

#Orctober day 1 Orc Barbarian

Kurgen Bloodbathed is a legendary warrior of the Graahak Tribes, called the Fell Swarm by the humans inhabiting the Sunfrost Bay. Kurgen led the fierce Blood Drinkers, the most savage and vicious warriors of the three tribes. After becoming warlord in the summer of 172 AC Kurgen raided the Sunfrost Bay all autumn, and the tribes spent that winter in control of the trading posts of Kiltlen and Vurjaan. The armies of the Duke of Roses ended the invasion and drove back the Graahak into the Frozen Peaks. The Blood Drinkers took back the body of their fallen leader and ate his body as to gain his ferocity and pass it on to their sons. To this day the most barbaric orcs are said to channel the spirit and ferocity of Kurgen Bloodbathed.

#Orctober days 2 Orc Shaman, and day 3, Old School Pig Headed Orc

What's Orctober you ask? Well I did not know about it until Claudio Pozas shared an image with the prompts for the month some days ago. It seems some people merge the drawing celebration of inktober with a celebration of orcs and have orctober. I admit to knowing very little about it, except that in Claudio's post he invited people to paint, sing, or write about orcs, and with my need to just think about something else besides hurricane recovery, I've taken on the challenge. Since I missed day 2 of #orctober yesterday, I'm catching up by posting about the topics for days 2 and 3.

"You want to know about fearsome Yrigtren the War Chanter? Well of course I know that story!"

Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter, was a descendant of the Blood Drinkers who feasted on the body of the fallen hero Kurgen Bloodbathed 38 years before. Unlike his ancestor, Yrigtren was born during times of hardship for the Graahak tribes, one of the fiercest storms to strike the Frozen Peaks in the tribe's memory, he was the runt of his litter, the smallest of the four whelps. The lone female would have likely been left to die, but Yrigtren had been born with an atrophied hand. The shaman told his concubine to

take him out into the snow and crush his head. She took the baby out but could not bring herself to do it. She simply left the screaming whelp out in the snow so Yrigbum, the Screaming God of the Unforgiving Snow would take him. But someone else found him...

The savage snow apes of the high Frozen Peaks had been driven down from their secret cities in the great cliffs and they found the baby. One of the females of the snow apes adopted the baby orc and he grew up among them. It wasn't until his fourteenth birthday when the future War Chanter would meet another orc.

By then he was tall and strong, and the smiths of the snow apes had forged him a mighty arm of fire metal. When a daring band of orc dared into the high peaks of the snow apes, the young orc led the snow apes into battle. The orcs were captured and the orc that would come to be known as Yrigtren one Arm, the War Chanter learned of his people. He learned the Graahak tribes were broken and scattered. He also learned of their proud tradition and the stories of their old conquests. He asked the snow ape king for his blessing and in the company of a lone survivor from orc band, he traveled to the lands of his people.

There he faced the shaman of Yrigbum who had told his mother to kill him. Despite the shaman's magic, the might of the young orc and the secrets he had learned from the viziers of the snow apes, was unmatched. He killed his father and was named Yrigtren, son of the howling wind. Four years later he would become the War Chanter of the Graahak tribes and in 230 AC he would begin his march from the Frozen Peaks into the lands of the Duchess of Roses.

"You are right, this wouldn't have happened if not for Secher One Eye, or as he was known in the fighting pits of Roumdel, The Swine. So, let's not get ahead of ourselves..."

Let's get this out of the way. The orcs of the south are different from their northern brethren. While the northern orcs roam free in the mountain ranges and the tundra, the

southern orcs were long ago driven from Irgenia by the founders of the Roumian city states. Some were enslaved, others escaped into the wilds or hid in the underground ruins of the dwarven kingdoms. These orcs are noticeably shorter and generally not as big as northern orcs; because of their pronounced, flat noses, and their grunting speech, it should be no surprise that the roumians call them savage pigs.

Secher was captured by treasure hunters who raided an orc nest in some lost dwarven ruins and was sold as a slave in Roumdel. A local lord down on his luck purchased him and sent him to his gladiator stable, sure a fierce orc would turn his luck around. The pit master soon discovered Secher was not a savage fighter soon after he lost an eye in training. Still Secher survived and the pit master had seen something in him. Secher was not physically powerful or especially savage, but he was canny and fast. The pit master knew how to present him, and he trained him in underhanded and dirty fighting. Secher became known as a treacherous gladiator, known to exploit his enemy's weaknesses, prone to betray his partners for his own glory, thus earning the nickname, the Swine.

So successful was Secher one eye that his master became a rich lord and the orc was able to purchase his freedom. But the decadent roumians considered themselves too civilized to allow a savage pig to live among them and Secher was exiled. He became a mercenary in the frontier, eventually serving with the Sea of Swords mercenary company during the War of the Petals for control of the Duchy of Roses. Even after all these he never felt welcome among the humans, in his old age Secher One Eye travelled to the Frozen Peaks, seeking perhaps kinship among the orcs. It was there that he would meet Yrigtren and bring down the Roumian Empire.

"Buy me another ale and I will tell you the story of how Secher became Yrigtren's advisor."

#Orctober day 4 Orc Assassin

Continuing my written participation in #Orctober. As in previous days I must credit Claudio Pozas for posting about this and inspiring me to participate.

“Refreshing! That ale hit the spot... Where was I? Oh yes, Secher and Yrigtren’s meeting.”

By 228 After Crowning, by human reckoning, Yrigtren One Arm had become War Chanter of the Graahak tribes and subjugated many of the other orc tribes in the Frozen Mountains to his will. The chieftains came to him for guidance and to receive his blessings which made them nearly unstoppable in battle. This fact had not gone unnoticed by the vassals of the Duke of Roses in and near Sunfrost Bay. It had also caught the attention of Secher One Eye who journeyed into the Frozen Peaks to meet this great leader.

Of all the tribes that the Graahak had dominated were the Hill Runners, among the southernmost tribes in the Frozen Peaks, often derided by other orcs for their warrior’s propensity to father weakling half-humans in the prisoners they captured on their raids south. The Hill Runners had been beaten into submission and their leader Bundrek resented the power the Graahak and especially Yrigtren held over them, and he made a secret deal with the human nobles of Sunfrost Bay to rid both of their problem.

It was with a hunting party of Hill Runners that Secher made his way into the Frozen Peaks. The old orc gladiator was certainly past his prime, but he was still a canny opponent, and Bundrek saw an opportunity in him. The southern orc wanted an escort to the tribal lands of the Graahak to meet their War Chanter. He sent an envoy of guides and warrior to escort Secher in his journey.

In this band Bundrek sent his son Burag with a gift for the War Chanter. Secher travelled for four weeks in the windswept, cold and unforgiving mountains until he reached the sacred vale of Yrigbum the howling orc god of the unforgiving snows where Yrigtren the War Chanter, shaman of the, Graahak made camp. Burag asked for an audience, and after all in his party had surrendered their weapons, they were granted passage into the

shaman's tent. There he introduced Secher, who in turn regaled the War Chanter with the storied he had heard of the shaman and his own life story. Yrigtren seemed unimpressed with this strangely civilized elf who barely spoke their language.

Burag impetuously interrupted the southerner and presented Yrigtren with a statue his father's warrior had captured from a human merchant. A fearsome dragon carved in ivory with red gems for eyes. Burag brought the statue to the shaman, when a dagger pierced his neck. The orc barely gargled in his own blood before falling to the floor.

Secher stood there, bloody dagger in hand, as the tent exploded around him. Burag's warriors jumped at him, the War chanter's bodyguards protected their leader and grabbed Secher. The old pig nosed orc was moments away from being torn to pieces when the War Chanter struck the floor with his fire metal arm. The dark metal rippled with red bands dancing over its surface, in the joints sparks of fire flashed in the dark tent, the sound it made when it hit the floor silenced and stopped all in Yrigtren's presence. He stood and pointed at Secher and simply said, 'Explain.'

The orcs holding him released him and Secher walked over to the carving of the dragon laying on the floor. He squatted and pushed the dragon's paw with the tip of his bloody dagger. The carving came alive, unravelling with strange mechanical clicking, the size of a dog it danced in the floor seeking its target. Secher grabbed Burag's body and threw it at the clockwork dragon, it pounced, biting the body and coiling around the neck. Its red eyes flashed and it exploded in a conflagration. Burag's head was a smoldering cinder.

Seeing the confusion Secher began to explain that he had seen such things before in Roudel while he was a slave, old dwarven tricks learned and reproduced by human artisans. Then he realized none around him understood him, he had spoken the tongue of the humans he had grown up speaking all his life. He simply pointed at what remained of Burag and said in orcish, 'Orc assassin.'

With that Yrigtren realized Secher understood his enemies in ways he did not, and the old orc began advising the War Chanter about the humans to the east and south and more. While the War Chanter wanted to strike at the Hill Runners and the humans,

Secher tempered his furry and convinced him that his enemies expected just this, and that the secret to victory was doing the opposite of what your enemies expected.

“Just what their plans were and what they did together is a tale for another day. Rest and be packed in the morning. I will continue this tale on the road.”

#Orctober day 5 Orc Necromancer

The next installment of my written participation in #Orctober. Shout out to Claudio Pozas because his post on this subject and art for #Orctober inspire me to do this. So, I'll hand it over to our narrator.

“Oh, the road... The possibilities it brings. Leaving behind civilization and wondering forth into the wilderness. Be so kind and pass me that wineskin. Stop pestering me, I'll continue my story. No, today I'm not telling you the story of the Battle of Death Garden. To get there you need to know about someone else.”

In the distant past, during the heyday of the Roumian city states, their priest launched a great proselytizing crusade from Irgenia into Gersania, Hirinia that the locals called Issinia, Rustvan and as far as Sasserren and the coasts of mysterious Undan. It was thus how many mortals converted to the faith of the Great Founders. It is hard to continue worshiping the gods of your ancestors, when the priests of these foreign gods can perform miracles you've never seen.

Not everyone welcomed these missionaries, in Sasserren they were thrown to the snake pits where the desert clans locked the first men corrupted by the thu-ben. In Rustvan their chief of chiefs had his horsemen trample them, only to convert when they saved his favorite wife from a mortal wound she suffered in a duel. This did not stop them, they continued their crusade, and one of the unlucky ones wondered into the Dry Sea north of Rustvan. In this enormous, barren and dangerous valley lived orcs and ogres

renowned for their savagery. Learning of his arrival to his lands, an ogre overlord sent his warriors to fetch the priest.

Bloodied and broken the priest was brought before the ogre overlord, who demanded to be shown the secrets of the gods. The priest to no avail told him that their gift would not work on his giant-tainted blood. The ogre did not believe him and by the end of the interrogation the priest was near death, the ogre ordered him thrown to the war wolves and was done with him. A lowly orc warrior crawled in the darkness to find the priest, and there hunched in the darkness, she heard the words the priest whispered to her before death finally took the human. That orc learned the secret of divine communion, the pathways the Founders had crafted from beyond the mortal world where open to her, distant powers whispered to her their secrets and rituals. This lowly orc became first shaman of her kin!

But orcs were tainted by their role in the Great War of Heaven and Earth, while they did not bear the blood of the god's ancestral enemies, the giants, their nature had been darkened and twisted by their yoke. Thus, the darker powers from beyond found converts and believers among the orc. This shaman was granted power by these powers and she in turn showed other orcs the way of her patrons. One of the powers the orc came to worship was Gernellian Lady of the Dead, Mistress of the Undead!

The powers of Kurgen Bloodbathed his Blood Drinkers came through the blessings of Gernellian. One of Kurgen's concubines was a powerful shaman of the Lady of the Dead. She showed him the rituals of blood magic which allowed the Blood Drinkers to feats on the flesh of their enemies and gain their strengths. When Kurgen had died she has been spirited away by warriors loyal to him, knowing full well that a new leader would kill Kurgen's concubines and children. Her descendants hid among a small tribe of devout followers of Gernellian. The shaman of that tribe was renowned as a great orc necromancer. The ravines and paths leading to their tribal lands were said to be guarded by fallen orcs risen from the dead, and foul spirits under her command.

The old gladiator Secher One Eye learned of this and other tales when he earned a place in Yrigtren the War Chanter inner circle after saving his life. He had argued

vigorously in opposition to immediate retaliation against the traitorous tribe that had attempted to kill the great shaman and their human allies. Yrigtren had amazingly listened to him and granted him three days to come up with a plan. Secher had tried to learn all he could of the orcs of the Frozen Peaks, their stories and traditions, and when he heard to Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead, he had his plan!

“We’re near the river crossing. Help me off this mule. I’ll continue this story once we are across.”

#Orctober day 6 Warcraft Orc

I’m here for day 6 of #Orctober. As usual, tipping my hat to Claudio Pozas whose art got me interested in #Orctober to begin with. I apologize for mistakes on these. I usually write them on the phone, at night, currently with no power, so please accept my apologies ahead of time...

Today’s topic is one of those complicated ones. I know about Warcraft of course, played some of the original strategy games. Only played WoW once! Saw the movie, and did not like it. So, to work around this I’m cheating a little. You’ll see.

“And that’s how we lost the mule after you went under the water... No! Stay down, get yourself dry. Let me continue my story.”

Secher One Eye presented his plan to Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter. While the chieftains scoffed at the southern orc’s suggestion Yrigtren listened intently. Secher proposed an alliance between the Graahak tribes, their allies, and the Death Speakers, the tribe of Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead, shaman of Gernellian Lady of the Dead, Mistress of the Undead.

The orc gods are fickle and petty, tribes that follow one deity often clash with those that follow others. Yrigtren was a shaman of Yrigbum, the Screaming God of the Unforgiving Snow. Such an allegiance would certainly be hard to arrange. But Yrigtren understood

the brilliance in Secher's plan, who smiled smugly at the gathered chieftains. A smile that quickly vanished when the War Chanted tasked him with arranging the pact.

Secher was sent with an escort of Yrigtren's most loyal orcs. The paths to the Death Speaker enclave was treacherous, and Secher more than once regretted journeying into the Frozen Peaks. Attacked at camp while resting by rotting orc corpses who would not remain down once felled, almost convinced him that his mission was folly. But eventually Secher One Eye and a handful of his escort made it into the cave where Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead gathered her tribe. Her tribe eerily silent around the entrance, their faces painted black, the stench overpowering, hard to tell who was alive and what was an animated corpse.

Sent alone into the depth of the cavern, Secher looked in amazement at the young orc standing before him in the smoke-filled grotto. Unlike the tans, dark browns and green common in orc complexions, the young ragamuffin before him had pale, pinkish skin, her hair wild, unkempt, a sickly white yellowish color, he could see her veins like snakes pulsating under her skin. He had heard stories that Merkigra was an older, matronly, albino orc woman, but this girl was barely and adult, yet her eyes betrayed a much older soul. They glowed a strange eerie reddish green.

In his woefully inadequate orcish Secher began explaining why he was there. He regretted not practicing the language of his people more, and what he knew bore the accent of his southern origin. He tried to explain as best as he could the benefit of the alliance he proposed. Merkigra responded in perfect roumian, speaking the human trade tongue as a native, her voice far too deep and gravely to be the voice of a child. 'I learned of you plans in her entrails, and it is a good plan. That is why I put on a new skin.' Secher looked at where the girl pointed and saw the body of an old albino orc woman, her abdomen open, her entrails strewn about the cave.

Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead traveled back with Secher to meet Yrigtren One Arm. Accompanied by her protectors, orcish warrior priestesses and the shambling corpses of their fallen sisters, her arrival caused a stir among the gathered tribes, but the two shamans joined in common purpose. Thus, the first part of Secher plans began...

Bundrek of the Hill Runners, who had conspired with the humans and sent his son Burag to assassinate the War Chanter, waited nervously. If Yrigtren was dead he would have heard about it, but the tribe lands of the Graahak remained quiet. He had neither heard from Burag nor received a ransom demand; his people had not been attacked. The humans had sent emissaries, but Bundrek had turned them away. He brooded in his tent late at night, sending away his concubines, when a lookout shouted of an approaching party. Had his son arrived? Bundrek put on some pelts, grabbed his axe, and trotted out to find out.

The chief of the Hill Runners and his orcs cautiously approached the hill from which the lookout had called out, but could not find him. Then he saw him, down in the path between the hills, Bundrek recognized his son's silhouette. Burag and his warrior had returned. He led his tribespeople down to meet them. His warrior urge caution, but Bundrek realized his mistake too late. His son walked slowly, slouched, and then the stench hit them! Too late because the animated corpse of Burag and his orc warrior suddenly ran to them, their hungry mouths agape. The Hill Runners fought them fiercely, but the undead can fight until they are torn to pieces. Burag's animated corpse feasted on his father. The just dead rose up and joined the hundreds of dead orcs marching down into the Hill Runner camp under the command of Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead.

From a nearby hill Yrigtren the War Chanter watched the fires and heard the screams as his enemies died in agony. He turned to Secher One Eye and told him 'You know much about warcraft orc. You shall be my advisor in the coming war!'

"Together these two would sow fear in the hearts of men and reshape the kingdoms of the world by their actions. But that's a tale for tomorrow. For now, rest. I don't like that cough."

#Orctober days 7, 8 and 9: Orc Bard, Orc Archer and Shadowrun Orc

Back from the weekend! I had intended to post over the last few days, but no power and iffy Internet connection post Hurricane María means you get a triple post today. And what a combination it is! I'm going for a narrative here, and today's entry kind of throws me off for a loop. But Like I did for the Warcraft Orc, I have something in mind.

Don't forget to visit the very talented Claudio Pozas' FB page because he's killing it with his daily orc drawings. He's the reason I'm doing this. And now, on with the orc.

"Here drink this. Yes, we are in a wagon. How about that? You get hired as a porter and end up traveling in style. I know it hurts. Drink it all. It will take care of the cough. Let me continue my tale. Where were we? Oh yes!"

The gathered tribes lusted for battle. The orc army, unlike any the south had seen since the time of Kurgan Bloodbathed, marched upon the fields of Rose Garden. Across the fields waited the army of renowned military commander Hortense Gevalliene, the Duchess of Roses. Her cavalry had crushed her brother's forces, her footmen taken the last garrison of her nephew in Sunfrost Bay, and the mercenary forces her vast treasure troves afforded her had made sure her father's vassals knew their place. She was confident, sure of her victory over the largest orc army in human history.

But human memory is fickle, and the Duchess for all her education and knowledge, did not remember the Orc Wars of the past. Before the crowning of the King in Gersania, even before the construction of the grand cathedral to the Great Founders in Serissen, or the election of the Grand Master at the Library of Tesalon, humans fought side by side with the dwarves in the Orc Wars.

The wounds of the Great War of Heaven and Earth were still fresh, and the dwarves were yet to abandon their vast underground holdings. Humans were a young race, and had barely learned the art of metallurgy from the dwarves.

Mighty orc armies marched south devouring everything in their path like unstoppable locust. The dwarves made their final stand in these vast plains, their thunderous cannons ripping the sky apart, their soldier holding the line. The numerous humans sent

in wave after wave against the seemingly endless orcs. Eventually the humans and dwarves were victorious and the orcs were bested. Thousands of corpses were strewn for leagues on end. The dwarves granted the humans these lands as their holding and the first human kingdoms beyond Irgenia were founded.

The dwarven generals ordered that no fallen combatant was to be taken from the battlefield, the killing fields would remain as a warning to those who would dare march against the dwarves and their allies. But time is unrelenting and the battlefields would be overgrown and the dwarven kingdoms fall and be forgotten. The human lords of this region became known as the Lords of the Roses because of the wild roses that grew upon the battlefields. These lords eventually swore fealty to the kings in Gersania and became the Dukes of Roses, ancestors of Duchess Gevalliene.

The Graahak tribes, and their allies, the Death Speakers, the Wyrms Burned, the River Hunters, the Shadow Runners and many others that had joined the call of Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter, longed to be let off their leash, to run wild against the humans just sitting there, but Yrigtren had a plan. One crafted by his War Master Secher One Eye.

Almost two years prior to this battle they had attacked the human baron who had paid the Hill Runners to try and kill the War Chanter, and begun a series of raids against the cities in Sunfrost Bay. Enough to alarm the locals, for the lords to plea for help from their liege, the Duchess of Roses. She had sent troops and supplies north, redoubled their defenses, as Secher knew she would. He had after all fought as a mercenary under her command. While this game of cat and mouse went on across the territories of the Sunfrost Bay, Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter sent his bards to gather the tribes.

Calling them bards serves the purpose of illustrating what they do among the orcs; they tell tales and inspire the orcs to great deeds, but that's where the similarities end. Unlike a traveling minstrel reciting an epic story by the fireplace of a crowded inn, or a skald inspiring his fellow soldiers to battle by song, orc bards are howling madmen as likely to sing the tale of mighty chieftains, as to rip your limbs from your body.

Like shamans, bards in orc society fill a religious role. They are typically the travelling eyes and ears of the shamans, initiated into the rituals of the gods, and granted power over orcs by strength and magic. The bards of Yrigbum, the Screaming God of the Unforgiving Snow were called Howlers. Their leader was Krellgar, an initiate and sometimes lover, of Yrigtren One Arm. His howling dance was said to strike fear into the souls of all who saw and heard him. Krellgar was tasked with sending his orc bards to all the tribes of the Frozen Peaks, so that they might tell them of the power of the War Chanter, of his unforgiving revenge against those who plotted against him, but also of the glories that awaited those who followed him. Yrigtren One Arm had one goal, to conquer the human lands for the orc.

Krellgar's bards brought tribe after tribe under the banner of the War Chanter, and now led the march of his gathered forces. They howled in the vanguard as they approached the amassed human army.

Long before this battle, while the humans chased the raiders around Sunfrost bay, the amassed orc tribes surreptitiously began their march south. Instead of invading the northlands and then spilling out into the Duchy of Roses by the Hydra's Pass, the forces of Yrigtren One Arm took the more difficult and treacherous route of the southern Frozen Peaks. They killed every trapper and annihilated any small settlement they ran into. Reaching the Fields of Roses, northernmost border of the Duchy of Roses by spring of 230 AC was their goal. And now they stood ready to face the enemy.

Secher had not wasted his time either. Before then march began and during it, he gathered the most disciplined and smartest orcs he could find in all the tribes. He drilled them for months as his plan took form and they marched south. During this time he took for his second a most unexpected orc. A half breed young orc who had been turned away by her tribe for her human blood. Unfit to bear any children she had been put in charge of the animals the tribe kept for sustenance. Secher had recognized her potential as soon as she saw that her tribe had the most livestock of any of the tribes. To other tribes this was an afterthought, a lesser task left for the undesirables. But Nissegra had embraced her duty and provided for her tribe like no other. Secher made

Nissegra his second in command and put her in charge of supplying and feeding his new battalion.

To the orcs archery is a necessity, a means to attack a foe who runs away, and in the passes of the Frozen Peaks, spears, bows and arrows are weapons warriors master to protect their tribal lands. But orc warriors relish hand to hand combat. It is the ultimate glory. Undisciplined orc archers often abandon their position when the chance for melee combat presents itself. Secher wanted a dedicated archery battalion. He picked the best candidates, some half breeds thought as unworthy by orc warriors. Like his second, his best archer was a half-human, Putterg was tolerated by his tribe for his skill with the bow, rarely allowed to fight with his tribe's warriors, he honed his skill with bow and arrow. Secher put him in charge of the orc archers, and had them practice through the seasons it took the massed tribes to make it south. Now in the eve of battle Secher stood by Yrigtren the War Chanter, far from his untested battalion, praying to gods he barely believed in, that Nissegra and Putterg would fulfill their duty.

The Duchess of Roses raised her hand, her bannermen raised the flags ordering the footmen to march. The pike men opened the way and the footmen marched into battle in orderly rows as to draw out the orcs. The archers readied their arrows, and Duchess Gevalliene was ready to lead the cavalry assault herself. Their opponent had greater numbers, but she had discipline and cunning. The orcs had stretched their march as late into the day as they could, but she was sure her soldiers would draw them into the field and that the Battle of Rose Garden would be over before sundown.

The ancient tunnels of the dwarves were abandoned long ago. The kingdoms they built and the endless tunnels they constructed during the centuries of the Great War of Heaven and Earth were vacated with haste. Dwarves hid in the surface world from some unknown enemy, slowly dying out among the humans. They were but an afterthought to many, relics of the past holding on to former glories in some rundown part of town. Their tunnels however were taken over by others. Some southern orcs lived in the tunnels and complexes near the surface, dragons and even worse creature took control of the depths of the dwarven kingdoms. But most of them were overrun by

the goblins. In all their strange shapes and sizes, they had sprung from the depths of the world as the dwarves fled the underworld. They thrived in the darkness and travelling into the shadows of the underworld meant facing the goblins.

The Shadow Runner orc tribe was a pivotal part of Secher's plans, and Krellgar the Howler was dispatched to recruit them personally. The Shadow Runner tribe knew the dwarven passes and tunnels in the Frozen Peaks and were known to deal with the goblins. When Melgron the chieftain of the Shadow Runners joined the War Chanter's march, he was tasked with Secher with the final part of the plan.

The orc howlers howled and the warriors beat their weapons against their shields. Their beast of war grunted and beat the earth. The war boars' hooves grooved the rose fields. But Yrigtren the War Chanter had them hold off their attack. The few warriors that broke the ranks were quickly chastised by their chieftains. They held firm while the human footmen reached the middle of the field.

Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead, shaman of Gernellian Lady of the Dead, Mistress of the Undead and her undead soldiers reached the battle another way. Under the protection of Melgron the Shadow Runner, who had arranged safe passage for her and her minions through the dwarven warrens crisscrossing the battlefield in the underworld. Here she could feel the remain of the orcs fallen in ancient times in this very same fields. Like the sea of colors swept by the wind across the vast fields of roses, she could feel the orc skeletons as numerous as the roses above. She began her chanting, fowl revelries to her dark mistress. A sickly green fog filled the corridors beneath the battlefield and seeped through the ground up...

The Duchess took her horse to a high point to look over the battle. Why had the orc not attacked? Half her army, her footmen were ready and waiting. Her commander urged her to pull back, it was near sundown, to wait until the morning, but she would hear no such thing. Some men broke formation. A sudden fog seemed to seep out of the earth in the late afternoon gloom. At first a few screams. Then her footmen broke formation wildly.

On the battlefield the long forgotten remain of thousands of orcs left to rot in the fields long ago, their remains the fertile ground where the rose bushes grew for so long, rose once more to battle, summoned by Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead in the name of the goddess! Orc skeletons clawed themselves out of the fields and attacked the humans. Where one fell. Another rose, the humans were routed and fleeing.

Faced with an unexpected army of undead orcs the Duchess of Roses ordered her archers to fire, her pike men to line up before the onslaught of orc skeletons reached them. Many soldiers faltered when faced with such horrific opponents. Yet they held on, barely, stopping the wave of orc undead. A wild cheer went up when they undead seemed defeated in the early night, but it was drowned in screams of agony as the orc tribes broke the human lines coming out of the mist in the dark!

Duchess Gevalliene knew she had lost. The orcs had taken the field, broken her line, she would not sacrifice her knights in this folly. She ordered a full retreat, leading her cavalry out of the Fields of Roses and into the long and winding Verun Vale, the quickest route to Gevalliene Keep where she was sure to hold off the orc. Verun had been key in her ability to reach Sunfrost Bay quickly and to move her troops around the duchy. Troops that included the Sea of Swords, the mercenary company Secher had fought with.

The Duchess and her knights were cut down by the arrows of Putterg's orc archers under the command of Nissegra. The duchess was killed, her body sent to the War Chanter who feasted on her heart and mounted her head as a trophy on his banner. A few riders were allowed to flee, as to tell others of what had happened. To tell their kin how that night the Fields of Roses had become de Garden of Death. The orcs were coming!

"Thus, began the second Orc Wars. Now rest, you've become too excited and you need to gather your strength. We shall talk tomorrow."

#Orctoiber day 10: Orc Peasant

Shifting gears... The next prompt for #Orctober, as per the promotional image created by Claudio Pozas that started me down this path goes on a different direction today.

For those who don't know I live in Puerto Rico, and these past few weeks have been rough. We had two hurricanes, the second one, María, was a direct hit. A category 4 with gusts reaching category 5. The island is still in dire straits. I am among the lucky few that has water, work, food, Internet connection in some areas. Many of my countrymen are worse off. One of my therapies in life, what helps me stay sane, is gaming. I haven't been able to role-play in 6 weeks today. I got some gaming done Sunday before last, but I haven't scratched my role-playing itch. So, what do I do instead? I write #Orctober posts. And here is today's!

(If anybody follows my posts in Stargazer's World they may realize I used a name for a kingdom here that I used for a campaign there, totally unplanned!)

"There, there. No need to scream. That's the fever. I know the foot hurts. The good priest is taking care of it, but he's not the kind that performs miracles. He had to cut the toes. Easy, easy... Here drink this. Let me tell you a story."

The Second Orc Wars began with the Battle of the Garden of Death. The armies of the War Chanter did not lay siege to Gevalliene Keep, instead marching into the fields south of the Seisar River, destroying the towns and villages there, capturing the humans they did not slay as slaves, and seizing the grain supplies of the Duchy of Roses. The King in Gersania had heard of the advancing army by now and convened his War Council. A few ambitious lords tried to amass a defense against the orcs only to be slaughtered.

The army of the dead under the command of Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead, now bolstered by the fallen soldiers at the Battle of Death Garden overran Gevalliene Keep, but instead of joining the main forces south of the Seisar River, marched southwest into the steppes of the Grass Sea and into the Mountains of Thunderwyrn in the westernmost borders of Gersania.

But wars are not won merely by a commander's will. Wars require soldiers, supplies and patience. The War Chanter tribes had plenty of the first, and this move assured them the second, the third... well the third can sometimes be hard to come by for an orc. Orcs are short lived when compared with other races. Even humans often live a few decades longer. Add to that the savage existence most endured then, orcs lives were savage and quick, often snuffed quickly like a short candle. They longed for action and waiting around was not in their nature. Raiders and warrior lived for the glory of combat, and death was a very real possibility. Women, children, the old, and the crippled stayed behind to tend to the tribal lands, or followed nomadic warrior supporting them with supplies and provisions.

It was not uncommon for a war band to attack a settlement at night, ravage it and move on. The rest of the tribe would move in after them, scavenge, pillage, and continue following the trail blazed by the war band, bringing them food and water when they camped during the day. This was exactly what happened on a grand scale with the tribes the War Chanter had amassed into his armies

After taking the fertile fields south of the Seisar River the tribe folk not in the frontlines were expected not only to scavenge in the towns overrun by the orc armies, but to take over the fields and tend to them as the war progressed. Orcs had learned to sow the fields from humans long ago, but their existence in the fringes of civilization, in the most dangerous and barren lands, meant that widespread agriculture was not feasible. The few crops they grew helped the tribe survive a hard winter, but they relied on raids, hunting and gathering to survive. What we would think of as orc peasants, were now in charge of the supply lines to feed an army.

Fergul was just one such orc peasant. Orc warriors live for combat. No reward so sweet as to best your enemies. But if you were to be defeated, better to die in battle than to survive in shame. Fergul lived with the shame every day. Once a capable warrior, his raiding party had gotten drunk off some wine they had stolen from a travelling merchant. The Snow Panthers, the renowned rangers and protectors of Sunfrost Bay had caught

them at camp, drunk and unawares. When combat turned against them Fergul fled over a frozen lake, only to be pursued by rangers. The ice broke and all fell into the lake.

One of the women following his warband pulled him out of the water, But Fergul had been in the freezing water too long. He lost half a foot and some fingers in his good hand. No longer fit to fight Fergul was now relegated to be a warband follower, indeed the orc equivalent of a peasant.

But now, in during the onset of the Second Ord Wars, Fergul and his fellow tribe members were supposed to take over and tend the fields. Some of the women knew how to do this, but Fergul was too proud to ask for their help. He wanted to lead the efforts and thus grabbed some captured humans to teach him how to do it. He took them from the pens, and despite their fears after being defeated and captured, the sight of a crippled limping orc missing some fingers failed to intimidate the human slaves. They snickered when he failed to understand even the most rudimentary skills that they were forced to teach him; or at the fact he could not tell a boy from a girl. All human whelps looked the same to him. To show them who was in charge he snapped the neck of the girl. The humans were not laughing now.

Unable to learn to plant or tend the fields, Fergul soon beat the orc women in his tribe and forced them to work for him, to learn what the humans were teaching them. He beat the human slaves mercilessly, convinced they continued to make fun of him. With his tribe off in battle, his chieftain absent as to put him in his place, and other tribes charged with distributing supplies, Fergul took command of these plots of land, and forced some of the orcs and humans he lorded over to fix a house and he moved in, leaving his tent behind. Fergul fashioned himself master of this land.

But Fergul was an inefficient master, the fields were overrun by vermin, the human slaves starved to death, and his fellow orcs went hungry, while he grew fat and complacent. One day some of the women fetched him at noon. They told him how some of the humans had escaped their pens and were hidden in the pit where the dead were thrown into. They pleaded for his help, flattering him for his past glories as a warrior,

insisting only he could stop the humans. Full of himself Fergul grabbed a knife with his good hand and asked the women to show him where the humans were.

They took him to the pit where the dead slaves were thrown in, and when there, the women told Fergul the humans had hidden under the piles of dead bodies, that he should climb in to force them out. Unwilling to let them see how difficult this could be for him, the former orc warrior half climbed, half slid, into the pit. He poked at the bodies and growled loudly to make the humans reveal their hiding place. Nothing moved. He turned around to question the women, only to see them gathered around the edge of the pit. He saw their anger, their hate. He had beat some, taken others against their will. Their hate filled stares told him all he needed to know. He hobbled over the bodies, limping on his bad foot. His bad hand could barely grab the muddy pit wall. Then a rock struck him, soon another, and another. The orc women stoned him to death on that pit. When his bloody body laid still the women threw some dead humans on top of him and left.

Fergul's name would have been forgotten if not for the human slaves. Some saw what the orc women did and told the story after their escape. Fergul became a name both ridiculed and feared by those who survived the Second Orc Wars.

"Like Fergul, you also suffered from the ravages of the freezing water. You can't let what's happened to you stop you. When you fell into the icy river we pulled you out as soon as we could. The priest took the toes, you may lose the fingers but we'll take care of you boy. Don't worry. Rest now..."

#Orctober days 11 and 12: Orc Soldier and Orc Child

Catching up! The day before yesterday was too busy, and I had no energy to tackle an entry for yesterday. This means you get double the orc goodness today. BTW, if you haven't seen what Claudio Pozas is posting for #Orctober, his work is amazing! Check them out.

(BTW, I've corrected Garesia and replaced it with Gersania, as it was intended to be all along, here and in the document collecting all the posts. Sorry for any confusion!)

"You can say that again... He was a good boy. What you said after the priest set his body ablaze was very touching. You grew up together? I had no idea. So, you were listening... Of course, I can tell you more about the half-breeds and their role in the Second Orc Wars."

There was no such thing as an orc soldier, not as you think of them. Their warriors are fierce and in numbers can be terribly destructive. But to be born an orc is to be born savage and free. Orc warriors fight among themselves for loot, weapons, armor; their leader is the strongest among the lot. There is no discipline, there is obedience, if warriors detect weakness in their leader there will be a challenge. Regiments, ranks, commanders, divisions, these all were foreign subjects to the orcs of the Frozen Peaks and many others. That was until Secher One Eye, the War Master for the armies of Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter, organized his battalion of archers.

Because he was an orc captured by humans, Secher had been thrust into violence from an early age, first as a gladiator, then as a mercenary. He learned from the humans, much like they had learned from the dwarves, the benefits of tactics and planning. He recognized that the savagery and fearlessness of the orc was a mighty weapon, a great hammer, but sometimes you needed a dagger stealthily placed between the ribs. He used his soldiers, whom he trained in more than just archery, in this way. Thus, his battalion became known as Secher's Fangs.

Nissegra was put in charge of the battalion and Putterg was tasked with training new recruits. The orcs serving under Putterg never forgot he was a half-breed shamed with human ancestry, but his prowess and victories earned him their fear and obedience, and eventually their admiration. Other half-breeds joined Secher's Fangs; the orcs that were drafted were handpicked, at first by Secher, then by Nissegra and Putterg. They

had to show the ability to follow orders and to fight in an orderly fashion. They were incredibly successful.

By the end of summer 230 After Crowning, the orc armies had overtaken the Duchy of Roses, overrun the army of General Umeion dispatched from Gersania to defend the Duchy of Virsia and the Merchant League of Tharsus. With that victory Yrigtren's tribes had advanced south like no other orc horde had before. They controlled Gersanian territory from the Sunfrost Bay to the Lakelands of Tharsus. Almost half of Gersania was under his control.

Victories were not only won in the battlefield. During the taking of Ecuren, First City of the League of Tharsus; Secher, in Yrigtren's behalf, struck a deal with the shadowy criminal organization the Chain of Whispers. They would take no action against the invading armies, in fact they would often help the invaders, in exchange for their businesses being left alone, and the orcs freeing their leader, the mysterious Ylder Scourax! Secher's Fangs were dispatched to take Shadow Guard, the Gersanian prison deep in the Swamps of Woe. Nissegra recruited the lizard folk of the swamps as mercenaries, and with their help, the orcs took Shadow Guard after a siege of forty-two days. The unnatural near human creature Ylder Scourax, said to be able to look through the eyes of any member of the Circle of Whispers, was set free. The victory at Shadow Guard was a great triumph, bringing honor and praise upon Secher once more, but this was also when Nissegra and Putterg betrayed the trust he had put on them.

Secher had one unbreakable rule, no fraternizing among the battalion. The old orc knew full well the complications of lust, but knew that love could be far worse. The battalion was given leave to rest and carouse, but taking a mate or having sex, as warriors oft do when away from the tribe in long raids or scouting missions, was forbidden among fellow soldiers. During the siege of Shadow Guard, Nissegra and Putterg spent long nights strategizing, often going on raids with the lizard folk to see the defenses for themselves. Shared experiences as marginalized half-breed orcs, and their joint responsibility, became a strong bond that blossomed into passion during the siege.

These two, who had been deemed as pariahs in their tribes, only to become heroes of the gathered tribes, found love in their common experiences.

Both were lucky to have survived in a society that so despised them. Orc children are only thought of as such when they can fend for themselves. When they can feed themselves, and follow the tribe on their own, only then is an orc child considered to be worth more than any of the other animals in camp. A newborn baby orc is called a whelp, and multiple births are the norm. Litters of three are common, four and five nor unheard of, but identical twins are rare and seem as an omen of good luck. Single births are rare, and believed to bring bad luck. Orc women carry the whelps for shorter periods than humans, often bearing two litters in one year.

Half-breeds are typically born in single births, and unlike full blooded orcs, tend to be fragile whelps, showing the weakness of their human blood. Most are born of human slaves that orcs capture during the raid. Orc warriors, both male and the more uncommon female warriors, often humiliate and denigrate their slaves this way. A female orc will commonly drink a concoction prepared by the shaman to end a pregnancy, but slaves are not so lucky. Many die during childbirth and often the whelp is killed outright or left to die. Some mothers survive, hide the whelp long enough, and it grows up among the tribe. You can't call these few survivors lucky because half-breeds are despised and mistreated their entire lives. Deemed unworthy they are forbidden from taking a mate, and relegated to the worst jobs among the tribe. Only those that demonstrate some outstanding skill, such as Putterg's archery, are tolerated. It is thus no wonder that these two who had known nothing but scorn all their lives until Secher found them, would fall in love with each other.

They kept their affair from the troops in the battalion, meeting surreptitiously, but by the end of the siege of Shadow Guard, Nissegra was with child. Desperate and confused Nissegra both wanted to get rid of the pregnancy but shared the joy Putterg felt. In the middle of this conundrum, the orc army suffered its first defeat facing the Baron of Greyleaf and his elven allies, and Secher's Fangs were recalled back to the frontlines.

“You’ve never hear of Greyleaf? I’ll tell you about him later. For now, tend to the horses. We’ll talk during dinner.”

#Orctober day 13: Orc’s Pet

Happy Friday the 13th folks! Today’s topic should have been slasher film orc... alas! I blame Claudio Pozas for this oversight. Just kidding. Let’s write about today’s topic.

“Do you like the taste? Yes, it is spicy! That’s tharkan in orcish. I guess you’d call it seasoning or spices. It’s a mix of wild peppers from the south, Tellis root, and a fungus that grows on rotting meat. Don’t look at me like that. It is strong because orcs would use it to season and eat almost any type of meat. I’ll tell you how I learned to prepare it some other times. Let me now tell you about the folly of Mecrog and how it cost the orcs their first defeat in the Second Orc Wars.”

The River Hunters tribe was one of the many that joined the War Chanter. They hunted the many rivers that snaked south down from the Frozen Peaks. They knew the land like no other tribe and were instrumental in the orc armies making it south undetected. Renowned swimmers and apt at building sleek fast canoes, they were pivotal in taking the holdings of the Merchant League in the Lakelands of Tharsus, that relied on dams, moats and rivers for protection. Mecrog Finetongue was the adopted son Hurrak the River Hunter’s chieftain. He had been given the honor of taking Hurrak’s daughter as a mate and often represented his tribe to the gathering of chiefs.

Mecrog’s original tribe lived deep in the Frozen Peaks and had been attacked by human trappers encroaching on their land. The warriors were killed and the women and children taken as slaves to carry the pelts back to the trading posts in Sunfrost Bay. While most died doing the harrowing trip, Mecrog was sold to a traveling carnival that toured the southern lands. In his youth he merely served as a carrier and porter, but as he grew, the owner turned him into one of the carnival acts, the savage man eating orc from the north!

Mecrog would growl and howl, eat raw meat, and scare the people of the civilized south, many who had not seen orcs in three generations. Mecrog embraced the role, but despite playing the savage, he learned much during his years in the south. He had a good ear for languages and eventually spoke and understood many of the languages of the southlands. He also fell in love with the carnival owner's niece, herself part of the show. The human girl had malformed legs and could not stand properly, instead crawling on her hands and feet, billed as the crab girl in the carnival.

Despite her appearance the girl was smart and loved by her uncle. She had been schooled by tutors, sang beautifully, and had a gift with animals, training the colorful southern birds her uncle kept as part of the show. She taught Mecrog letters and mathematics, how to play the lute, and despite her uncle's misgivings, she and Mecrog began to share her wagon when the carnival was on the road.

The girl did not survive her pregnancy. She died during childbirth, the baby stillborn. Mecrog escaped the carnival that night, sure that he would be killed by her uncle. He used his mastery of languages and his natural intelligence to get work as a guide and scout with expeditions travelling north, eventually returning to the Frozen Peaks. Working as a guide for just such an expedition he met with the River Hunters and after helping the orcs kill the humans that had hired him, he joined the tribe. He soon proved his usefulness, intercepting and deciphering messages sent up and down the rivers, arranging deals with guides willing to lead expeditions into ambushes by the orcs and more. And so, Mecrog became the adopted son of Hurrak, chief of the River Hunters.

After the victory at Tharsus, both the War Chanter and his War Master trusted Mecrog with command of Hilesabia, the southernmost of the Merchant League cities located where the Hiles and Crex Rivers met, tasked with guarding the orc armies' rear flank from any incursions from the humans of the Grey Valley.

The Grey Leaf Forest and the Grey Valley marked the easternmost border of Gersania, The Grey Valley earned its moniker because the canopy of the trees in the forest was so thick that the sun rarely reached the floor, it was a cool land of greys and greens. Their lord was last of the lords of Gersania to swear fealty to the king. The Baron of

Greyleaf ruled over a fiercely independent people. Their forested land was sparsely populated but its inhabitants were renowned as hunters, loggers and soldiers. Unsurprisingly, because of the isolation and independence of its inhabitants, when the Fey Court of the Elves and their courtiers crossed the threshold from the realm of dreams into the world of mortals, one of the Moon Pools of the Twelve Elven Princesses sprang forth in the Grey Valley.

Remember that as this time the elves were still unknown to most mortals, a tale of mythical beings told in some wild story. Certain scholars had investigated the tales and some luckless explorers narrated how they met a fey in deep in a wooded glen, only to awaken days later outside the forest. The Skywatchers of Volfberg in Rustvan had observed and documented the disappearance of the constellation of the Twelve Princesses from the sky, but despite all these, most mortals knew nothing of the elves or the fey hiding among them.

When the Baron of Greyleaf sent envoys to Hilesabia to parley with Mecrog, any other orc chief would have sent the envoys' bodies back to their liege torn to pieces, but Mecrog did differently. Confident after his recent victories, and convinced he could deal with any human noble, he granted the Baron and his entourage audience. Baron Julian Greyleaf arrived with his four knight protectors and a beautiful woman he introduced as his seer. Mecrog was smitten by the beautiful human woman, he saw in her eyes those of the dead lover of his youth. Unbeknownst to him or any of the orc there this seer was an Elven Dream Walker, shrouded in the magic of fey spirits. These spirits sensed Mecrog's secret wishes and subtly enticed him with their magic. Julian Greyleaf assured Mecrog he would not attack Hilesabia, asking for the orcs to spare the Grey Valley from their fury. Mecrog provided assurances and toasted to bonds of friendship with the Baron, to the surprise and dismay of the River Hunters present.

When Baron Greyleaf was about to leave, his seer brought forth a gift for the orc leader. She gave Mecrog a colorful singing bird in a silver cage. She bid the orc to take care of the bird for it would sing the sweetest notes to him every night. Once the humans were

gone the River Hunters wanted to eat the bird, but Mecrog stopped them and took his new pet to his chambers.

See, orcs have no pets. They do keep animals in their camps. But these animals have a purpose. They are a source of food, beast of burden, or of war. Keeping an animal as a companion or as a useless adornment such as a caged bird, was foreign to the orcs. That Mecrog would keep the bird was madness to the orcs under his command. Already he had left his tents and taken the Merchant Lord's House in the city, he listened to the human's pleas, and ruled over them not like an orc would, but how a human might. He stopped the warriors from taking any man or woman from the streets or pillaging inside the city after its surrender. Keeping this bird was the last straw. Some orcs abandoned the city and joined other bands, others openly disobeyed his orders. Mecrog punished the unruly harshly and hid the desertions from his reports to his chieftain and the War Master. He hurriedly took care of his duties, only to return to his chambers and listen to the bird sing while he played the lute.

The Elven Dream Speaker had summoned a deceitful fey spirit into the magical cage that allowed it to appear to mortals and to twist their mind by fulfilling their wishes. Mecrog's command fell apart around him and he barely left the room where the bird every night turned into his lost lover in his dreams. He turned away his mate, his most trusted warriors, and the night of the next new moon, the army of Baron Greyleaf and his elven allies attacked the forces holding Hilesabia and freed the city from the orcs. Greyleaf's troops and his elven allies would go on to free two other settlements of the Merchant League and attack the orc armies from the rear just as the King of Gersania launched his second attack against the invaders.

It is said Mecrog's last loyal warriors broke into his chambers to tell him of the orc's defeat by Baron Greyleaf, only to find him straddled by a half-woman, half-bird creature, plucking out his eyes while he smiled and played the lute. The orc warriors in their fury attacked the creature that once again became a bird and tried to return to the cage. The orcs smashed the cage and the bird instead flew into the lute. Unable to pull it out or to break the accursed instruments, an orc runner tasked with delivering the news of the

battle to their chieftain was given the lute to take with him. The Knight of the Grey Valley cut him down on the shores of the Hiles River where the current took away his body along with the lute.

“Regardless of what they say about orcs, there is wisdom in their sayings, True it is mostly about combat and killing, but wisdom nonetheless. Mecrog’s story gives us this gem, ‘Beware a gift in a cage, it is often not what it is seems, and who the prisoner is depends on which side of the bars you stand.’ Now go rest. We pack camp at first light.”

And that’s all for Friday... I don’t think I’ll be able to write over the weekend. See you all Monday!

#Orctober days 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18! Orc Warboar, Orc Paladin, Ogre, Goblin and Wereboar

I started writing a post Monday... and then life happened! So here we are Wednesday to catch up with the last five prompts in Claudio Pozas’ list. Let’s get this going.

“What do you all want? That’s what he’s told you? I am no sage! I am merely a traveler whose heard a few stories. Sure, you can all listen. Pass the stew. Where was I? Yes, you are right. Baron Greyleaf had just handed the orc armies their first defeat in the Second Orc Wars.”

The forces of the Grey Valley under the command of Baron Julian Greyleaf and his elven allies had liberated Hilesabia. His cavalry would advance quickly through the Lakelands of Tharsus, liberating other holdings of the Merchant League, obliterating the orc forces on the way, and reaching the orc rear flank undetected. Powerful elven magic ensorcelled the soldiers, making them undetectable through fey illusion. Some of the orcs defeated where dominated by elven skin changers who took over their bodies and used the orcs for distraction and misdirection.

Meanwhile, the orc armies of Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter advanced from Tharsus and invaded Bacaren. It's wooded hills and pastoral villages all that stood between the orcs and Gersania. The villages had been abandoned, the fields razed to keep the orcs from scavenging anything, and a defense line established at the heavily fortified city of Murecin. Site of the Cathedral of Saint Veciana the Pure, Murecin was located where the River Celpur exits the Mount Mikeren and becomes navigable connecting Bacaren with Irdell in Eastern Gersania. With defenses in the nearby hills, the reinforced defenses of Murecin, and support from the Monastery in Mount Mikeren, the King of Gersania was assured by his War Council that the orcs would be stopped at Murecin.

The King sent his nobles and their soldiers to defend the front, but with almost half his troops lost under the command of General Umeion at the Battles of Virsia, his armies were bolstered by southern mercenaries and an Imperial Host sent from the Roumian Empire. These troops were commanded by a very peculiar Host Marshall, a devout warrior of Teron the Crafter, Father of the Great Founders, Gillevan the Fierce, nicknamed the Fury of The Father and the Savage Marshall. Gillevan had accumulated uncounted victories, and earned accolades from the Emperor himself. Gillevan was loved by his men, feared by his enemies This Paladin of Teron was a military genius, a hero of the empire, and an orc.

Like Secher, Gillevan was a southern orc, but unlike the former, this famous military commander was groomed from birth to be a leader of men. Raised by the Host Marshall of the Undan Expeditionary Forces, Gillevan was born to orc slaves sent with the Host to build fortifications and support the establishment of a Roumian colony in Undan. When the natives poisoned the wells of the camp, and storms destroyed their ships, Marshall Nicerios found himself without three quarters of his men, no way to leave Undan, and surrounded by enemies. When things seemed most desperate, the orcs picked up the weapons of fallen soldiers and joined the fight. These orcs turned the tide and the Roumians held the settlement against relentless attacks until ships arrived to take them across the sea. The Marshall gave the surviving orcs their freedom, some

continued to serve as irregulars under his command, and Nicerios sent the baby a dead orc slave home to be raised among his children.

Gillevan would have easily become a servant in any other house in the Roumian Empire, except in the Marshall's household; his wife was a devout follower of Teron the Crafter and strove to fulfill her husband's wishes. She named the orc baby in honor of the founder of the Order of Teron's Hammers and Roumian hero, Gillevir, and raised the young orc as one of her own. Gillevan had the best tutors and teachers. He learned to fight, and lead, to control his temper, how to act in polite company. From his adopted mother he learned the litanies and the sacrifices to please the Great Father. Unlike Secher who had to fight for every scrap he got, Gillevan was raised to be an example of the civilizing effect of Roumian culture, a champion of the Roumian Empire, a leader of men. With so many victories, Host Marshall Gillevan was put in command of the forces at Murecin by the Gersania War Council; much to the dismay and jealousy of Gersania nobles and commanders.

War Master Secher One Eye knew that Murecin would be a challenge for the orcs. The hills and trails favored the orc pack tactics, but the humans had prepared well, bolstered their defenses, and the geography of the land would force the brunt of their forces down a bottleneck and into the plains north of the city, straight into the gathered forces defending Gersania. His scouts reported that Host Marshall Gillevan had taken command of the field and that his troop formed the main line of defense. Secher knew Roumian military tactics, unlike the nobles in Gersania, so enamored by their cavalry, to the commanders of the Roumian Empire, infantry was king. Roumian formations and tactics gave them an upper hand against almost every enemy.

Orc scouts also learned that Gillevan had garrisoned his archers and Gersanian troops at the Monastery in Mount Mikerén. His archers could decimate enemy forces from the mountain, raining death upon them, and the Gersanian troops would block any retreat. Secher formulated his attack plan with War Chanter Yrigtren.

First, he called upon one of the ogres that had joined the orc armies. Ogres were once the commanders of the Giants' armies during the Great War of Heaven and Earth,

leading orc foot soldiers against the armies of the gods. Ogres had been cursed for their role in the war and were a shadow of their former selves, their lot sometimes even worse than the orcs. Some ruled over orc tribes by force, other ogre clans collaborated with orc tribes for the benefit of both. Gruken the Mountain was the leader of one such clan. He was taller even than even the already massive ogre warriors in his clan, it was said that his father was a giant. Gruken's tribe tended to orc armies warboars. These massive and savage creatures were unruly and dangerous, prone to throw ridders, and attack allies and enemies alike, unless controlled by a hard taskmaster and an experienced rider. Gruken's clan raised the most savage warboars, and Gruken himself could walk into their pens and no creature would dare attack him. Gruken was key to Secher's plan. The second of the plan part would be more difficult. Secher met in secret with Melgron chieftain of the Shadow Runners and had him once again contact the goblins of the underworld. The myriad tunnels of the Dwarven Kingdoms extended across the lands, often hidden or forgotten, and Secher was counting on Melgron to get Secher's Fangs into an advantageous position with the goblin's help.

The leaves had started to turn red and the chills of autumn were felt in Bacaren when the orc armies advanced upon Murecin. Host Marshall Gillevan held the field with Gersanian troops to his rear and flanks. The orc descended from every hill in countless numbers, harassing the Gersanian flanks but stopping short of a full attack. Gillevan advanced his troops and they engaged in a defensive stance, ready to stop the sea of orcs. Then the grunts and howls turned into savage squeals!

From the orc ranks thousands of warboars spilled out into the battlefield. Wearing crude leather barding protecting their backs, and with no ridders to lead them, these savage creatures ran out of the orc armies without attacking any orc and rushed the Roumian Host. Gillevan's lookouts reported this to the Marshall's dismay. How were the orcs controlling these creatures? The lookouts reported that the warboars were led and controlled by unnaturally large warboars. There was no time to change plans. Gillevan ordered Gersanian cavalry to meet the warboars, but those who rode out were cut down. Others simply did not take the field when faced with such ferocity. The warboar

host crashed upon the Roumian line. At first, they held the line, but soon the largest warboars were upon them! These creatures changed shape before the soldiers, becoming a half-boar, half-ogre creatures of destruction, the largest of them single handedly breaking the line and scattering the Roumian front. Gruken's clan of wereboars cut a swath across the enemy.

Gillevan ordered his men to hold, but Gruken's tribes-folk were unharmed by normal weapons. The wereboars and warboars were cutting down his men, many had broken formation and some division of the host where retreating. The orc armies charged and the orc Host Marshall in charge of the human armies ordered the Gersanian troops into battle. They were cut down by archers from the slopes of Mount Mikerén. Secher's Fangs had attacked and taken the Monastery under the cover of night after reaching it through an old and forgotten dwarven tunnel with the aid of goblins. They killed the monastery's defenders and the troops stationed there, and took their position in the Mikerén slopes. The Gersanian and the Roumian fell to their arrows, commanders lost control of troops, the human armies descended into chaos and the orcs overtook them. Host Marshall Gillevan refused to abandon the field and was ripped to pieces by Gruken, who brought the head of the fallen Gillevan to the War Chanter.

The forces of Baron Julian Greyleaf attacked the orc rear during the battle, killing many orcs, but even bolstered by elven troops and magic, their numbers were too small to turn the tide of battle. The Baron and his allies instead pulled back and fled west to Hirinia. The elven realms in this land date back to this time. The reckoning of the orcs and Baron Greyleaf was yet to come.

Some human nobles retreated into Murecin but their reprieve was short lived. The War Chanter had made a pact with the goblin clan that aided them, and the goblins had invaded Murecin through the city's ancient sewers that connected to dwarven tunnels. The goblins ran rampant across the city and the humans surrendered to War Chanter Yrigtren three days later hoping he would save them from the twisted and cruel goblins. Sadly, the War Chanter had given the goblins the city, hills and mountain nearby, along with all the humans there, for the goblins to do as they pleased.

The human armies had fallen, the way to Gersania laid undefended before the orc armies. There would be token defense of the kingdom. Foolish young nobles throwing away their lives for some foolish sense of honor or glory. Nearby kingdoms protected their borders, many Gersanians fled before the advancing orc army. By winter the palace of the King of Gersania burned, Yrigtren declared before the assembled tribes that the tribe lands of the orc tribes extended from the Frozen Peaks to Gersania. But the second year of the Second Orc Wars would bring many challenges and great suffering to the orc armies and their leaders.

By this time Nissegra could no longer hide her pregnancy and along with Putterg traveled back to Murecin. During their attack on the Monastery in Mount Mikeren they had met a goblin witch named Ziraider who somehow knew Nissegra was with child, and prophesized this orc would bring great suffering to the orc armies. Dismayed by the prophecy Nissegra and Putterg travelled back to her and asked the goblin witch how to stop her vision of woe from coming true. Ziraider told them that the only way to do this was for them to give her the child to raise away from the orcs. Reluctant but desperate the two half-breed orcs spent winter among the screams and depravities of cursed Murecin until Nissegra gave birth. They handed the whelp over to Ziraider and returned to their posts to prepare for the spring campaign. These pair of broken hearted lovers did what they thought best to protect their people and Secher, despite of their betrayal of the trust he had placed on them, but they were unfamiliar with the traditions of goblins and their traitorous mischievous ways.

“This has gone on for too long. We all need to rest for tomorrow we venture past those hills into northern territories. We must be ready for the dangers there. I’ll continue the story when we make camp again.”

#Orctober days 19 to 24: Orc Chariot, Orcish Sword, Axe, Lute, Orc Swashbuckler, and Orc Martial Artist

These massive catch ups are becoming habitual. Real life is picking up and getting busier, despite all the recovery left to do post Hurricane María. Still I am committed to finishing this, even if it is in blocks of six now! Allow me to continue hitting the thematic prompts Claudio Pozas shared in his #Orctober promotion. Here we go!

“Fret not little one! We may be prisoners but there is no need to cry. Go tell your father to calm down. Our captors value strength, he should clean his tears and remain strong. Your mother is with the Great Founders now...”

He’ll get us all killed. If the girl cannot get him to be quiet someone needs to give him some wine. Don’t look at me like that! I know you hid away some. You do know that we are in this predicament because of the aftermath of the Second Orc War I’ve been telling you about. Let me tell you how?”

By the spring of 231 AC the orc armies in the invaded human kingdoms were ready for battle. Winter had not been peaceful, while most humans had fled to neighboring kingdoms, some had remained to protect their land. These humans banded together into resistance groups, harassing the orc patrols, attacking their supply lines, and confronting the invaders in any way they could.

Some humans cooperated, trying to find a way to survive in the bedlam. In the major towns and cities some tried to appease the orcs and cooperate with them, helping them manage the cities, others embraced the new masters, allowing their darker instincts to flourish in this time of chaos. The Chain of Whispers criminal society took over the Merchant League and attempted to open trade with the civilized kingdoms, but to no avail. The monarchs and leaders of these lands distrusted anyone coming out of occupied Gersania, or as the orcs called it the Orc Tribelands.

The other sovereign kingdoms around the occupied lands prepared for war. The Hirinian Theocracy called upon the faithful to gather and arms against the orcs. The elven allies of Baron Greyleaf putting themselves at the disposal of the Church. At that time the elves were considered saviors by the theocracy, not heretics. The Elven Heresies, the

Inquisition of the Fey and the fall of the Issinian Holy Council was still years away. The Rustvan Chief of Chiefs, the Cazan, summoned all his chieftains to Rustvangar and summoned the Great Horde to defend their homeland. The Rustvan horsemen answered their liege's call. Smaller holdings likewise prepared for war.

The Irgenian Empire was in disarray. For generations the emperors had ruled over a crumbling empire. Their armies were still mighty and numerous, but around them, their former subjects had established new kingdoms and flouted their independence. The emperors had squandered their military might in far-away Sasseran, Hindiran and Feshar. The loss of the Imperial Host sent to aid Gersania caused a panic among the populace. The Assembly of the People with the help of the Guard Imperator removed an old feeble emperor from power and crowned his teenage grandson Hixerios Emperor of the Irgenian Empire. The new emperor, under the watchful eye of the Council and following the advice of the High Assembly, composed mostly of nobles and former soldiers, sent the two Imperial Host in Irgenia north and dispatched orders to the other seven Host Marshalls in lands beyond the empire to bring their troops home.

All monarch were weary of the mass of undead orcs nor seen in combat since the Battle of Death Garden. They had crossed the steppes of the Grass Sea of Rustvan to the west of the Orc Tribelands and entered the dreaded Mountains of Thunderwyrn. Human survivors, escaping the orc conquest, told horrifying stories of the dead left in the field of battle, orc and human alike, rising at night and marching west towards the Mountains of Thunderwyrn. The Rustvan riders that patrolled the area spoke in hushed tones of the moans and cries of the dead echoing through the mountain's canyons.

Secher One Eye, War Master to Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter, master of the Orc Tribelands, knew that the worst was still ahead. The humans were still afraid but where they to unite in purpose, their combined might would break the orc armies stretched across the conquered lands. The success and effectiveness of Baron Greyleaf and his mysterious elf allies worried him. The Wyrn Burned tribe had captured the city of Tamrel early in the campaign and their chief had become enamored with the Tamrel chariots built in the tradition of ancient Irgenia. He had learned from collaborators the art

of chariot making and combat. One driver, two archers, a lightning fast advance against enemy frontlines. The chariots of Tamrel had once been feared by the clans in this region when the Irgenian conquered the Gersanian province. Kergell Fire Scarred, chief of the Wyrn Burned brought his warboar pulled chariots to the gathering of tribes that previous winter and impressed the War Chanter.

While Secher was leading Secher's Fangs and other orc tribes to raze the Grey Valley, sending the heads of every woman and child to Hirinian, Kergell Fire Scarred persuaded War Chanter Yrigtren to allow his tribe to lead the attack against Rustvan, sure that his chariots would break the horsemen of the west. With his orc restless after the winter, Yrigtren approved the attack and Kergell Fire Scarred led his tribes and their allies into the Grass Sea.

The imposing orc bellowed from his massive chariot pulled by three warboars. Kergell led the charge into enemy lands, his chest bare and bearing the traditional burn scars he and all his warriors inflicted upon their chests in honor of their great leader that defeated the terrifying fire wyrm Xycherillas Et'baren in ages past. He wielded the great axe Xyboras, the dark blade fashioned from one of the fire wyrm's fang.

The Wyrn Burned rode against the gathered Great Host of Rustvan, the Grass Sea crushed under the steel covered wheels of their chariots, and the horsemen fled at every turn, refusing to face the orc army. Furious Kergell pressed on, following the Rustvan beyond the reach of his supply lines.

The Rustvan finally decided to stand and fight near Velgastovor. They formed a line to defend the city, and Kergell's Wyrn Burned charged the humans. Their chariots fell into the dry river beds left dry long ago by the dams at Velgastovor, and hidden under the tall grass. The wagon wheels destroyed, their charge stopped, the warboars trapped and tied down to the chariots attacked the charioteers. The orcs that survived this initial blunder were cut down by the Rustvan riders. The great axe Xyboras taken as a trophy and delivered to the Rustvan Chief of Chiefs, the Cazan.

This great defeat showed the other human kingdoms that the orcs were not unstoppable. By the time Secher had rejoined the War Chanter the orc armies were

facing attacks from three fronts, Rustvan, Irgenia and Hirinia. The orc chiefs were desperate and questioning the War Chanter's wisdom and power openly. Despite the setbacks the War Chanter remained focused and sure of his deity's blessing for this great campaign. He told Secher he had dreamt of Kurgan Bloodbathed's sword, Demon Tongue, an ancient blade forged of dark metal by giant blacksmiths during the First Orc Wars against the dwarves, and passed down through the clans until his ancestor wielded it. Yrigtren was convinced that once he recovered the sword, the tide of battle would turn in their favor. Never one to put much faith in the designs of gods, Secher however knew his master well enough to know that the quest to find this sword was important. He ordered his lieutenants to find the sword and threw himself into developing a strategy to stop the humans from gaining more ground.

Nissegra was tasked with finding out what had become of Demon Tongue. She scoured the libraries of the sages of Gersania and learned that supposedly the sword was taken by the dwarves after the war and given to a warrior from Firez, a captain of sea raiders from beyond the Sunfrost Bay who returned home and became lord of that far away land of dark rivers and cold mountains. According to many travelers, Demon Tongue was still in the hands of his descendants, but Firez was now a land overrun by trolls and under the shadow of fey spirits, their once mighty warriors a shadow of their former glory. Secher arranged for Nissegra to travel to Firez in the ship of Captain Ulgan the Walrus. Ulgan was a former pirate turned merchant, a former slave liberated by a pirate captain who allowed the southern orc to join his crew. Ulgan earned his sobriquet because of his prominent tusks. In his youth he was a fierce warrior, leading boarding actions by swinging from one ship to another, lightly armored, rapier in one hand, hook on another. Ulgan the Walrus was the scourge of the Southern Seas and beyond.

He became a captain, led a fleet, accepted a pardon by an Irgenian Emperor, and became a merchant. Despite now resembling a walrus not only because of his tusks, but of his girth, Ulgan was still powerful and surprisingly nimble. He knew Secher from his days as a mercenary, and for a hefty sum agreed to take Nissegra to Firez. They left from Whaler's Bay in the Gersanian capital to find Demon Tongue.

As spring approached summer, despite human victories, the orc armies held the conquered lands. Fearing a prolonged war of attrition and after various years of drought in the south, the Irgenian Emperor summoned the other human rulers. The High Assembly had come up with a plan and presented it to Emperor Hixerios. A plan to end the war through treachery and deceit.

The human armies pulled back and sued for peace, they sent an old dwarf diplomat to the camp of War Chanter Yrigtren to arrange a treaty. Secher told the War Chanter this was a ruse, but advised he listened to him to learn what they propose and bid for time. Secher had an inkling of what they may yet to, and left the camp to confirm his suspicions. He left Putterg in charge of protecting the War Chanter.

The peace mission from Irgenia had negotiated a meeting in the orc's main camp, a gathering where no one would bring any weapon. The half-breed mistrusted the humans, and tasked the Furious Fists with protecting the War Chanter and the great orc chiefs. The Fists were renowned for the prowess in unarmed combat and would be able to defend the War Chanter even in a gathering where no weapons were allowed. Berkinell of House O'lendar, Son of Hurriss, Descendant of Burdis, Judge of the People of Herrthon Hall was an old pompous dwarf. He arrived with his entourage in the great camp outside the former Gersanian capital escorted by a dwarf honor guard and emissaries from all the human kingdoms. They surrendered their weapons and entered the War Chanter's great tent.

There before War Chanter Yrigtren and the gathered chiefs, he proclaimed the human's desire for peace, and recited the poems and histories of the ancient Orc War, inviting the orcs to agree to peace. The orcs grew restless with the formalities, and Yrigtren pushed for the dwarf to speak plainly. Berkinell asked for one more concession. He had composed a song to honor the great orc chiefs and asked to play it to the gathered orcs. Reluctantly Yrigtren agreed. The dwarf asked a young woman to accompany him and play the lute. None of the gathered recognized the lute. The same one Mecrog had played and upon which an elven summoned spirit had hidden and now was bound to it. Baron Greyleaf's elven allies had found the lute in river and had sent it to be used

against the orcs. As Berkinell sang their praises, an Elven Dream Speaker, magically disguised as the lute playing girl, summoned the spirit of the lute.

The orc chiefs were enthralled by the song, reliving their greatest victories, relishing the death of their enemies at their own hands. Putterg instead saw visions of his child, how it grew up with Nissegra and him. He cried, but knew this was not right. The human blood in Putterg allowed him to fight the spirit's influence. When he returned to his senses he saw the carnage around him. The chiefs under the spirit's spell were killing each other. Putterg picked up his bow, shot and hit the lute playing girl. The ensorcelled elf stopped playing for a moment, but it was enough.

The orc chiefs were confounded, the gathering in disarray, one chief had killed another and in the confusion a brawl broke out. The Furious Fist with their deadly strikes and grapples kept Yrigtren safe. The Fists also cut down the human emissaries and the Elven Dream Speaker. The War Chanter ordered the dwarf captured and he crushed Mecrog's lute with his arm forged of fire metal. Still the damage was done!

The surviving chiefs fled the gathering, the tribes of murdered chiefs sought revenge against those that had killed their leaders. The orc tribes fought each other before the War Chanter could stop them. The great camp near the Gersanian capital fell, the orc armies were in disarray. Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter, had to flee and the alliance of human kingdoms retook the old Gersanian capital.

"Since that time orcs learned never to trust humans, dwarf or elf alike. Which brings us to our current predicament. When they found the elven dream elixir in the caravan our fate was sealed. No parley or ransom would allow us to escape. Let's see what their commander does in the morning. We better rest and gather our strength."

#Orctober days 25 to 31: Orc Deity, Orc Falconer, Orc Ally: Demon or Devil, Zombie Orc, Skeletal Orc, Orc King, Vampire Orc

And here we are... trying to take this into the final stretch. The last seven days have been incredibly busy. In Puerto Rico, 41 days after the hurricane, we are still in the

midst of recovery. I haven't had power at home all this time, and writing these at night has become harder and harder. Still I am committed to finish this, and I'm actually trying to hit all the 31 topics in Claudio Pozas' promotion for #Orctober before October ends! Again, a big thanks to him for motivating me to do this. It has really helped this past month. Now, on to the final part of the story.

The ragtag band prisoners, mostly caravan hands, merchants, drivers, passengers and a few remaining guards, were dragged in chains down into the crepuscular cold of the underworld. The stone passageway was well worn, and the crude paintings on the walls, along with the blood splatter everywhere confirmed the weary traveler's worst fear. The orphan girl clung to his leg, making it even harder to walk with his wound. The smell of death and decay confirmed it. The orc commander had brought the prisoners to his master.

The orcs barked orders, the storyteller bowed his head and the others followed suit as they entered the chamber. After the caravan master's death, he had become the one they looked up to for comfort and leadership. Slim chance of that!

The cavern was too cold, even this far north. It was not an abandoned, ancient, dwarven stronghold. This was older, far more dangerous and foul. Frost covered the stalactites and stalagmites. An eerie blueish glow from the depths of the chamber, opposite to where they had come in, added to the sense of foreboding. Corpses were still chained to the natural columns that supported the ceiling. No not corpses, they stirred and snapped at the humans, pulling on their chains with the strength of the hungry undead.

They were made to stand before a throne set upon a foul altar dedicated to a dark orc god and their otherworldly allies. There, covered in furs and leathers that almost hid him completely, sat the orc king. The white-blue glow behind the altar casting him in shadows, only his red glowing eyes visible. He did not stir, and the orc commander barked his accusations. The storyteller interrupted him loudly and firmly, the orc nearly flew at him in rage, but a stir from the throne froze everyone in place. With a tremulous

voice and in a heavily accented orcish, the storyteller spoke.

“Oh, mighty Orc King! We, throw ourselves at your mercy. We knew not that we had wandered into the Tribe Lands. This was a trading caravan north. We were lost in the storm. None of us here knew the caravan master was transporting the elven poison.” Growls and hisses filled the cavern. “We beseech you, please find mercy, and do not punish the foolish for following the fool. I know the history of the Tribe Lands and know about its past, and future glories. Here let me tell you...”

With the fall of the War Chanter's main camp, and the orc chieftains fighting each other due to the trickery of humans, dwarves and elves, Yrigtren fled through the underworld guided by the Shadow Runners tribe, under the protection of the Furious Fists, and the watchful eye of Putterg. While above the alliance of the human kingdoms retook the conquered Tribe Lands, the elven skin changers took control of the bodies of orc warriors and shamans, tricking various tribes into imbuing the intoxicating and addictive elven dream elixir, turning more and more orcs into the thralls of the elven Dream Speakers. Secher One Eye rallied the tribes north of the Lakelands of Tharsus, keeping the tribes and chiefs united, culling elven influence from the orcs.

Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter, dragged a prisoner through the leagues of underground tunnels. Berkinell, the old dwarven emissary sent by the humans, screamed through the gag on his mouth. He was writhing and convulsing, and often had to be dragged until he was bloody and raw. His muffled mad screams about the darkness and haunting fears brought countless giggling goblins to the nearby tunnels to scream at him.

Every time they attempted to return to the surface Putterg would advise against it. The tribes were embroiled in fratricidal battle, or the humans were on the march. Putterg insisted that they should regroup in Tharsus, that Secher had planned for this eventuality. Still Yrigtren raged. How could Yrigbum, the Screaming God of the Unforgiving Snow, had abandoned him? He was obsessed that only when he had Kurgen Bloodbathed's sword, Demon Tongue, would the tide of battle turn in his favor.

During one of their rests in the underworld the orcs finally noticed the dwarf was quiet. After weeks of miserable screaming, open wounds, losing nails and hair, the orcs removed the sack covering Berkinell head, untied his hands. The dwarf had changed, his skin had blistered, boiled and regrown putrid greenish yellow. His new nails were black and hard as stone, his beard and hair gone, in their place coarse dark hair in tufts. The nose had grown even bigger, bulbous. The eyes were no longer those of a dwarf, Berkinell had become a goblin. Putterg was fascinated and repulsed. That is why he fought so hard when he was dragged underground, why dwarves had abandoned the underworld, and why goblins had suddenly appeared when many dwarves had disappeared. What god had cursed the dwarves to become goblins? Putterg realized just how much he did not understand of the world, and there would be much more to learn before the Second Orc War was over.

Secher's plan worked. Despite the human's advance and the problems caused by the elves, the orcs held the Tribe Lands north of Tharsus. Still he knew that without the War Chanter the tribes would not stay together much longer. He sent his scouts looking for his liege, trying to find his escape route from the underworld. If Putterg had followed orders, that is where they should be.

The human alliance was just as weary of advancing further north. They knew the orcs had reinforcements in the form of an army of the dead hidden in the Mountains of Thunderwyrn. Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead sat there in command of a sea of undead, only to be unleashed against them at the orc's command. Unbeknownst to them Secher had sent orders seven times to Merkigra to join the fight. The shaman of the Death Speakers had sent back all emissaries with a single message, 'The shaman will come to her, and then she will join the fight.' Secher grew tired of her games and feared that, despite these short-term victories, the war would be lost because of her.

Secher knew full well that bringing together the shaman of Gernellian Lady of the Dead, Mistress of the Undead with the War Chanter of Yrigbum, the Screaming God of the Unforgiving Snow was risky. Yrigbum was an orc god, furious and fickle, but Gernellian had followers beyond the orcs. Death cultists, mortals seeking to stave off the inevitable

sleep of death, made sacrifices and performed dark rituals to her across lands. When the calming music of Sister Quiren failed to lull the dead into their sleep, these cultists turned from the faith of the Great Founders and prayed to the same goddess as the orcs. These competing gods would not allow their faithful to work together for long. So, Secher had sent Merkigra to Thunderwyrms earlier in the campaign.

The Mountains of Thunderwyrms were the domain of Theravol, the Great Thunder. The last of the mighty dragons of ancient times. After the War of Heaven and Earth the dragons of the distant east had flown from beyond the tundra with their riders behind them. The dwarves had fought the dragons, and their victory cost the dwarves their power. Dragons were broken, and they retreated, holding on only to their conquests in the Sea of Drar. Those in the west claimed vast tracts of wilderness as their holdings, and then fought amongst themselves for supremacy. The Great Thunder was the last of these ancient dragons. A dozen powerful wyrms had challenged him. Their battles had ripped apart the sky. None returned. Secher believed that Merkigra could animate the corpses of the fallen dragons and place them under her command as to bolster the orc armies. She had gone into the mountains, Secher knew not if she had achieved her mission, but she now refused to allow her army of the dead to rejoin the war.

In the underworld Yrigtren grew frustrated. At every turn tunnels were blocked or collapsed. Escape into the surface world and returning to the tribes proved impossible. He raged against his fate and his god. He wandered away from his protectors and a goblin witch visited Yrigtren that night. She confirmed his fears that his god had abandoned him. She told him that only Gernellian Lady of the Dead would guide him out of the underworld. She brought him a sacrifice that to please the goddess, one that would seal his conversion and dedication to the dark mistress. He performed the ritual, killed the sacrifice, drinking its blood, and renounced Yrigbum, becoming a devotee of Gernellian. He returned to Putterg and the others with a twisted goblin lamp and his renewed faith. He told them the goddess spoke through the lamp and she would guide their travels.

Autumn raged with early winter storms coming down from the Frozen Peaks and Secher

knew hostilities would end early this year. Celebrations began not long after among the tribes, Yrigtren had emerged from the underworld in the Tribe Lands and now traveled to the front to lead his army. Secher One Eye travelled to meet him and was surprised to see his master's conversion, but the southern orc had little interest in the ways of gods. All he cared for was victory in the mortal world.

From the Mountains of Thunderwyrn, Merkigra Whisperer of the Dead unleashed the army of the dead upon the humans, she rode the corpse of Theravol the Great Thunder, whom she had slain and turned into a vassal of Gernellian, and twelve great skeletal dragons flew behind her over the undead horde. The War Chanter had come to her mistress now she rode to him!

The orcs and the undead overran the human kingdoms of the west. In Hirinia the elves refused to face the undead and withdrew to the forests. Baron Greyleaf faced the orc and the undead alone. For being one of the fiercest humans to face the War Chanter's armies he was cursed by being turned into an undead thrall of the goddess, and made to fight with the orc armies. The Grey Riders became a fearful undead cavalry by the end of the war. Rustvan fell and smaller kingdoms could not stand against the advancing orc armies.

With the humans in full retreat faced with an ever-growing army of the dead, Secher wanted the tribes to march to the front and finish the conquest of the last standing human kingdom in the west, the Irgenian Empire. But the War Chanter refused. He sent the orc tribes north to protect the Tribe Lands and marched the armies of the dead into Irgenia.

The empire had stopped all would be invaders before. They had lost lands in the past because they had not exerted their power, or had grown complacent, forgetting their frontiers and subjects until they became new kingdoms. They had seen their empire shrink because of ennui, not by conquest. The Imperial Hosts from oversea had returned. The empire was ready to defend itself against any invader, living or dead. War machines and mighty war beasts lined the fields ready to face the undead dragons.

The Irgenian Empire had been built upon the back of slaves. At first other westerners,

then foreigners, and eventually the orcs. They had proven the sturdiest of all slaves. Tireless, strong, they were brutally exploited everywhere. Perhaps not as common as during the heyday of the empire, but orc slaves could be found across the empire, gladiators, laborers, servants. The young emperor's falconer was an orc skilled at handling these birds, a tradition passed on for generation of orc serving the emperors. South Irgenia was the hiding place of uncounted southern orcs living in the wilds.

As winter set in, the orc Tribe Lands extended across the west. The War Chanter had amassed the armies of undead on the Irgenian border. While Secher and his second Putterg made plans for the orcs directly protecting the War Chanter in the upcoming last battle, Nissegra arrived in camp. Putterg was overjoyed to see his fellow commander of Secher's Fangs, and secret lover, return from her mission. But his joy was short lived when he realized that, even if she looked the same, Nissegra had not returned. They escorted her to see the War Chanter, and there a voice that was not Nissegra's told how the one called Nissegra had travelled to Firez to find Demon Tongue, and almost died at the hands of demon worshipping Firezians, until she had called upon Demon Tongue's mercy. The sword's demonic spirit had answered her supplication. It freed her spirit from mortal suffering, and took her body to bring back the sword that would undo the west.

Yrigtren One Arm, the War Chanter of the gathered orc tribes, commander of an army of the dead, held Demon Tongue in hand. Flanked by Merkigra on one side, and the demon possessed Nissegra on the other, he marched his armies into Irgenia. At first the Imperial Hosts held the battlefields, but a trusted orc falconer poisoned the emperor and the gathered nobles in the imperial palace, slaves revolted, and the orcs of the south rode against the armies of the empire. Encircled by enemies the Irgenian Imperial Hosts broke. The empire descended into fire and suffering.

The ancient cities of Irgenia fell. The orc skeletons of long dead warriors marched side by side with the recently risen corpse of southern orc turned into zombies. The dreadful moans and the relentless march of the dead crushing the Irgenian Empire into oblivion. Secher reveled in the fall of the land that almost broke him, too distracted by the celebration to notice Putterg's suffering at seeing the one he loved turned into nothing

more than a demon's puppet. The demon possessing Nissegra knew of Putterg's suffering and often teased him that he could drink her blood and become a servant of Gernellian Lady of the Dead as well. He refused each and every time.

Yrigtren One Arm entered the imperial hall in the crumbling capital of the Irgenian Empire. There, before his undead servants, before former rulers turned prisoners brought from this and all other conquered lands, before the gathered chieftains of the orc tribes, he declared himself King of the Orcs, Master of the Living and the Dead, the Scourge of the West; and vowed to conquer the entire world for Gernellian!

While the orcs celebrated in the ruins of an ancient empire, demon possessed Nissegra took Putterg to the War Chanter's tent. There she told him a story he already knew. How a broken Yrigtren had left camp one night in the underworld only to return a changed orc, with renewed purpose, in possession of the lamp that allowed them to escape the maze of the underworld, and return to the tribes. What Putterg did not know was the name of the goblin witch, Ziraider, the same one that had taken Putterg and Nissegra's baby. Or the sacrifice that the War Chanter had performed to consecrate himself to Gernellian. As she opened the lamp, floating inside the oil, Putterg saw from whence the voice that guided them came. Possessed by some demonic force, just like Nissegra, the severed head of the baby he had seen but once, looked back at him through demonic eyes, and laughed.

Putterg was broken, he could no longer refuse, and drank the tainted blood from Nissegra's body. He could not stop, he drank until there was naught left of her. He felt the power of the demon course through him, feeding off the ancient taint in his orc blood. The severed head of his dead child teased at him, asking what he would do with such power.

Yrigtren was lost in revelry, those humans that still survived cowering from the orcs' savage celebrations. When Putterg approached the War Chanter with surprising speed. Yrigtren instructively knew his former soldier meant him ill, and struck at him with Demon Tongue. But Putterg was unharmed! The half-breed orc took the sword from his master's one hand, and ripped out the other arm of fire metal with which Yrigtren tried to

strike him.

Secher ran to them, but was too late. Putterg was upon the War Chanter. He hungrily bit his neck and fed on his blood, satiating for now his unnatural hunger for blood. The orcs were stunned, the demon spirit in the sword enticed him to kill everything that lived and truly remake the world into Gernellian's vision.

But Putterg's half-breed nature resisted, his human side allowed him to keep the demon's influence at bay. He fought back and with a mighty strike broke the sword upon the hall's floor. He renounced the goddess and sent the orcs scattering to the four corners of the world. Merkigra, betrayed and swearing revenge, took her dragons to Firez, and left behind a rotting, unmoving horde of the dead. Secher helped Putterg and some orc chiefs return north, and the remaining tribes have held onto the orc Tribe Lands north of Tharsus since the end of the Second Orc War.

Humans rebuilt, but the Irgenian Empire was no more. The history of the world and its kingdoms was forever altered by the Second Orc War.

Secher died but his leadership strengthened orc society and their military. But the scars of the war, the elven magic, the ancient taint, meant that the orcs have regressed into old customs and wild savagery in the centuries after the war. Putterg withdrew from the world, his tainted body unable to resist the sun. The orc commanders still recognize his rule over them, calling him the eternal chief, living for the day he will stir from his rest and lead them to new glories. They still bring blood sacrifices to his secret lair as tokens of respect, to appease the lust for blood of this ancient orc vampire.

"And so, we stand at your mercy Putterg the Blood Drinker... Orc commander raid their neighbors in your name. Orc shamans made blood sacrifices in your name, and call upon your blessings. It is said that the demonic power you keep in check seeps beyond this cavern and gives power to those that act on your name. Putterg the Blood Drinker is indeed the youngest of the powers worshipped by the orcs of the Tribe Lands.

I implore you, do not let this innocent child die. I will take care of her and make sure she arrives safely to her mother. I will tell the story of your mercy and warn all that would

hear me of your power. So, shall you once more return to lead the orcs when the mortal realm is plunged into night and the orcs rule the world once more.

Allow us to survive and take instead these lot as sacrifice, for they surely will satiate your hunger.”

The storyteller carried the girl and covered her ears, so she would not hear the screams in the cavern behind them. He would survive to tell this story as well.

This has been fun... Hope some of you have enjoyed this tale. Happy Halloween!