trophies.
- **Orc hermits** have been spotted trading surprisingly eloquent poetry for food and shelter.
- **Some orcs protect settlements** from monsters—not for gold or power, but simply because they *can*.

But this new orcish identity is **contested**. The Dragon Empire has seen orcs only as monsters for ages. Some refuse to believe these changes are real, while others remain wary. Trust comes slowly.

Your orc PC walks this fragile line—straddling the world of their own kind and the world of those who once hunted them.

## INCLUDING AN ORC PLAYER AS A GM

If you're a GM, introducing an orc player character can be an exciting challenge. Consider the following:

- **How does the world react?** Some NPCs may be openly hostile, while others may be curious or even supportive. Think about how different factions and icons might feel about a “new” kind of orc.
- **Does the orc PC know their own origin?** Perhaps they are the first of their kind to experience this change, or they come from a hidden enclave of evolving orcs.
- **What role do Icons play?** The Prince of Shadows might have a vested interest in their existence, the Emperor may want them studied, and the Lich King could seek to harness their latent magic.
- **Is their transformation permanent?** If the orc's nature is linked to the death of the Orc Lord, could something reverse it? Would they be willing to risk finding out?

Work with your player to ensure that their orc's story enriches the campaign. Whether their presence leads to conflict, mystery, or heroism, an orc PC should feel like a game-changing presence in the world.

## PLAYING AN ORC: KIN POWERS

If you're ready to carve out your orc's place in the world, here's how to reflect their raw power on your character sheet.

Choose one of the following kin powers: closer than you thought or on the brink.

### CLOSER THAN YOU THOUGHT (KIN POWER)

Your relentless aggression makes it nearly impossible for enemies to judge your reach.

Twice per battle, you may make a melee attack against a nearby enemy that you are not engaged with. If you hit, your target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

**Adventurer Feat:** If the escalation die is 2 or higher, you can use *closer than you thought* once per round instead of twice per battle.

**Champion Feat:** This attack deals 1d6 extra damage (or 1d10 at epic tier).

**Epic Feat:** You may use *closer than you thought* against two different enemies at once instead of just one.

**Tactical Use:** This power lets you control positioning aggressively, effectively expanding the area you occupy greater than it seems.

### ON THE BRINK (KIN POWER)

You fight with reckless abandon, pushing yourself to the edge of control.

Once per battle, as a free action, you may declare that all of your successful melee attacks are critical hits until you miss. When you miss, you immediately become *frenzied* (see below).

#### FRENZIED:

- On your turn, you must randomly select a nearby creature (ally or enemy) and attack them.
- If you need to move to attack, you may attempt to disengage twice per turn instead of taking opportunity attacks.
- You must roll a normal (11+) save at the end of each turn to recover.

**Tactical Use:** If you position yourself carefully before using this ability, you won't endanger your allies while enjoying the benefits. If attacking your allies seems to hinder fun, change this ability to a more stable damage bonus (maybe +2 per level) and remove the frenzy.

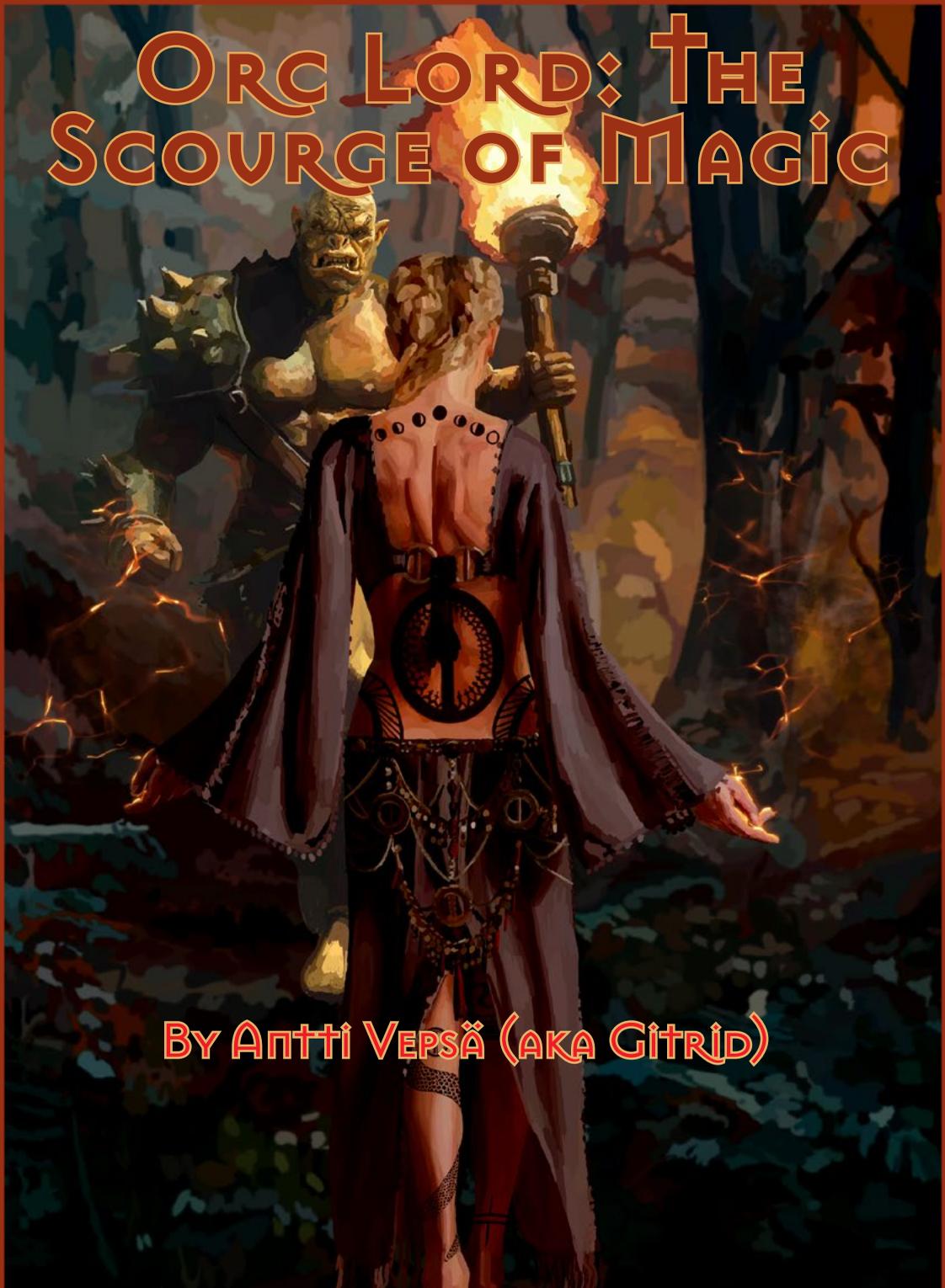
## FINAL THOUGHTS

Orcs in 13<sup>th</sup> Age 2E aren't just reskinned warriors—they're a new force in the Dragon Empire, and your PC is part of that evolution. Will you embrace your monstrous past, defy it, or forge something new? The choice is yours.

And when someone underestimates you, well...

*They were closer than they thought.*

# ORC LORD: THE SCOURGE OF MAGIC

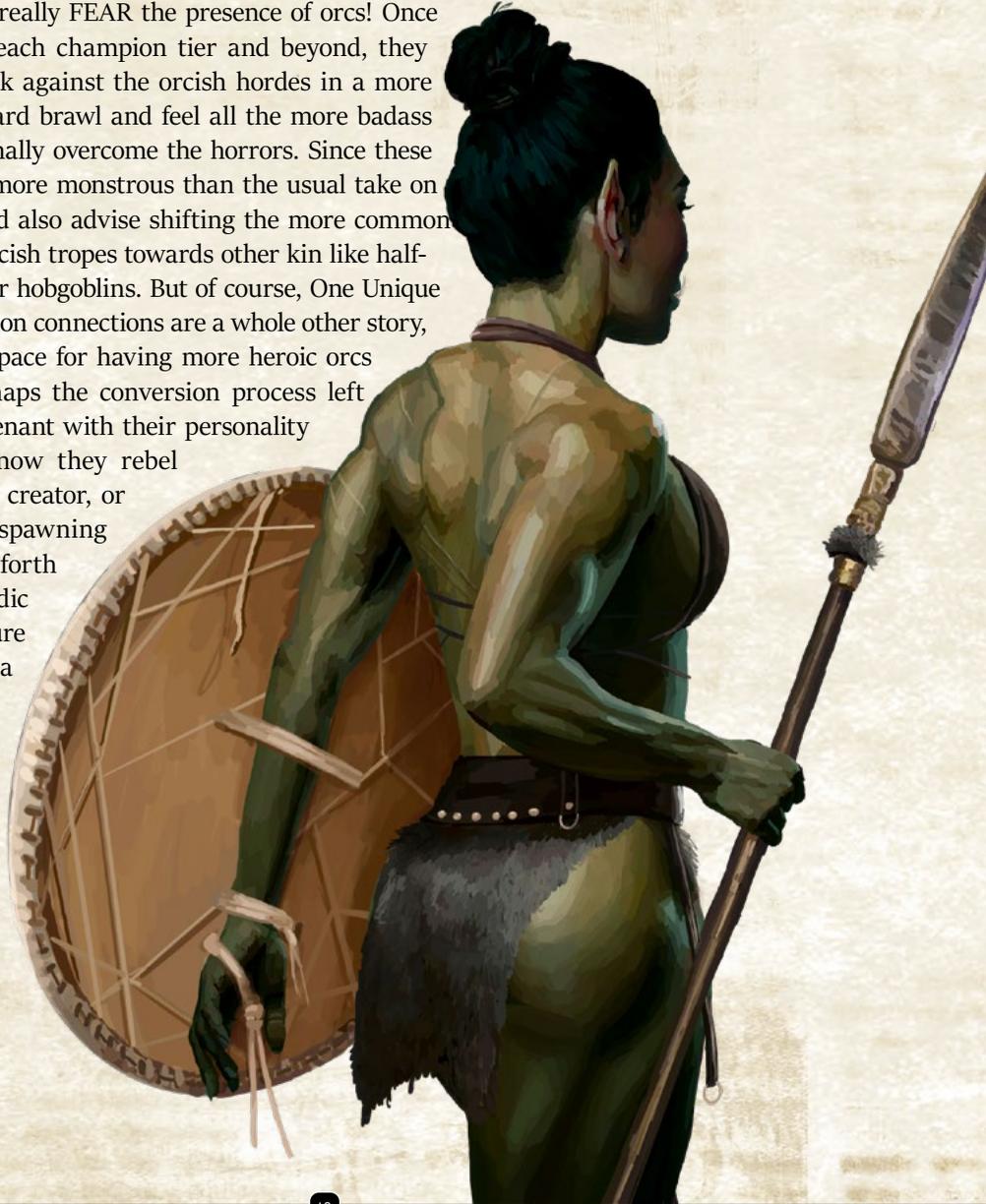


BY ANTTI VEPSÄ (AKA GITRID)

# ORC LORD: THE SCOURGE OF MAGIC

BY ANTTI VEPSÄ (AKA GITRID)

**AV** says: This interpretation of the Orc Lord and his monstrous spawn works best as an almost survival horror-like experience at adventurer tier against a cunning, implacable, and always adaptive opponent. So GMs, make your players really FEAR the presence of orcs! Once the heroes reach champion tier and beyond, they can fight back against the orcish hordes in a more straightforward brawl and feel all the more badass for having finally overcome the horrors. Since these orcs are far more monstrous than the usual take on them, I would also advise shifting the more common and heroic orcish tropes towards other kin like half-orcs, ogres, or hobgoblins. But of course, One Unique Things and icon connections are a whole other story, and there's space for having more heroic orcs as well. Perhaps the conversion process left one orc lieutenant with their personality intact, and now they rebel against their creator, or perhaps the spawning pits spewed forth a single druidic avatar of nature rather than a machine of war.



## ICONOGRAPHY

The Orc Lord is an anti-magical bioweapon created by the elves to eliminate the ancient Wizard King. Having reawakened along with the Lich King's rise, they now pursue the eradication of everything magical with the single-minded determination of a machine... but with the cunning of a beast on the hunt for their prey.

### QUOTE

*“Do not overestimate yourself, mage. You are nothing but a conduit for my true enemy.”*

### USUAL LOCATION

The orc hordes scattered to the four winds over the ages, but the biggest concentration of them could always be found in the Frost Range mountains right beyond the borders of the Dragon Empire. It was there that the resurfaced Orc Lord first made their presence known, amidst the subjugated goblin tribes of the mountains. You, however, can't wage a war from the comforts of a mountain retreat, so the orcs needed a forward operating base inside the empire's borders. The ruined sections of Oldwall proved a perfect fit for the icon, their anti-magical presence calming the normally violently self-repairing architecture into a stable form. From this new base, the orcs can threaten almost the entirety of the northern empire, and also have relatively easy access to alternative traversal methods via Koruback, waterways of the Fangs, or even the overworld through a short hop, skip, and jaunt to Starport.

### COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Orcs can't use magic, but they still have flesh manipulation tricks that they can employ, especially when boosted in the

presence of a Fleshwarper. The Orc Lord being the strongest possible Fleshwarper in existence, orcs being directly led by their icon are a truly horrifying force of regenerating, adaptive, twisting flesh and bone.

The Orc Lord and their minions can be reasoned with if your goals and interests happen to align. They do not kill needlessly or for fun (although they do like to cultivate a fearsome image as a terror tactic), but if an orc has designated you as an elimination target, they *will* pursue you until they are completely incapacitated.

Lately, an increasing number of elves have claimed to have had visions related to the Orc Lord, where usually they would have dreamed of their Queen.

### ADVENTURERS & THE ICON

For most adventurers, orcs are simply a threat: something to always be wary of. But there are always those opportunistic people who come to the Orc Lord because they believe the icon can grant them power and ferocity that is otherwise denied to them. There are also some who come to the bioweapon out of desperation, their frail, mutilated, or disabled bodies craving

the fleshwarping that the Orc Lord can provide. Even a rarer few are those idealists who fully commit to the Scourge of Magic's goal of ridding the world of magic for good.

The type of help that the Orc Lord can provide an adventurer ranges from nullifying annoying curses or wards to improving or changing their bodies, but also includes more mundane military intel or assistance via orc infiltrators and saboteurs. Similarly, the Orc Lord's enemies can know the limits of their anti-magic, how to exploit or bypass their adaptive flesh, or where to find signs of orcish tampering and sabotage.

### ALLIES

Despite their declaration of war against magic itself, the Archmage still continues his tenuous alliance with the Orc Lord. He reckons that he can at least direct the bioweapon's path towards the more harmful magical mishaps and catastrophes before they need to be put down.

Meanwhile, the current Elf Queen seems to be under the protection of the Orc Lord, undoubtedly because of lingering attachments from the original sword-consort that gave up their flesh for the iconic transformation. Orcs have been witnessed to cease their hostilities upon seeing the royal seal on an attacked elf's clothes, and some even whisper that orcish intervention was critical in allowing the Elf Queen to capture the Great Green Wurm. The Queen's proverbial "sister," the High Druid, does not benefit from



this protection, but she is intrigued by the animal-like cunning and ferocity of orcs and could be tempted into joining the war against magic if persuaded of its unnatural nature...

### ENEMIES

The Lich King is still the main target of the orcs and their primary reason for existing. There can be no peace between the two icons. The dwarves never agreed with the elves' decision to create the orcs, and this sentiment continues with the current Dwarf King. He is especially furious about the orcish anti-magic draining all of his magic items dry!

### THE TRUE DANGER

As long as the Orc Lord's war isn't allowed to escalate into destroying the Archmage's arcane wards, reality will remain in a somewhat stable form...

# HISTORY

## BIRTH OF AN ICON

Back in the age before the ages, an alliance was made to destroy the evil Wizard King. The only problem was that the Wizard King was frighteningly powerful, as compared to the 13 icons of the modern Dragon Empire; he alone held all of that archetypal power for himself. Even the closest beings to his power, the ones known later as the iconic dragons, were begrudgingly kept at bay by the Wizard King having a hostage in the form of the slain Great White Wyrms's soul.

Faced with this impossible mission to defeat the man whose very presence defines and stabilizes reality, a desperate plan was hatched to bring forth a new force that would be anathema to the arcane might of the Wizard King. The Elf Queen of the time prepared a ritual to strip a being of all of its magic to turn

them into an anti-magical living weapon, with the queen's own sword-consort willing to volunteer their flesh and spirit as sacrifice for this task.

The ritual worked, but stripped the elven royal of their soul in the process. Their memories are still there inside that monstrous husk, without any of the kind personality of the individual remaining. Every bit of magic within their body had scattered to the winds, replaced by sheer, raw power, and mastery over their own biology...and eventually others' as well.

It was this latter ability that made it possible for the newly-titled Orc Lord to quickly muster an army of loyal monsters under their beck and call. Having prepared special spawning pits from which countless grunt orcs would spawn,



lead by lieutenants converted from the former elven royal's loyal retinue, with this new army in tow, the new icon sallied forth towards the Wizard King's capital in the isle of Omen.

Magical creations and defenses broke and evaporated under their very presence, and even the most powerful of spells fizzled out before they could touch them, but the Wizard King still proved a formidable opponent to the cunning orc. If direct hexes and curses wouldn't affect them, the Wizard King would throw boring old mundane mountains at them or erase the air around them. Some tellings of the legends also make mention of the enslaved soul of the Great White Wyrms being commanded to attack the Orc Lord, but the Three and their agents very understandably aren't glad about people spreading such tall tales.

In the end, Omen was ruined, with a great chasm cleaved all the way down into the depths of the underworld, with no sign of the two icons remaining. What little remained of the forces loyal to the Wizard King swore later to have witnessed the remnants of the orc army just suddenly abandoning their weapons and silently marching back to their boats, which soon disappeared over the north-western horizon.

## LEGACY AND REAWAKENING

While the iconic clash was happening in Omen, the alliance of elves and humans weren't just resting on their laurels. They systematically took down the vassals,

organizations, and terrifying guardian beasts of the Wizard King's reign, and slowly established a new order in the world, dubbed the Dragon Empire. Orcs and undead remained a fact of life in the fringes of the empire, but neither force managed to gain much relevance amongst the grand politics and histories of the icons.

For many, many ages, the orc remnants kept building up their strength and scouting out the lands in search of both their missing progenitor and their fated enemy. Orcs have no use for money or luxuries, but they knew that engaging in trade and offering their services to employers would make for an easy infiltration method into the heart of the empire. The lessons of the past being swiftly forgotten by almost everyone save the very elves responsible for their creation, many in the empire found the orcs to be useful as bodyguards and mercenaries. For instance, when the giants sacked the capital at the end of the 1st Age, it was orc saboteurs that opened up the emperor's keep for the taking. Or for another, far more controversial example, many Archmages have chosen to work together with the "savage" orcs in preserving the ever-failing arcane wards that the Wizard King had left behind. For their defense, most cited the anti-magical properties of orcs as a key factor in stabilizing areas with rampant surges of chaos magic.

This tendency of seeing orcs as nothing more than pragmatic tools and cannon fodder came to an end with the advent of the 13<sup>th</sup> Age, and the surprise reappearance of the Wizard King. Now branded

with the moniker of the skeletal Lich King, his mere presence caused undeath to regain a foothold in the Dragon Empire, with both naturally occurring ghosts and necromantically reanimated horrors popping up everywhere in ever increasing numbers. And as their fates had been linked together in the dawn of the ages, with the Lich King's rise, so did another icon. Immediately taking control over the scattered orcs, the Orc Lord assessed their forces and intel, and decided that just taking down the Lich King (again) wouldn't solve any of the issues plaguing the world. They saw that the common thread linking every major problem together was the presence of magic, destabilizing reality or otherwise running rampant. It all had to go away, and only in a magicless world would true lasting peace be attainable.

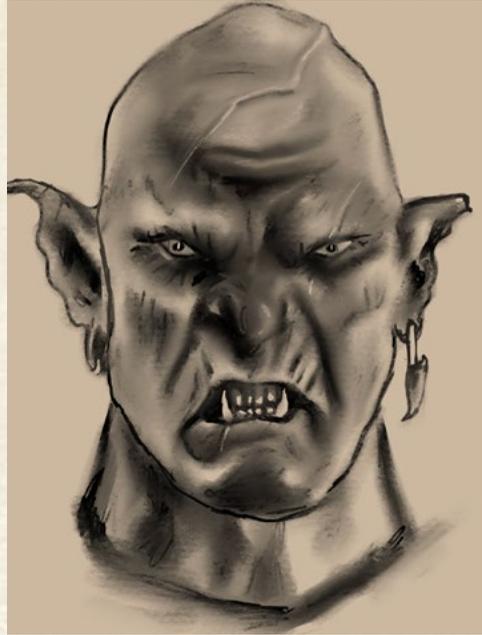


## HIS SPAWN

Orcs are a blank slate, a template for war. Pit-born grunts are near-mindless soldiers, and even the converted elite orcs lose most of their former personality, so orcs as a whole do not really have any culture to speak of. Their minds, however, do still grasp the concept of culture...and more importantly how to exploit it in order to bring kingdoms to ruin.

For example, an orc raider wouldn't care about honor at all, but would still know to challenge a dwarven commander to a duel, confident that the tradition-bound and proud dwarf couldn't refuse such a challenge. Or during a siege against a human keep, the normally pragmatic soldier-orcs might still do seemingly pointless evil acts like desecrating corpses or shouting very graphic war cries, just because of the psychological impact it would have on the defenders.

Biologically speaking, an orc's body, despite lacking any capacity for magic, is blessed with supernatural strength and endurance beyond most mortal men. But most importantly, their flesh responds to incoming damage in a unique way: by mutating to a form that's hopefully more suited towards victory. To direct this adaptation process, and to serve as replacement to the many mages and clerics found in other armies, the orcs elevate special flesh-warper from



amongst their number via an alchemical process taught to them by the Orc Lord themselves.

And speaking of the icon's involvement in the birth of orcs, the Orc Lord was the only one of their kind to be able to spawn orcs directly from the land itself, so after a dozen ages of fighting and preparation, most orcs active in the Dragon Empire are of converted mortal stock. However, distressing reports from counter-infiltrators have revealed the existence of stockpiles of hibernating pit-born grunts, just waiting for their icon to return and unleash them on the region once again.

## GAMEABLE BITS

### ORCISH PASTIER SPECIALS

**Scourge of Magic:** All orcs have Resist Magic 14+. For especially powerful champions of the Orc Lord, this resistance can also extend to other magical effects like attacks made with magic items.

**Adaptation of Flesh:** The first time this orc is staggered, and also every time they are critically hit but survive, their wounded body mutates to make the orc a more effective fighter. Roll a d10 and apply the results. Repeatedly rolling the same result doesn't add anything more than making the orc's form even more grotesquely body-horror-y.

D10	ADAPTATION	EFFECT
1	Head-Mandibles	Missed melee attacks against the orc deal the orc's level x 2 damage to the attacker.
2	Head-Spinnerets	On a Natural 16+, the orc's melee attacks also cause the target to become stuck (save ends).
3	Torso-Scales	Increase the orc's AC and PD by 2.
4	Torso-Wings	As a move action, the orc can take flight, although it needs to land at the end of its turn or fall to the ground.
5	Torso-Smoker	Creatures starting their turn engaged with the orc take the orc's level x 2 in poison damage.
6	Arm-Spear	The orc's melee attacks can be used against nearby enemies.
7	Arm-Shield	Increase the orc's and one adjacent ally's AC by 1
8	Arm-Pincers	The orc deals half damage on melee misses.
9	Leg-Hoppers	Once per turn, the orc can try to disengage with a quick action.
10	Leg-Tentacles	Any creature trying to intercept this orc has to roll an easy save (6+). On failure, the interception still happens, but the creature is grabbed.

# Orc Flesh-warper

3rd level elite leader [Humanoid]

Initiative: +6

Syringe-like tendril +8 vs AC  
– 15 damage

*Natural even hit:* The next time an orc hits the target with a melee attack, they deal an additional 6 points of damage.

CQ: Whipping tendril mane + 7 vs PD (up to 3 engaged enemies, or 1 nearby enemy) – 10 damage

*Natural 20:* Instead of dealing double damage to the target, the next time an orc hits the target with a melee attack, they score an automatic critical hit.

Forced adaptation: As a quick action, the flesh-warper can force a nearby un-adapted orc to roll on the Adaptation of Flesh table.

Neural network: Connected to its subordinate orcs with a thin web of wriggling nerves, the flesh-warper can direct their fellow orcs with supernatural precision. By spending a move action, the flesh-warper and up to 1d6 nearby orcs can move once or roll a single disengage attempt.

*Limited use:* 2/battle, but only once per round

## Nastier Specials

**Adaptive regeneration:** When rolling on the Adaptation of Flesh table, after seeing the result, the flesh-warper can choose to ignore the result and instead heal 20 hit points and remove all save-ends conditions from themselves.

*Limited use:* 1/battle

**Dying frenzy:** The flesh-warper's death throes send one final signal through its neural network: a command to raze the world. When the flesh-warper dies, 1d6 nearby orcs increase their critical range by the escalation die value for the rest of the battle.

AC 19

PD 13

HP 70

MD 17

# WHO KILLED THE ORC LORD?

BY JOHN BECKER  
(AKA SPUGS)



# WHO KILLED THE ORC LORD?

BY JOHN BECKER (AKA SPUGS)

The downfall of the Orc Lord has been widely reported across the Dragon Empire, and everyone wants to know exactly how it happened. Your table can use the prompts and random tables below to craft a unique story of the fall of the Orc Lord and who (or what) rose to power in his wake. You'll need at least one d12 if you're going to randomize any of the prompt results.

A single icon cannot fell another; various other icons certainly played a role, whether in cooperation or otherwise. Have each player choose an icon to play as, or roll on the table. Then agree on a turn order by rolling or any other method of agreement. Each player will take their turn to answer the next prompt.

For each prompt, a list of options in a random table is provided. A player may:

- Pick an option.
- Roll once.
- Roll twice and select one of the results.
- Ignore the table and make up your own option.

If there's a blank, fill it in with whatever you please. Discussion with the rest of the table is encouraged, but ultimately whoever's turn it is makes the final determination. Then, pass the turn to the next player.

The prompts are to be answered from the perspective of the icon you are portraying, so keep in mind your relationship to the Orc Lord, the other icons at play, and the rest of the Dragon Empire at large.

You can put anything you want in the blanks, except for the name of another player's icon or something closely held by them. For example, if another player is portraying the Archmage, don't answer, "He killed The Archmage" or "He invaded Horizon."

## WHICH ICON WILL YOU PORTRAY?

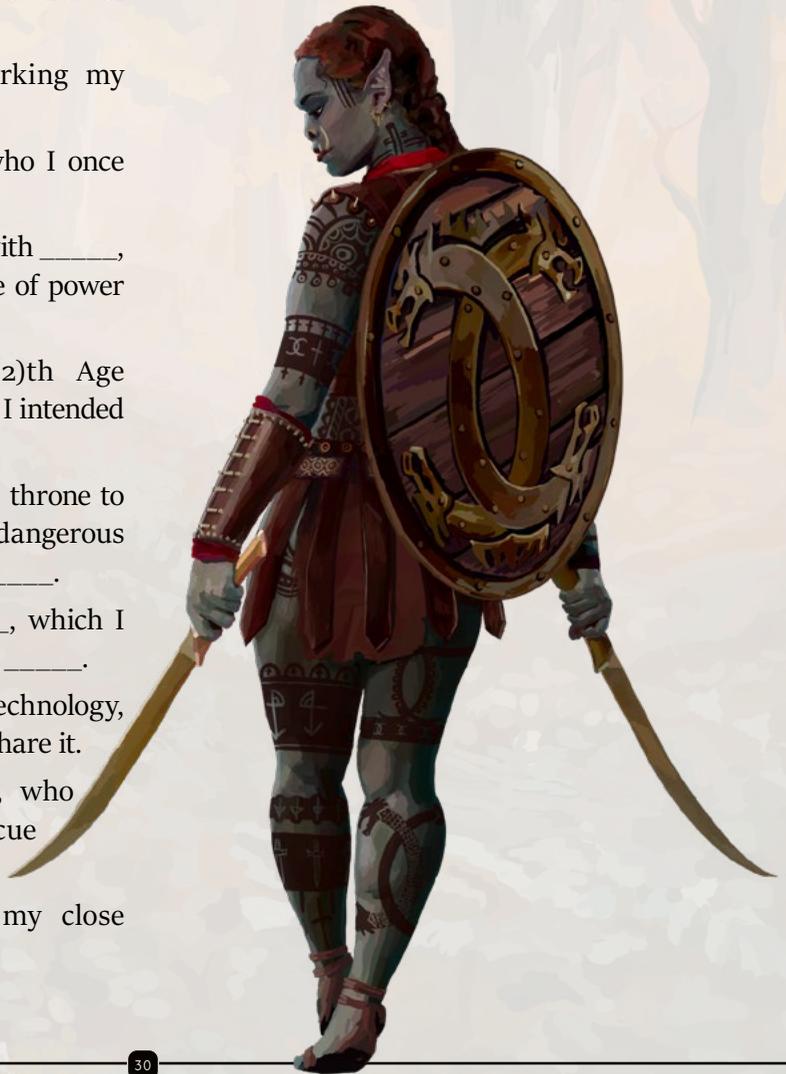
*Each player answers once, without repeating.*

1. THE ARCHMAGE
2. THE CRUSADER
3. THE DIABOLIST
4. THE DWARF KING
5. THE ELF QUEEN
6. THE EMPEROR
7. THE GREAT GOLD WYRM
8. THE HIGH DRUID
9. THE LICH KING
10. THE PRIESTESS
11. THE PRINCE OF SHADOWS
12. THE THREE

## WHAT CONFLICT WITH ME LED TO THE DOWNFALL OF THE ORC LORD?

*The starting player who answers this question is the instigator of the Orc Lord's fall.*

1. He invaded \_\_\_\_\_, at the heart of my territory.
2. He obtained \_\_\_\_\_, a source of power I covet.
3. He killed \_\_\_\_\_, sparking my retribution.
4. He recruited \_\_\_\_\_, who I once called my ally.
5. He formed an alliance with \_\_\_\_\_, threatening the balance of power by \_\_\_\_\_.
6. He discovered \_\_ (d12)th Age secrets of \_\_\_\_\_, which I intended to keep hidden.
7. He intended to pass his throne to \_\_\_\_\_, a much more dangerous enemy to me because \_\_\_\_\_.
8. He grew to love \_\_\_\_\_, which I could not allow because \_\_\_\_\_.
9. He developed a new technology, \_\_\_\_\_, and refused to share it.
10. He kidnapped \_\_\_\_\_, who I endeavored to rescue because \_\_\_\_\_.
11. He defeated \_\_\_\_\_, my close lieutenant.
12. He gained the favor of \_\_\_\_\_, a supernatural force beyond my understanding.



## DID I OPPOSE, SUPPORT, OR REMAIN NEUTRAL TO THE ORC LORD?

*Each player other than the starting player answers, the starting player opposes by default.*

1. Opposed, because \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Opposed, despite \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Opposed, in hopes that \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Opposed, for fear of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Supported, because \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Supported, despite \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Supported, in hopes that \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Supported, for fear of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Remained neutral, because \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Remained neutral, despite \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Remained neutral, in hopes that \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Remained neutral, for fear that \_\_\_\_\_.



## THE RISE BEFORE THE FALL

*Each player answers once, without repeating any prompt.*

1. What victory did the Orc Lord win that made his ascendancy seem unstoppable?
2. What brilliant tactic did the Orc Lord employ that nobody expected?
3. What monstrous fiend unexpectedly supported the Orc Lord?
4. What uncharacteristic skulduggery did the Orc Lord engage in?
5. What unforgivable collateral damage did the Orc Lord sow in his wake?
6. What unexpected secret of the Orc Lord's origin was revealed?
7. What desperate gambit did the Orc Lord's make that paid off?
8. Who's weakness did the Orc Lord exploit?
9. Where did the Orc Lord make his seat of power?
10. What ally did the Orc Lord betray at an unexpected moment?
11. Which minions of the Orc Lord proved their worth beyond expectations?
12. When did it appear that the Orc Lord's victory was inevitable?

## THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

*Each player answers once, without repeating any prompt.*

1. What key battle turned the tide against the Orc Lord's ascendancy?
2. What secret alliance undermines the Orc Lord's forces?
3. What ally of the Orc Lord betrayed him at a pivotal moment?
4. Who went too far in their efforts to oppose the Orc Lord?
5. What work of cultural or historical significance was saved from the Orc Lord's rampage?
6. When did it become clear that the Orc Lord could be defeated.
7. Where did the Orc Lord's enemies obtain a source of power to defeat him?
8. Why did the Orc Lord continue to fight, despite insurmountable odds?
9. Who devised a genius strategy that exploited the Orc Lord's weakness?
10. What omen or sign gave hope that victory was assured?
11. What made a previously neutral party side with the Orc Lord's enemies?
12. Where did the Orc Lord retreat to make his final stand?

## WHAT WAS THE ORC LORD'S FINAL FATE?

Decide as a group, or roll, and flesh out the details together.

1. Slain in an epic battle.
2. Defeated with tactics and subterfuge.
3. Thoroughly beaten and his armies routed.
4. Defeated, but fled with his life.
5. Dethroned and alone.
6. A change of heart.
7. Gave command to a worthy successor.
8. Murdered in cold blood.
9. Banished to an unreachable place.
10. Subjugated by another icon.
11. Forgotten by time.
12. His death brought about the beginning of the end of the age.



## WHAT NEW ICON ROSE IN THE ORC LORD'S PLACE?

*Decide as a group or roll, and flesh out the details together. Then, name the new icon.*

1. A new leader of orcs.
2. A would-be machine god.
3. A heroic slayer, inspiring epic tales.
4. An unpredictable agent of chaos.
5. A gargantuan entity in size and power.
6. A fallen icon returns to power.
7. A wielder of ancient and forgotten power.
8. An invader from beyond the Dragon Empire.
9. A juggernaut destroying all in its path.
10. A prophet of new gods.
11. A demonic tyrant.
12. The harbinger of the Final Age.



# ESCALATION!

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WILL RETURN

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