

Orcs of Golarion

This article is intended to be a historical summary of all orc-based information published by Paizo Publishing LLC, for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Campaign Setting. All content of this article should be considered product identity of Paizo Publishing LLC. This article is not endorsed by Paizo Publishing LLC. Any use of Paizo Publishing LLC copyrighted material or trademarks anywhere in this article should not be deemed a challenge to those copyrights or trademarks.

Orc History

Orcs have seemed to have existed since time itself on Golarion. Originally they only dwelled in the realm of Nar-Voth deep within the Darklands. In the Age of Darkness, dwarves inspired by a prophet of Torag, embarked upon the Quest for the Sky. As the dwarves ventured through the convoluted passages of the Darklands seeking a passage to the surface world, they encountered vast footholds of orcs and goblins impeding their progress.

The inspired desire to fulfill their prophesized quest soon turned into feelings of great frustration and anger as they found themselves nearly unable to proceed. Soon-after, the dwarves lost sight of their original cause and replaced it with a genocidal need to cull the orcs and goblins from the Darklands.

Although the orcs scattered the dwarves and destroyed any further ability to mount substantial organized attacks on them, the orcs suffered too. In their efforts to re-group to fight off the onslaught of raiding dwarves, the orcs had been pushed into many remote and unexplored recesses and environments of the Darklands. In the year -5102, in unknown bitter irony in the face of the dwarves, one such area the orcs withdrew to led to the surface world.

Upon surfacing, the orcs found a land teeming with adversaries for them to war with as they pushed onward to claim territory. Many of the surface inhabitants were not accustomed to the pure savagery which fueled the orcs' need to spread across the lands. The orcs' darkvision provided them with a significant advantage in their conquests during the Age of Darkness.

The humans that the orcs encountered were already quite demoralized, distraught and sickly. The orcs easily conquered the vast human settlements and enslaved many of the weakened race. The orcs spread quickly and soon northern and central Avistan were overrun and ravaged with orcs, as were the humans and halflings that stood in their way.

Many historians believe that had the elves not fled Golarion during the Age of Darkness, the vast spread of orc footholds across the world would never have existed.

A vile enemy of the orcs surfaced in year -4987, the dwarves. The dwarves were very surprised to find their arch-nemesis' had already claimed regions of the surface world before them, and this only made festering, old hatreds even more dire.

The dwarves set out and built several Sky Citadels to govern and prosper from in the surface world. However, the orcs were at the pinnacle of their power and organization. With concentrated attacks, the orcs were able to overwhelm the dwarven armies and drive them away from many of their key fortresses. The dwarves were forced into isolated pockets throughout the lands causing the dwarven centralized government of Tar Taargadth to collapse.

Orcs of Golarion

Many of the surviving dwarven clans gained a foothold in the vast crags of what later became known as Five Kings Mountains. The dwarves were successful in creating significant defenses within the crags which kept the orc attackers away. Although the orcs continued to patrol the borders of the mountains, their forays deep into the mountains were rarely, if ever, met with success.

Orcish dominion waned at the onset of the Age of Anguish. Although the orcs were unaccustomed to the newfound daylight, their vast spread and sheer numbers guaranteed their survival on the surface.

With a new hope enlightening the races, humans, halflings and dwarves allied together and began to reclaim lost territories. The dwarves also made great progress in forcing the orcs to withdraw from the various mountain ranges of northern Avistan. The once unified orc force found itself scattered, half-blinded and overextended. The orcish empire collapsed into numerous tribes that spent as much time fighting themselves as they did with their allied attackers.

Orc warlord Belkzen, did what few orc leaders have ever been able to accomplish. Belkzen rallied together the orc tribes and encouraged them to fight in a unified force known as a horde. In the year -3708, Belkzen lead the orc horde to the great dwarven Sky Citadel of Koldukar and successfully stormed it. The ransacked metropolis still stands as an awe-inspiring monument of Belkzen's greatness in the eyes of the orcs. Belkzen renamed the city, Urgir, meaning "first home".

Despite their large numbers, the orcs had spread themselves out too thin across Avistan. The allied forces greatly reduced the numbers of orcs in the lands and forced them to withdraw from many of their conquered territories. The orcs were pushed into the Kodar Mountains, Five Kings Mountains, Menador Mountains and other desolate wilderlands.

Traditionally when the orcs withdrew to the mountain ranges, they were left alone. However, centuries earned hatreds fueled the various races as they plunged into the mountains determined to exact vengeance upon the heinous orcs. By the early days of the Age of Enthronement, the orcs were cleared from the Menador range. The orcs were also pushed far into the depths of the Kodar Mountains, however they were able to aptly defend themselves in the Five Kings Mountains.

Unexpectedly, the Whispering Tyrant, Tar-Baphon unified the orc tribes in the Hold of Belkzen and began attacking and expanding in most areas of central Avistan in year 3203. This reign of terror lasted until 3828 when Tar-Baphon succumbed to the Shining Crusade. The Kingdom of Lastwall suffered significantly prior to the defeat over the Whispering Tyrant, and had great difficulty establishing its northern border which was constantly pushed back by the marauding orcs. Following the fall of Tar-Baphon, Lastwall constructed the Sunwall, a great line of fortresses.

The Sunwall proved to be a formidable barrier for many centuries but alas, the endless forays of savage orc tribes wore down the defenses and around 4228 the Sunwall fell. Lastwall's General Harchrist created a new line of strongholds and connected many of them with a low stone wall. This new barrier, dubbed Harchrist's Blockade, which spanned a large amount of territory proved to be effective for many years. Like its predecessor, it could not hold against the continual orc attacks and fell in 4237.

Orcs of Golarion

In an act of desperation in year 4515, many soldiers and farmers combined efforts to construct The Hordeline south of the Kestrel River. The poorly constructed wall consisted mainly of earthen ramparts, crude wooden palisades and remnants of Harchrist's Blockade and The Hordeline. The unnamed border has been supported by troops from Lastwall's southern reaches and an influx of money. Although sections of the border are well defended many from Lastwall fear the consequences should the orcs again focus their efforts on expanding south.

Kazavon, a blue dragon disguised as a powerful human knight answered the call of a desperate and frantic Ustalavian conte around year 4043. The Midnight Lord's duty to protect the border was constantly being challenged by continuous orc raids and advances. The Ustalav border defenses were crumbling and the orcs were only a few battles away from a major push into Ustalav when Kazavon appeared.

Rallying the demoralized and scattered border forces, Kazavon led major assaults on the orc forces, delivering crippling blows which required the orcs to withdraw. With the orcs on the run, the disguised dragon pressed on and slaughtered all orcs he could find just for sheer enjoyment and satisfaction.

When Kazavon reached the Kodar Mountains, he built a great fortress called Scarwall. Kazavon eventually carved his way south and east, killing all who stood in his way solely to fuel his bloodlust. Although the blue dragon was eventually slain his fortress remains and is usually avoided by superstitious orcs.

In 4695, orcish Warlord Graukrad was humiliated in a great defeat. Knights from Lastwall, numbering around 173, lead a victorious cavalry charge at Graukrad's troops which numbered greater than 2000. The orcs were defeated and stories of the great battle and Lastwall's knights' triumphant victory quickly spread throughout Avistan.

Orcish Warlord Naellk had an epiphany in year 4696. While taking a few victory spoils from a battle with humans, Naellk looked upon an icon which the war-priests had carried into battle. He gazed into the symbol of Gorum where he was granted a vision of the deity and realized that the Lord in Iron was actually a half-orc. The first and most perfect half-orc. Declaring himself the Proclaimer of Gorum he introduced the Lord in Iron's religion to his kin. Although most orcs and humans deemed him to be mad, his ideas eventually spread throughout western Avistan.

In 4704, Kurg Gutsar murdered Vestach, the orc ruler of Urglin, in his sleep claiming control of the orc town in Vasaria.

At present the orcs have a strong foothold within the deep interior of the Kodar Mountains which hosts many makeshift cities bustling with orcs. The orcs have also re-established themselves in the Menador range. Orcs in the Five Kings Mountains conduct frequent raids in the nearby regions, bordering forests and the settlements within Andoran.

The current greatest concentration of orcs in Avistan is in the Hold of Belkzen. Many warbands and tribal armies frequent the region. Many orc raids are launched from the Hold into all bordering lands. Lastwall and Varisia are the primary focus of most of the orcs' attacks. Vigil, in Lastwall, trains many paladins at the Holy Citadel of Light, primarily for defending against the constant invasions from the Belkzen orcs.

Despite being largely contained within the Hold of Belkzen, the orcs constantly try to expand their borders and talk of reclaiming their ancestral lands "with the rising of the dark".

Orcs of Golarion

Orc Settlements

The most prominent orc settlements consist of the cities of Urgir and Wyvernsting in the Hold and Urglin in Varisia. Notable smaller settlements in the Hold of Belkzen include Blisterwell and Deepgate.

Urgir “first home”, population 28,700, rests on the unkempt remains of a conquered dwarven Sky Citadel and within many layers of warrens below it. Urgir is the most significant trade centre in Belkzen. Grask Uldeth of the Empty Hand is the current ruler of Urgir.

Wyvernsting, population 11,320, a palisaded town built by an unknown orc warlord in the Kodar Mountains of Belkzen. Currently it is ruled by the canny half-orc, Hundux Half-Man of the Murdered Child tribe.

Urglin, “second home”, population 5,400, is built upon the ruins of some old forgotten settlement in Varisia. Kurg Gutsar is the current ruler of Urglin. The town consists of five districts, Bonerattle, Oozefront, Pinkskin, Scabtown and Warmouth. Ploog’s Bloodworks is the most renown building in Urglin, a vast arena where all manner of vile acts and deeds are showcased for sheer entertainment.

Blisterwell is a vast settlement built within the walls and deep shafts of a captured dwarven quarry and strip mine. The settlement is ruled through a constantly shifting alliance of the Haskodar and One Eye tribes.

Deepgate is a small settlement in the Kodar Mountains of Belkzen. Deepgate consists of an orc built fortress which had been constructed at a tunnel mouth whose passage leads into the Darklands. Various orc tribes constantly vie for ruler ship of Deepgate.

Important Orc Locations

The Brimstone Haruspex is a temple high in the caldera of a smoking volcano in the Kodar Mountains of Belkzen. Run by ascetic orc clerics the complex best resembles a monastery. Monks within the Haruspex maintain a record of orc history which consists of extensive cave paintings chronicling orc past events in Avistan since their departure from Nar Voth. The clerics are also considered to be oracles as they often inhale the volcanic vapors that escape through fumaroles within the Haruspex, which have been known to give prophetic revelations. The fumes are quite caustic though, permanently scarring the face and lungs of those that breathe them in.

The Foundry, located deep within the Kodar Mountains of Belkzen, is a captured dwarven fortress. A cult of mad tribeless orc smiths known as the Steel Eaters, continue the dwarven arts of metallurgy, smithing and engineering within the iron walled fortress. The Steel Eaters are often sought by out by various orc tribes for their skills in making twisted siege weapons.

Orcs of Golarion

Orc Tribes

The most notable orc tribes in Avistan would include the following:

Black Sun
Blood Trail
Broken Spine
Cleft Head
Dead Eye
Death's Head
Defiled Corpse
Empty Hand
Gnarled Fist
Gouged Eye
Gutspear
Haskodar
Murdered Child
Rotten Tongue
Severed Hand
Shattered Skull
Skull Eater
Twisted Nail
Vile Blade
Wingripper

Notable Orcs

Belkzen. An orc warlord who mustered together many orc tribes into a great orcish horde and captured Koldukar, a dwarven Sky Citadel. This captured city was renamed Urgir. The region of land controlled by the orcs became known as the Hold of Belkzen.

Grask Uldeth of the Empty Hand. The current ruler of Urgir in the Hold of Belkzen.

Graukrad. An orc warlord who suffered a humiliating defeat when his vastly outnumbered troops fell to a significantly smaller cavalry unit consisting of knights from Lastwall.

Kurg Gutscar. The current ruler of Urglin in eastern Vasaria. Krug murdered the prior ruler, Vestach, in his sleep.

Kreth. An orc who was either brave enough or stupid enough to enter within some ancient standing stones while they were alive with crackling magical energy during a celestial alignment. The curious orc was never seen again, however the artifacts were named the Pillars of Kreth in his honor.

Naellk. An orc warlord who in a moment of divine revelation realized the deity Gorum was a half-orc. As acceptance of this revelation spread, Naellk became known as the Proclaimer of Gorum.

Orcs of Golarion

Orc Information Sources

- Pathfinder Campaign Setting, pages 14-15, Half-Orcs.
- Pathfinder Campaign Setting, pages 64-65, Hold of Belkzen.
- Pathfinder Adventure Path #11, pages 58-63, Hold of Belkzen (Detailed map of the Hold on page 60)
- Pathfinder Adventure Path #11, pages 70-75, A Friend in Need
- Pathfinder Adventure Path #8, pages 72-77, The Bloodworks Incident (Urglin detailed)
- Pathfinder Chronicles Classic Monsters Revisited, pages 52-57, Orcs.