

# THE IX AGE FANTASY BATTLES



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A 9<sup>TH</sup> AGE SUPPLEMENT

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## ORCS AND GOBLINS

HERE COME THE WARBORN

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## ORCS AND GOBLINS HERE COME THE WARBORN

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I never give nothing for free, but you can have this: we Warborn are scary! Even to ourselves! I look in the mirror, I terrified! Us goblins are scary cunning, and them orcs, they scary strong. We don't have fancy towers, or books, or universe-cities, but we got fear. Everyone knows someone what came a cropper cos of the Warborn. We're powerful, it makes you afraid out of your wits...and sometimes out of your purses too.

So what do you go and do? You take your fear and use it to make up stories. Invent nasty lies what make even me blush green! I never seen nothing like it, the crazy things you say about Warborn, even when you know nothing at all about us – and what you do know, you understand even less.

So, time to settle a few little things straight. Let me show you a choice selection of comments made to my very face, right here at this verrrry respect'ble trading operation. Me with my poor sick Fleabag! And then I'll explain what's really true, I swear on the grave of me old grand-gogtuk. Here we go:

*"Orcs, goblins, those things are everywhere like flies. Walk outside of any city, throw a rock, and you'll probably hit one."*

Ah, humans. They think they know so much, but they lack perception. There are many of us, true, spread across the world. But we aren't beasties, not swarming insects. Goblins in their Gardens, hidden away from watching eyes. Orcs in their tribes, walking the lands and punching the faces.

Point is we all have a place. That place could be secret and stationarical, or it could be loud and moving, but it is still our home. We aren't everywhere: we're family, and families stick together. Fight sometimes, sure – but we stick together!

*"Beware the orc, tough, strong and green, comes to eat you, he's so mean. Tiny goblin, sneak and greed, steals babes for wolves to feed."*

Who writes these nursing rhymes? I writes better, and I thought schools were for fishes. So, first, orcs:

**Tough** – yes, they loves to fight and hates to lose, so it takes a lot to make them lie down for a rest. But they ain't invulcible, and they bleed like anything else.

**Strong** – of course, they love to hit things. I mean, they can be clever, they can make plans, build stuff, but if it's not hitting a baddie it will never be right. So they get real good at it.

**Green** – well, sure, lots of us are green. But that's like saying humans is pink – kind of true for lots, but it's not exactly the words of an artist, and there are many who have their own colours. Brown, black, beige, bronze, lots of nature colours not starting with B – if it's the colour of a leaf or the ground, you can probably find some of us in that shade.

**Mean** – S'funny right – fight an orc, and he'll rip your arm off. But after the fight, he'll probably give you the arm back, if he doesn't want it as a trophy or a snack. He'll even say sorry for the mess, and ask if you want to go again next week. And as for goblins...

**Sneaky** – F'course. We basically invented sneaky, and we have spies everywhere. Some people even say I'm a spy, which is silly, would a spy have friends in every city, and know every guard's schedule? 'Xactly.

**Greedy** – As if we cares about your money. What we want from you? Stuff to build, stuff to eat, stuff to plant. Most of all, stuff that you know, that we can use to stay ahead. I trades in everything, but nothing sells like secrets.

**Stealing babes** – loud, smelly and helpless...and then there is the kids! We don't want your babies – your coo-beasties are much tastier, and move on their own.

**Wolves to feed** – yes, well. The Gardens have a lot of mouths, and a *darrmu* has to keep his people with full bellies if he wants to stay in the top spot. We don't need to steal though, well, not all the time!

*“Damn Warborn hordes. They descend like locusts, and when they go, there's nothing but destruction and desolation left behind.”*

So rude, and so silly. As if we are nothing but animals, and we break everything we touch. Very wrong. We choose what we want to break, and we don't just break because it's fun. Except sometimes, sometimes it's fun... But we prefer to take useful stuff, and even the orcs much rather break bodies than walls.

But humans like to tell stories about how bad we are, because if they didn't make us into monsters, they couldn't get enough help to fight. We are too strong, too smart and too many. So we become boogeymen, and they feel better when we beat them.

*“They appear from nowhere, and then disappear again, like a curse.”*

Awww, she thinks we are magic! Sad, it's not that fun. Sure, we have a reputation, because we don't grow up in smelly cities or boring farms. Normal peoples don't know how new Warborn get made – you know, when a mummy and a daddy like each other, and the daddy is in charge, and there's a lot of food, and then the magic wyvern brings the little uns!

Well, maybe not. But we grow fast, we don't need roads and supply lines or big noisy camps. When broods come together to make a tribe, or a Garden sends its soldiers to a horde, it happens fast, and civilised folks don't see it coming. “Please don't hurt me, I live in an indefensible village and have no martial training.” Silly people.

‘Course, some of them think we comes from the moon, cos special moons... that's an important time f'r us. But we like the moon all the time. It sings to us, and we know its faces, the big face and the little one. It is both and both can rise, and so it is with the Warborn.

Well there you have it, ladies and orcs, that's Goga's very own truth. Oh you want more? Just so happens it's your lucky day. I happen to be a bit of a collector when it comes to true stories about Warborn, all come into my hands by completely legaligious means. Here's a lovely bunch of nice little tid-bits, yours for just the cost of your sanity. I joke, haha. That'll be twelve scudos, no returns.

*—Klepa, honest merchant goblin of Avras*

## BIOLOGY

A curiosity on the road today. Since leaving Matamuertos, we've seen evidence of Warborn on the march. Rough tools and scrimshaw artefacts have been found near the road in a distinctive orcish style that suggests innate but untutored mechanical and artistic skills. Game has been exceptionally scarce, chased away by a warparty, most likely. There is smoke on the horizon, and word coming down the road is that a company of royal Genovevan guards was attacked near Malero, some ten miles north.

I feel vindicated for hiring an ogre company for protection on this route – at least this time al-Kiruz won't complain about the extra expense. There are other benefits too; ogres are not just stronger than human mercenaries (and better company), but they also seem to have knowledge of the world our species apparently lacks.

This became especially apparent in the late afternoon, when we noticed a terrible stench of decay. Shortly after, one of the pathfinders discovered something a ways off the road that put the company into commotion. I followed the ogres through the bushes to find an abandoned camp – a patch of ground trampled by many feet, with more orcish detritus scattered all around, suggesting significant festivities. But the primary spectacle lay in the centre: the source of the stench.

The Warborn had dug a large trench, roughly circular, as big as a pair of steam tanks and probably as deep. The hole was filled with carcasses. It was a sickening assortment of slaughtered bodies, hailing from many species. I recognised deer and cattle as well as smaller creatures, and worst of all: men in the uniform of the royal guards. All of them in an indescribable state of putrefaction.

I vomited twice before I realised the ogres were preparing wood and oil to burn the corpses. Chief Koyuz laughed grimly when I expressed shock at their desire to cook and consume such awful meats.

"Not for eating," he chuckled. "For killing." His laughter redoubled at my confusion. "You humans too civilised. You still not understand Nature's Violence," he continued, using a term for the Warborn I'd heard him use before.

"It's true we don't know why they leave piled bodies," I admitted. "It mainly happens at the full moon, but most people think it must be an offering to the gods, or leftover food."

"Ha! Ha!" boomed Koyuz. "And you people call us stupid! This not food. This..." he grinned broadly, making a gesture clearly intended to indicate sexual intercourse. Appearing not to notice my discomfort, he continued. "And it only full moon for orcs. Smiling moon for gobs. Always big party for Warborn."

I was almost too shocked to speak. By now the company had piled up the wood and were preparing to start the fire.

"You're saying they use the pits of corpses for...reproduction?" I stammered.

"Of course! Nature don't waste. Use bodies from fighting to feed babes." He reached forward and plunged his massive hand into the chest of a rotting goat as one of his ogres carried it towards the pyre. I retched again. "See?" he said.

He gripped a slimy, semi-translucent ball I had taken for a disgusting globule of fat or effluvia.

"Egg," he said, simply. "Warborn females fight to lay in best parts of meat pit. Meat of strong enemies most wanted. Meat of fellow Warborn not wanted, use only when nothing else. Strongest male orc, or cleverest gob, he make eggs come alive."

The chief was silent, while I queasily digested the implications of what he was saying. Then he looked at me quite seriously.

"You leave it, egg become little orc, eats pit meat, gets bigger, leaves pit, lays more eggs. In few moons... big horde of orcs. You come back here in a little while, you see hands coming out, orcs crawling free, most of meat already gone. Rare to find, but I seen it. Even more rare to find gob pits – they're kept hidden away. Both kinds of Warborn come out already big from feeding, colour of ground what they come out of. But sometimes little Warborn sleep late, miss the feast, runts come out as tiny grots.

"Incredible," I murmured. "And to think the consensus in Santa Regina is that they emerge fully formed from godblood dripping through the Veil."

"True," nodded Koyuz. "Many don't believe in pits, even ogres. Most thinks Warborn come out of dirt!"

"But I don't understand...why leave their offspring unprotected?"

"Orcs...Nature's Violence," Koyuz replied slowly, as if I were a simpleton. "Like storm. Always moving. Must keep going to find next fight, find meat for next pit. New orcs come out of pit together, become new family. Follow path of old family, try to join together. Sometimes the old family is now dead, or young family can't find them. Then young ferals on their own, or join other ferals. Many times...most times, young Warborn not survive to make big family. Killed by people, creatures, weather. But when they do find family...can be very many, very fast."

"Even we humans are well aware of how rapidly Warborn populations can bloom," I agreed.

The sun was setting and the fires had been lit, the stench of the meat intensifying but becoming a little more palatable. At that moment there was a fresh commotion. A pair of large ogres marched up to the chief; between them they gripped an orc with muddy-yellow skin, howling and thrashing. The two ogres, each twice the orc's size, were barely managing to restrain it. I stepped backwards involuntarily. Its leg was badly broken, but it was so frenzied it seemed not to care.

"Found this up the track, bossman," said one of the ogres.

The chief grunted. "Another body for fire, friends."

As the enraged orc was dragged away to the pyre, I turned to Koyuz. "It must have been furious you were destroying its breeding grounds."

"No," the chief shook his flabby jowels. "It furious to lose family. Orc hurt, left behind. All it knows its whole life is pit-kin. Brood. More than brothers. More than tribe. Live together. Fight together, side by side, always, from day it leave the pit. Fight each other too, to show respect. Can't fight no more...can't live no more. Meat pit is everything to Warborn. Pit is the beginning, the end, the big symbol of what Warborn are. That why orc and gob work together. Orc big and strong. Gob small and clever. Different in many ways. But both come from pit. Understand each other, pure instinct. Speak same tongue. Both love war; orcs for fighting, gobs for cheating and putting enemies against each other. Orc and gob know they belong together, children of pits. Sim...simbeee..."

“Symbiosis,” I supplied.

“Exact. Orcs fighters – big, bulky. Gobs, smaller, stringy, but cunning, strong hands, know how to pick fight. Orcs always move, need new fights. Avoid civs, always go for soldiers. Gobs stay in one place, but have threats, enemies. Places to send fight to. For long campaigns, provide support, supplies, logics.”

“Logistics?”

“Exact,” Koyuz said again. “And gobs know how to talk too – spies, emissaries. Orcs only know fight. But orcs know gob cities good places to make pits nearby: better safety. Course, orcs and gobs not always friendly. They family, but they family that love to fight.”

“I can relate,” I muttered. Louder, I asked, “Chief, how do you know so much about Warborn?”

The ogre shrugged. “It just nature. How you not know?”

—*Diary of Destrian trader Lauda Inares, kept in private collection. Entry for Tandemar 33, 899 A.S.*

## THE ONLY KING

When His Majesty chose m'lord to serve as messenger, I nearly fainted with fright, but Sir Reginald accepted the commission without hesitation. In fact, he was grinning as we rode into the unfortified camp that the Warborn had erected only two miles beyond the city gates, confident as any noble, glad at the chance to show his elan. Demanding to see their lord, his request was answered when a large greenish brute with an iron blade fixed in the stump of his left arm came forward to glare at us.

"Where's the rest of you?" grunted the orc, in broken Equitan. "We want a proper fight."

"I have come as an envoy from the army of King Charles the Strong," Sir Reginald said, his bold voice ringing over the camp, while I tried not to quiver at the attention of so many well-armed orcs gathering around. "The strength of all Equitaine is encamped within our walls, and we are well provisioned. Our city has stood for one thousand years; it will not be threatened by a rabble of orcs with no history at all. Come any further, and we will show you no mercy. Leave this land at once and your lives will be spared."

The orc lord bellowed at this and leaped forward, causing me to shriek. He struck his chest and replied: "You talk nicely, pink horse man. But you make a big mistake if you think to know us. No history, you say? Orcs have longest history of all. Who made the world, after the Dawn? Orcs did! Everyone bowed to saurs – not us. When sky rock came, we were ready, at the very start of time. We led all the others to finish the reptiles, send them off to hide away in fear. Then came time of great empires – elves, dwarves, you know the pretty ones. But you don't know that orcs were first empire of all. That was the birth of Him!"

He paused, and the watching Warborn shivered in excitement.

"Amek!" roared the chief, thrusting up his sword-arm.

"Only King!" the whole tribe shouted in deafening response.

"No brothers, no sisters!"

"Only King!" they all cried again.

"No past, no future! No fear, no weakness!"

"Only King! Only King!" came the reply, the assembled orcs jumping and thrashing like fanatics. Someone had started pounding heavy drums.

"Amek is greatest King of all history, ignorant human! He not live once, but many times! He born alone, with no brood – a most terrible and unbearable thing, a mark of holy gods, of great destiny! He one with the magic, the whole world – he Wapaka itself!"

"Only King! Only King!" The crowd was roaring continuously now in time with the drums, but the chief was louder still. Even Reginald seemed to cower a little as the orc continued:

"He came first to build massive empire after saurs defeated. Next he came in farthest west, when elves were fighting over new lands – he almost swept them all back into the sea. Then he came when humans had legions and eagles – hugest ever battles against dwarf armies, shaking the mountains, splitting the whole empire of little bearded ones in two! Came again when rats were in charge – this time he smashed the ogres out of Tsuandan, gave it back to the humans when there was no one left to fight! Last he came was greatest of all – he brought the time you call Age of War! We fought the whole world, most glorious age! Breaker and builder!"

“Only King!” Voices like a storm, drowning out all else.

“Bringer of battle, bringer of fate!

“Only King! Only King!”

Later they told me that it was audible from the city. I almost fell from my saddle, all courage failing me. Sir Reginald was trying to speak, but it was useless. No one could hear him. The orc pointed his steel limb right at us.

“We don’t care about city’s history! Our history is greatest of all! Today is today, and all we want is the fight, big as possible! Maybe we’ll let your precious city stand another thousand years, after we’ve stomped all over your puny soldiers! You run away, not us!”

Seeing that any further negotiations were quite impossible. Reginald snarled and turned his horse. As we departed, the orcs were still chanting, and we heard a parting bellow from their lord:

“You remember about Amek! You think we’re scary, wait til he comes again! He will come!”

—*From the memoirs of Sir Maurice de Lhéraux, recalling his days as a page.*

## GOBLIN ORIGINS

At the feet of Shamut, Nabh and Amryl,  
Enslaved by those who should be its equal,  
Serving the stronger, the likes of Savar,  
Exemplar to its people, the God: Kuruka.

Its weakness did shame and humiliate,  
The Spring of Truth it did seek to locate,  
Sipping the water, body divided,  
The Deepest Garden of Delights its twin guided.

There, Kuruka found goblins free of shame:  
A paradise only cunning could claim.  
To the goblin gods it brought Spring's goga,  
God of Cunning and Death: First *Darrmu* Kuruka

To goblin gods, the *Darrmu* showed the Way  
Used lies to grow strong, no longer obey.  
The shrewdest of goblins they inducted,  
And a Garden grew for the worthy elected.

The mortal *Darrmus* taught serfdom was false,  
That all is allowed, no matter the cost,  
A profound paradigm would now take form,  
And from a horizon of calm, rushed a wild storm.

The goblin gods approached the pantheons,  
Spoke falsehoods to craft the greatest of cons,  
Elf gods were told dwarf gods found them ugly,  
The dwarves tricked to believe their crafting unworthy.

Next the saurians were told yet more lies,  
That the other gods did not think them wise,  
Finally orc ears heard the goblins speak,  
Convinced that the sage saurians believed them weak.

And so, when the war raged amongst the gods,  
The goblins were free, against all the odds,  
Building their Earthly Gardens of Delight,  
Teaching the Truth and the best kind of might.

This extract from the epic poem loosely named the “Saga of Enlightenment” acts as both summary and treatise. We are looking at words intended not just as entertainment, but also as record and ultimately scripture. For this poem comes not from the playful mind of an Equitan bard, but is in fact an ancient litany of the goblins, as recorded by the Fourth Age Avrasi commander Glinus the Elder. Originally transcribed in the Bwabatok language of the Warborn, the poem seems to tell the myth of Kuruka, the first *Darrmu*, or Divine Initiate, a figure widely attested in goblin religion and stories, typically claimed as their greatest immortal patron.

Perhaps echoing the supposed oppression of the Dawn Age, Kuruka is born into servitude, despite being a god itself. Leaving the torments of the other gods, Kuruka wanders the Realm, happening upon the Spring of Truth. Having drunk from it, Kuruka is split in two and its double guides it to the Deepest Garden of Delights, imagined as the ultimate locus of hedonistic freedom, the prototype for all mortal Gardens.

Here, Kuruka sees goblins with the virtue of cunning, without which it is impossible to find or enter the Garden. Returning to the other gods, Kuruka is elected as their *Darrmu* and begins to teach the arts of cunning. It is now the Twin God of Cunning and Death, for death must be defeated by cunning. The teaching continues in secret; all the while Kuruka uses *goga*, brewed from the original Spring of Truth, to show the goblin gods the way of *Atakpa* – deceit and denial – so that they can continue to act obediently in public, but plot in secret.

After the goblin deities successfully trick the other gods, the poem finally addresses the even more important doctrine of *Kimikwu*: a radical philosophical awakening that teaches that the law of obedience is false and that goblins are worthy of freedom. The goblins pledge themselves to these fundamental truths forevermore, shunning everything deemed *hob*, or subservient to non-goblin authorities.

A note on translation:

I have used “it” as an approximation of the hermaphroditic pronoun unique to Bwabatok. Kuruka is considered by goblins to be both male and female.

*Goga* is a multivalent concept to goblins, and I have not attempted a translation. It is the word for their revered and divine principle of life and magic, but it is also used to describe many kinds of physical potions created by goblins using esoteric herblore, which they see as a vital route to enlightenment. Words such as *gogtuk* (a goblin initiated into the secrets of *goga*) and *gogyag* (creatures or protectors representing the divine) are etymologically related.

—From *Liette Hoake's Essays on Warborn Culture, Behaviour and Practices; Volume III.*

## ORCS IN BATTLE

The first time that I met the Warborn, I'd only been a reiter a few months, fresh from school and posted east. I was covering 30 leagues a day and had seen little sign of Beast, Warrior, Makhar or Warborn, and I liked it that way.

It's not as though the others aren't game for a good punch up, but the Warborn, well, they just love it. Every reiter I've ever spoken to says the same thing. Most of the time they're not even fighting for anything besides the fighting itself.

Old Daisy smelled it first: smoke billowing from Frughafen village. An arrow struck the pommel of the saddle and skipped away into the dusk; another hammered into my holster and stuck quivering, crudely fletched with leaves. More stone-tipped arrows whistled past as I leaned low and urged the old girl into a full gallop along the edge of the forest and away from the threat.

I glanced behind me: orcs were pouring from the burning village, armourless but full of unruly excitement. Bones were thrust through their own skin and body paint was, how shall I put it, en vogue? An orc of gargantuan size stood atop a broken cart and bellowed in their 'twok – must have been their chief, it's usually the biggest one. I do recall that he had a distinctive tattoo of a bear on his chest. He was egging them on, all of them hollering and snarling, banging drums, making an ungodly racket. Wild with bloodlust, they almost caught up with the old girl even though they were on foot. Scary as sin, but we outran them.

Pass that wine.

The brood that hit Frughafen was a bit unusual. Orcs normally ignore the villages; they much prefer to take on soldiers that can fight back, not defenseless peasants. It'd been a bad winter, and they were after the livestock. Always moving around, see – chronic wanderlust. Can't raise their own food so they've got to hunt and pillage wherever they go. But this time they'd taken the people too – I guess they needed flesh for something, and that the villagers had. We tracked them for a few days as they drifted southwest, driven by who knows what. Gurts swore that they were following a scent towards their tribe, and after the battle of Nine Hills, we found out he was right.

We were late to the battle and frankly I'm glad. Judging by the corpses piled high, that wild brood had caught up with the larger tribe and driven back Alburg's guards with heavy losses. No one knows how they do it, but orcs are always popping up out of nowhere, coming together and making bigger tribes – terribly dangerous, even in civilised parts. You gotta hit them while they're still in a small group, or you're in trouble. Even if you scatter them, the buggers can often reform in new combinations, making new tribes with new chiefs.

Speaking of that – we found my old friend with the bear tattoo near the battle; from the state of him, an even bigger orc had done for him in a pretty spectacular way. I reckon he made a play for the tribe leadership before the battle and got taken down a peg or ten. Not normally lethal when orcs fight each other – more of a nonstop hobby for them. But it'll turn bloody alright when it becomes about politics.

About half the times I've had to deal with orcs they've got those smaller Warborn with them too. There were plenty of goblins at Nine Hills, by the way – probably one of their plant cities was nearby, it's impossible to find the bloody things.

Many of our boys' corpses had been taken – Warborn often keep bodies even when they leave valuables and weapons, and we find them later stuffed into holes in the ground. I'll never forget the looks on the faces of the few dead Alburgers who were left on the field. I've seen that look many times since, but back then it put the fear of Sunna in me.

That's the thing with your orcs. The sheer aggression is just terrifying. Born for war you might say...

—Interview of Sgt Holzenburg of the 7th Ullsberg Reiters. Notes taken by E. Rantzen for her book *Men of Sunna*

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## GOBLINS IN BATTLE

Captain Grigori has a remarkable record of military successes with the Aegis and Blade Mercenary Company. Summoned to Bellatorre to destroy a Garden of goblins that had just been discovered, he asked me to make available my encyclopedic knowledge. Grigori also wanted insider information. Goblin individuals are found everywhere, usually in filthy shops or fulfilling menial duties for the wealthy. They shine in gathering all the information one may be willing to pay for; making capable concierges, spotters, investigators, spies, emissaries or diplomats. It was not hard to find a scout, calling himself Hibamiki the Renegade, who knew the nearby Garden of the Burning Moon. Unfortunately, a goblin's jabber is not always reliable and I warned Grigori to take his reports with caution.

### **Captain Grigori asked what is known about goblins, and their reasons for fighting.**

**H.t.R.** We goblins do not want masters of not our liking. But we are so weak, how do we resist? So we compensate. We use any resource we find. We make friends with powerful creatures. We keep always gentle and docile with powerful lords who host us.

**J.Z.** Goblins are indeed smart and resourceful. Some say they cheat in almost all their activities. They typically do not start aggressive action unless they have joined forces with orcs or otherwise stacked the odds in their favour. In numbers, goblins become confident and may display their strength, especially as deterrence. Though sometimes, when the moon is young, they become aggressive for no reason.

**H.t.R.** Because the grinning moon is very special to us. Most goblins, you never see. We live happy in our Gardens. We are despaired to keep lovely Garden safe. Our diplomacy is Atakpa; we do not attack, we deter and deviate. Only goblins' very best friends visit us. Orcs are friends, but always moving; they do not stay to defend poor goblins.

**J.Z.** According to my research, what goblins call "Gardens" seem to be sedentary settlements adapted to their local environment. Famous archetypes include the Garden of One Thousand Caves in the White Mountains, the Garden of the Green Heart in the Virentian jungle, and the Garden of Floating Sails, which once stood where the Wasteland now lies, but which supposedly moved itself before the Inferno event. In the goblin tongue they are called Yatinshi, Bwajabwi and Tazyami respectively.

Some say these three large and ancient sites represent "cave", "forest" and "plains" subcultures, but many other kinds of goblins are classifiable. On the rare occasions that a Garden is found, it appears to be protected by layers of reactive defences. Goblins will campaign to purge an unwanted presence too close to their Garden and will become ferociously energetic when attacked, much like wasps.

### **C.G. asked about the Garden in Bellatorre named Burning Moon, and how many live there.**

**H.t.R.** Lovely delight place for goblins, once home to me. We are many there, several handfuls. Volcano name is the Burning Moon, our friend, no danger like other places. Live happy with pets, cute four-legged gnashers, like you have seen with goblin sellsword troops.

**J.Z.** I would not set much store by numbers provided by a goblin. They are notoriously inaccurate, and somehow the errors all come out in their favour. Mercenaries from the Burning Moon are gnasher-riding ruddy-skinned goblins; I would classify them as cave goblins, who are mostly feared for ill-explained self-destructive combat techniques involving the use of improbable weapons or lethal suicide assassins.

**H.t.R.** Not suicide, easy explain. They eat sacred *goga*, they become *gogtuk*, strong goblins, learn special truths. High spirit gives high strength. Short duration, but cleverest do not die, they cheat death! Very clever!

**C.G. asked for information about goblin infantry.**

**H.t.R.** We goblins are not couragerous creatures. But we are disciplinated! Just not every day. We need to gain confidence. Camelflage, distance, multitude, addicquate weapons, goga, proffecies, they all give confidence.

**J.Z.** Goblins are known for foul weapons such as traps, smoke, flames, diversion and feints. They extract various substances, some poisonous, from the plants of the forests and their Gardens.

**C.G. asked for information about goblin cavalry.**

**J.Z.** They use fast-moving creatures as mounts, often exotic but rarely armoured or as well-trained as horses – though where the terrain is suitable they are sometimes known to pull chariots. Not just gnashers but ostriches, wolves, oversized millipedes and spiders and so forth – whatever creatures can be found in their environment.

**H.t.R.** Also giant crabs, lava goats, fire scarabs, hyenas, dire skunks. No need for training – they are friends!

**J.Z.** I never heard of these animals. I doubt you will encounter anything stranger than a gnasher in Bellatorre.

**C.G. asked for information about goblin artillery.**

**J.Z.** Ballistae and catapults are a common sight, but you can ignore them. They invariably malfunction.

**H.t.R.** Our mechanisms have personality, not like your boring powder-bangs. We like to hurl rocks, bolts, burning pigs, precision pilots, lava, poison, grease, webs...

**C.G. asked for information about larger creatures found among goblin armies.**

**H.t.R.** Orcs provide the strength we lack, they are our supplementary troops. What you call monsters, they are friends, too! Trolls are nice and careful, they apprecizitate little goblins. Wyverns, big snakes, bears, gluey toads, all animals you call pest, they come to our Garden, we understand, we cater. Big *gog-yags* also, sent by Goga to help us, they like our worship.

**J.Z.** Gogyag is the name given by goblins to all large monsters. But no need for concern – the Equitans assure me none has been seen on Bellatorre in decades.

**C.G. asked for information about goblin leaders.**

**J.Z.** Often you will not be able to catch them. Many leaders are as cowardly as their troops, who sometimes don't even stick around to protect them. But there are many exceptions on record; I wrote a whole book about the paradox of goblin discipline – they are cautious and zealous at the same time.

If you see a goblin chief leading from the frontline, he likely has a trick up his sleeve. Their troops believe it, at least, and can become surprisingly stubborn and enduring if they trust they will be saved by a miracle or a masterpiece of cunning.

Spellcasters can be quite potent, but as unpredictable and fragile as goblins' machines.

**H.t.R.** Leaders need not to be strong. A leader with a good cause or proffecy inspirates his whole army. A failed boss inspirates no respect, because he's dead. Goblins trust and follow who has proven survival success.

When the Captain had all the information he needed, the renegade goblin was paid and left.

The battle the next day was a disaster. Our biggest mistake was to prepare for conventional cave goblins, as we thought they were, having dismissed much of the Renegade's information as goblin lies. But we did face lava goats, gluey toads, ridden crabs, smoke walls, traps and lava-induced explosions, all mentioned by our informer as if he knew we would not believe him.

Morale was finally broken when the men saw the Renegade himself among their very foes, giving orders as the leader he turned out to be, using the insight he had gained as an alleged outcast scout. I learned later that the name he gave us means "clever trick". We were defeated by an array of treacherous weapons, but moreover by the master mischievousness of the goblin leader, who had dared to spend a day among his foes.

*—Recorded in Jorge Zamoran's Historical Records for the Enlightenment of Future Generations*

## ORC SOCIETY

"Do my little helpers annoy you?" asked one of the two goblins with a sly smile.

The bulky orc she had addressed looked briefly at the grotlings making merry on his iron shoulder pads. He plucked one of the tiny Warborn off and flicked it squealing towards the goblin.

"I did not notice until you mentioned them," shrugged the orc.

"Ah, the old orc likes to demonstrate his size," grinned the goblin, and then turned to her junior companion. "So, young *gogtuk*, today's your lucky day. Your witch must really trust or hate you to have sent you here as your first task outside the Garden. Let's see what we can teach you about orcs. Look how they play together in their broods."

Last night's festival had ended, but most of the tribe continued to run amok around the camp even while the games themselves had started. All around, orcs were eating, dancing or punching each other in groups.

"The brood is everything," confirmed the armoured orc, who continued to loiter by himself beside the two goblins. "Brood is life itself."

"It's more than a family, for orcs," the goblin agreed. "More like an eternal bond. Most think they'll reincarnate as the very same brood in a future life. Each brood has a leader, and the leader of the strongest brood commands the tribe."

"How do they choose the brood's leader?" asked the younger goblin, shyly.

"We don't choose," the orc replied. "We just know who's the one to follow – like an instinct. And when in doubt, we smack each other til we know for sure. Broods and fighting, that's the two things that make life worth it. Orc always has to show they're worthy of being an orc."

"Orcs love a challenge," the older goblin nodded. "It's their strength, but also their weakness."

"We hate weakness."

"Of course, my old friend. I mean that sometimes you might rush into an enemy's trap if it offers you a fight."

"Enemy's traps are a good challenge," the orc considered. "We don't like to cheat or sneak, like you. We take life head-on!"

"That's why we're the perfect match!" cackled the goblin. "Remember, young *gogtuk*: life is violent and unpredictable. All of nature is a war, and orcs and goblins are born to wage it together. Now, let's see what else we have here. Look at this brood, wearing nothing but furs and bones for armour."

The younger goblin squinted at a small riot among a knot of orcs nearby.

"Still young, but good fighters," grunted the orc. "From a pit in enemy territory, but they managed to survive and find the tribe. Still feral and untamed. They don't want to learn, only fight."

"Young orcs are dangerous, remember that, *gogtuk*," agreed the older goblin. "Not much for negotiation, those ones, but they're not stupid either. Until they find an older tribe, they'll never learn tactics or good weapons or proper Warborn ways. The worst is when they find other youngsters and make a completely feral tribe. Very difficult to reason with! Luckily, if you can get them to join a normal tribe, then they tend to calm down as they get older."

"Gotta learn the ropes somehow," nodded the orc.

"Grown up orcs are the kind you normally see, like most of the broods in this tribe," the goblin gestured around the camp, where orcs were watching and cheering the games. "They're the ones with more re-

fined weapons, who know how to make use of the environment. Orcs learn mostly by imitation, you know.”  
“And what about your friend here, and the armoured orcs?” quizzed the goblin’s curious companion.  
“Good question! This fine orc before you is by no means typical. He’s learned to tolerate me over many long years. But most of these armoured fellows are not so friendly.”

“How comes?”

“We’re the ones that survived,” said the orc, darkly. “The older we get, the more of our brood falls in battle. More time to learn crafting. Sometimes we join with other small broods of our own age, since all these youngsters only annoy us. And finally, one day, one of us will be all alone. No more brood. And so no more tribe. No more leaders. Only fight, and in the fight...perhaps peace.”

The orc stared into the distance, and said no more. There was a long silence, until the older goblin spoke again.

“The old gits, all alone. They get a bit weird. Spend their days talking to shamans, sometimes. Can’t stand the younger ones. Get obsessed with weaponmaking, make themselves the very best gear, the thickest armours. Lose all fear. Embrace death in battle. Beautiful and mysterious warmongers they are, but grumpy and stubborn. This one especially,” she chuckled. “Sometimes, a lone orc leaves the tribe altogether. It’s called Ektapa. One day, they walk off into the wilderness all alone, to find their final fight. No one knows why. Some think they have a special mission from the gods.”

A dead, flaming pig landed abruptly among the two goblins and the orc, blazing merrily, while nearby spectators erupted in cheers at the conclusion of one of the games.

“You don’t join the games?” the young *gogtuk* asked the orc, while the grotlings rushed out to brawl in delight over the best bits of the boar, singeing themselves on the boiling hot meat.

“Old orcs have respect. No need for challenges, games, glory. Don’t care who’s the boss no more.”

“Games are like orc form of politics,” the older *gogtuk* explained. “It’s fun, but also about real challenges, to show who’s fit to lead. Lots of power in winning, for orcs. Broods want better status, brood leaders want to show they’re better than others, maybe even go for the top spot. If the tribe leader’s brood doesn’t win, let’s just say he’s in big trouble. Sometimes lots of tribes come together for games, then things get really crazy! Craziest of all are the Games of Zajgan. That’s a party you won’t forget! But that’s the only way for tribes to build trust – by fighting each other.”

But the young goblin was already looking at something else.

“What about that one with the feathers?” He pointed. “She’s alone like you, but no armour. Is she old too?”

“That’s our shaman,” replied the orc. “Shamans are different. Born funny. Outcast from brood on first day out of the pit. Feared, respected, scorned. They have no brood, but in some ways, they’re part of all broods. Outside of the tribe, but at the heart of it too, you understand?”

“Shamans learn magic like witches,” the older goblin continued. “Sometimes go from one tribe to another. They’re the only ones who can understand the tribe as a whole. Give advice to the leader, or sometimes take over as leader themselves, if no one wins a challenge.”

“They’re like witches? So they know cheating? They know goga?”

“They’re still orcs, idiot! They don’t follow goblin ways. Remember, we respect their strength, they respect our cunning. If you want to be strong, you have to work together. And to work with orcs you need their respect. So use your brains to show them you’re a goblin they want to be on a team with!”

—From *Wounded, Captured, Healed and Challenged*, by Rainouardt du Tinel

# GOBLIN SOCIETY

## On the knowledge of your Goblin assistant.

Remember that goblins do not see botany as a discipline in itself. To them it is a kind of living alchemy that affects every part of life: the plant as a microcosm of the entire world. Ironically, the philosopher-scientists of Myra have a similar belief, *spagyria*, which they consider very civilised and enlightened.

Horticulture is a way of life for all goblins. That is why they make such valuable assistants for the pioneering alchemist. Cherish your goblin; if you can develop a deeper relationship instead of disdain their inferior breeding, a great wealth of knowledge may open up to you.

A full comprehension of a goblin's botanical wisdom can only be reached by constant vigilance for falsehood. The only thing more natural to a goblin than the cultivation of plants is lying. For all that they share, they will attempt to steal and cheat away from you five-fold. They lie as naturally as they breathe, often without any purpose besides general confusion and mayhem.

Do not judge them for this nature, as you would not judge a dog for its gullibility. Your task is to sift the truth from the lies by a process of experimentation.

## On the Garden Cities.

Our own system, influenced by the Avrasi, distinguishes between botanical (or research) gardens and ornamental gardens. The goblin recognises no such separation. Goblins imagine the entirety of their cities as gardens – *bwajub* – or *Jan'bwajub*, which can be roughly translated as a “Garden of Delights”. The term covers every growing plant or fungus, all of which are valued for both beauty and practical use as a single concept. Those few who have seen such cities and survived report that plant life is everywhere, covering practically every surface and structure.

These cities are masterfully adapted to coexist with their local environments, for goblins do not like to harm the system in which they live. If the plant is a microcosm of the city, the city is a microcosm of nature itself. The very essence of the goblin contains and unifies both life and death, desire and fear: a perfect double understanding of nature, by which they may use plants to take life and enhance it with the same skill.

Goblins' ability to share information between each other, often over long distances, is attested in the garden cities, where plants from far off places are often found and nurtured, sometimes made to thrive in radically new environments. Extraordinary techniques for controlling light and temperature, unknown to us in Vetia, may explain some of this success – especially the baffling miracle of flora thriving underground.

Goblins usually make their Gardens in hidden locations, sometimes deep within or below other civilisations, yet isolated and unknown to them. Entrances are closely protected secrets, the subject of even greater webs of lies than other topics. Their seamless symbiosis with the environment helps to provide camouflage, sometimes allowing outsiders to come within a few feet of the city without realizing. Secret entrances are often protected by carefully bred carnivorous plants which can grow to enormous size and have been known to swallow, strangle or dissolve entire exploratory parties in a matter of moments.

Goblin Gardens have thrived in the densest forests, the most unnavigable swamps and the most barren deserts and mountains. Many goblins have boasted that there is no place where they cannot nurture a Garden.

## On the cosmology of the Gardens

Within the sprawling, wild fecundity of a goblin Garden – each one largely unlike the others – one finds, apparently, certain common features. Two important areas are called the Divine Blossoms and the Holy Roots. The Blossoms, known for the special lushness, colour, potency and density of its vegetation, once again showcases goblin duality. It functions both as a cemetery and as a breeding ground, with both graves for deceased goblins and “pits” for birthing new ones, whatever that may entail. The largest public festivities are held here. In the center of the Blossoms they are said to keep a specific plant, often very ancient, representing the Garden itself.

The Roots is the name for a darker and stranger part of the Garden, a religious center of sorts, kept mysterious through restricted access, and typically used for sect initiations. Most importantly, however, the Roots is used as a habitat in which to keep the infamous *gogyag*: giant beasts which goblins nurture and revere, and deploy in protection of the Gardens. Sacrifices are held to these creatures, who are thought to be sent by the gods themselves.

### On the trunks and branches of the Garden: tribes and sects

Like all Warborn, goblins are born in broods, which group together in tribes, typically sharing a familial link as the offspring of a single progenitor. This position of reproductive dominance, effectively acting as the tribe’s leader, is literally called a mob leader or demagogue, and is theoretically democratically chosen. Several tribes may coexist within a Garden, each perhaps focused on a certain botanical speciality and dwelling in the corresponding section of the Garden. This means goblin cities often exhibit greater social complexity and diversity in tropical climates where a greater range of plants can grow.

Sects are a parallel social structure rooted in rites of initiation into the secrets of the most powerful and religiously important plant-lore. These mystic botanists are nominally independent of the tribal hierarchy, but in classic goblin paradox, they are also the same thing, for each sect is affiliated with a single tribe, and each demagogue not only leads the tribe but the sect as well. Thanks to their secrecy and levels of untruth, some see the sects as the hidden guides of goblin Gardens; yet as the primary spiritual institution, they are also a very public and influential location of populist power.

### On the fruits and flowers of the Garden: witches and darrmus

Sect initiates, known as *gogtuk*, usually live among their tribe, but witches stand apart, living closer to the Divine Blossoms. These mage-prophets are high ranking initiates, whose wizardry is awakened by use of *goga*, functioning as a cross between apothecaries and politicians. Their primary power comes from survival, for the main activity of *gogtuk* is to test the limits of mortality, attempting ever more dangerous and suicidal feats of plant-fuelled trickery as part of the goblin’s eternal project and obsession with finally cheating death itself.

Owing to the extremely high death rate within sects from substance abuse, assassination and dares, any goblin who survives a significant number of trials is considered powerful and holy, achieving ecstatic popular followings. The most skillful (or perhaps fortuitous) become witches if they are magically adept, and the most popular of all, witch or not, is typically appointed *darrmu*. The word has never been translated, for there is no possible term in any human language that could convey the mixture of political, religious, mystic, reproductive, charismatic and magical authority encapsulated in such a figure, one who has survived all the dangers of the world: a master trickster. Although they are also elected – by the demagogues rather than the entire Garden – *darrmus* are in practice the ultimate goblin monarchs, priests, mages and rabble rousers. They lead the council of sects, are advised by the most senior witches, and their instructions are followed blindly and devotedly by all.

2/3

### **On the xylem and phloem of the Garden: politics and economy**

Political power among goblins is built out of bold and blatant deception, secrecy and often covert violence. Lies are the very rule of law: cheating is deemed not just acceptable but highly praiseworthy, as long as it is not unmasked. Propaganda, demagoguery, corruption and wild promises are everyday necessities for governing the chaotic goblin masses. Witches and *darrmu* base their authority on the visions they obtain through botanical means, granting them communion with the gods and ascended goblins dwelling in the “Deepest Garden of Delights,” as they call their afterlife.

Economic power for goblins is, of course, also a product of their peerless botanical skills, as well as their uncanny and ruthless ability to trade successfully with foreign powers that often despise them or are even actively at war with them.

*—Mircea of Paventa, Master Apothecary in the Department of Exotic Materials, Avrasi Chapter of the League of Apothecaries. From Lectures to the Apprentices on the Wisdom of Goblin Botany, Chapter I.*

## MAGIC AND RELIGION

It's easy to forget that magic is not understood in the same way by everyone. When I was apprenticed under old Mistress Schuler, she sent me out to live for a year among the various villages of upper Narrenwald, to learn something of the old traditions of hedge witchery and folk wisdom. My eyes were opened to many provincial conceptions of the Immortal Force that year, but those ideas were nothing compared to the new horizons I encountered one fateful night in Tandemar.

A farmer in my area had been recently kicked and badly injured by an unruly horse. I was attending to his bedside, when all at once I heard the offending animal begin to winnie. Soon she was joined by a cacophony of panicking farmyard creatures. I rushed out amid the barking and squawking to see two dozen burly Warborn striding over the fields, skin the colour of treebark.

I was alone in the house, besides the injured widower, and there was no hope of sending for help. I could have run, but a healer does not abandon her charge. I stayed in the bedroom and waited, preparing the defensive spells I already knew. In the yard, I heard the horse's winnies abruptly cease – she would not kick again. I heard them break down the door and search the pantry. And then I heard steps on the staircase.

An orc stood in the door, dressed in a cloak of strange leather. I considered an attack, but it was not threatening, and I dreaded to antagonise it. I was rewarded when the creature pulled out a waterskin.

"That one dying," it said, grunting towards the unconscious farmer. I thought it meant to offer the skin's contents as a tonic, but instead he gave it to me, gesturing at me to drink. I did so – the liquid was potent and herbal, instantly making me feel more alert. "Killed by beast," it grunted again, looking at the man in his bed.

Then, to my surprise, it sat down on the floor. Below us, I could hear the rest of its party running amok in the house and gardens.

"I hope to save his life," I said, tentatively. "Do you know anything that could help?"

"He dying," the orc said again, as if I were a child.

"But you do practice magic, yes?" I tried again, making an educated guess.

"Magic is nature. Nature is violence and death. Magic not stop violence, magic *is* violence," the orc said, cryptically. Seeing my failure to understand, it continued, clearly beginning to enjoy our conversation.

"The whole world, all of nature. This is the principle of everything. She divine. Pure. We name her Wapaka. The principle."

"Her? Like a goddess?"

"Maybe. But not walking talking like other gods. Wapaka – she everything. She within the world, every part of nature. She within the gods. She within magic. She within orcs, she makes us love to fight. We see her in the big moon, in the pit of birth. Her holy name, Wapaka."

"So you're a priest? Of...Wapaka? A philosophical principle, or maybe a goddess?"

"Priest, wizard – same thing. Magic is nature, is divine – I told you. And she *very* violent. Brutal. She kills and kills, and brings again new life. She does not care at *all*. Does not return life to the already killed." Here, the orc gestured at the wounded farmer. "Orcs part of Wapaka, Wapaka part of orcs. Part of goblins too, but little Warborn understand her different."

I nodded at the priest-wizard to continue, and it needed no convincing.

"Goblins name her Goga. She still violent, but she also crafty. Very clever violence – seen in nasty plants and smiling moon. To goblins, divine principle bring not just death, but also ways to cheat death, cheat

their own weakness. They say she not just in nature, in the gods, in the Warborn. She also in plants and potions, providing cunning goblins with truth and prophecies. Some goblins who say they 'initiated', they say they understand Goga more deeply, have special knowledge normal Warborn don't have. Goblin witches learn to brew Goga herself."

"Witches?" I asked.

"Not like your witches – or maybe like them, who can say? Orcs like me, we are wizards the day we born in the meat. Other orcs know right away we different, separate from brood. We strange, for we already know her, Wapaka. We understand magic-violence, we learn spells from others like us. But goblin witches don't know right away. One day they initiated, then they know. They drink the goga, and they meet her. Learn her magic ways."

I will stop my account here, though the conversation continued for some time, covering many magical theories. At a certain point, I realised we had been speaking for much of the night. The orc stood up just as suddenly as it had sat. It rummaged under its cloak and pulled out a stone knife, passing it to me handle-first.

"We go now. But you remember: Wapaka, Goga – she brutal. Shows no kindness. But you – you can show kindness if you want." And its eyes passed meaningfully from the knife I held to the sleeping man. "It the best way," it grunted at last, and then it was trudging down the steps.

I listened to the wind in the broken house, and to the departing orcs, amazed at how easily I had survived. And then I looked down at the crude stone knife I was holding, and I gulped.

—*From the One Hundred and One Lessons in Magic, by Cordelia Meigelicht*

## RELIGION AND MAGIC

Thanks to a lack of written texts and the unreliability of goblin sources, understanding Warborn religion, or more correctly, religions, can be quite challenging. The following text, sometimes called the Warsong, is thus particularly insightful. It is my interpretation of a complex artwork from the Maguria Cave in Vol-skaya, likely dating to the Age of War, and connected by some scholars to one of the vast Warborn hordes that proved so destructive at that time.

The repetition of a “chorus” section in the carvings leads me to believe the work was constructed as a functional ritual chant celebrating the gods, probably used during a significant religious festival. Such events are still seen today in Warborn camps, and are thought to provide a way to create unity within a Warborn horde.

Indeed, the Maguria artwork clearly develops around the theme of unity, as represented by common motifs: the Moon, the “Mother Pit”, the divine principle of Violence as the real face of nature and Warborn existence, and finally the duality or contrast between the orc and goblin pantheons, which are at once similar and completely separate.

Today we know the Warborn have many other gods, including gods unique to their own tribe or connected with certain ancestors. Yet the ones depicted in these carvings remain the most enduring and commonly mentioned, if one accepts the consensus of available research.

### The Warsong

Celebrate the Moon!  
Venerate the Violence!  
Worship the Mother Pit!

We're orc, born from the full moon,  
Born from Wapaka, the power of Strife,  
Raid the land and cherish battle!

We're orc, we venerate the gods called Apajik [Victorious Ones]!  
We call the Great Blade Tazrek, King of the Wyverns!  
Lord of the greatest chiefs, King of the Gods!

We're orc, born from the full moon,  
Born from Wapaka, the power of Strife,  
Raid the land and cherish battle!

We're orc, all battlefields are temples,  
We call the Lord of Courage, the Divine Bear Zagjan,  
Lord of Challenges, Master of Hunting!

We're orc, born from the full moon,  
Born from Wapaka, the power of Strife,  
Raid the land and cherish battle!

We're orc, iron in our blood, thunder in our voice!  
We call the Lord of Crafting, the Lord of Ones,  
Skin of Iron, Iron Within: Krajuk, the oldest one!

We're born from the pits, we're born for war,  
We're orc, we're goblin, we cherish the moon of violence  
We worship the Mother Pit!

We're goblin, born from the thin moon,  
Born from Goga, the power of Cunning,  
Confuse the enemy and cheat death!

We're children of the gods called Hamikish [Free Ones]!  
Deception is our word, lies are our truth,  
For Kuruka is one and two, cunning and death!

We're goblin, born from the thin moon,  
Born from Goga, the power of Cunning,  
Confuse the enemy and cheat death!

We come from everywhere and no one sees us,  
Taz'sha guides the ambush, Bwabtuk makes the poisons sing,  
We ride with Jomler, teaching truths to our pets!

We're goblin, born from the thin moon,  
Born from Goga, the power of Cunning,  
Confuse the enemy and cheat death!

Mistress of Spiders, Mikinok, guides our traps, makes us strong  
Our desire is Kishrik, great God of Ambition and Bravery,  
Hiba-Re shall be known by the enemy, Lord of Assassination!

We're goblin, born from the thin moon,  
Born from Goga, the power of Cunning,  
Confuse the enemy and cheat death!

We're born from the pits, we're born for war,  
We're orc, we're goblin, we cherish the moon of violence  
We worship the Mother Pit!

Celebrate the Moon!  
Venerate the Violence!  
Worship the Mother Pit!

—Oswald Deinomous, *Notes on exotic religions, Chapter IV*



3/3

## FAMOUS WARBORN

Old Mr. Smiley has sadly passed away. As you will recall, he was our family's goblin manservant ever since I was a boy. He is greatly mourned, as much for his friendship as for his services, not least of which was the providing of wonderful tales from around the world. He claimed these stories were absolutely true, taken from mysterious informants he simply called his "colleagues".

My favourite stories featured larger-than-life Warborn characters, some of which I do believe have a basis in reality. Since I know you love such tales as much as I, I have compiled a short list of those individuals I find most intriguing.

### "The Splendid Leader"

South of Khasibbia lies the realm of Ibridig, where rules the Goblin King – or so he is known in Vetia. But goblins, of course, are democrats and refuse kings; to his subjects he is known instead as the Splendid Leader, and his title is Darrmu.

The ultimate goal of all goblins is to cheat death, and their leaders are venerated for their powers of survival. The Splendid Leader's great legend – which has allowed him to build a confederation of Garden cities unlike any other in the world – derives from his uncanny ability to "return to life" after the most extraordinary feats of daring, as well as seemingly successful assassination attempts. He has been squashed, immolated, decapitated and poisoned in a thousand different ways.

Mr Smiley claimed to have a source who had proved the Leader's secret: he is not one goblin but many, born as a rare "identical brood", each able to impersonate the others. Whenever one Leader dies, another steps in, pretending to be the same person! Splendid indeed!

### "The Immortal Child"

Mr Smiley said that the goblins of Silexia speak of a great leader of orcs who has amassed one of the most ferocious and destructive Warborn hordes of recent years. And yet not one of these savage warriors is fully grown – all of them are immature, or "feral", as the naturalists sometimes call them.

The leader himself refuses to grow up, claiming the title Immortal Child, despite his great strength and intelligence. Calling the world and its bounty *Krugtuk*, meaning "Alwaysland of the free boys", he preaches a philosophy that adulthood is unnecessary and undesirable – orcs should enjoy their youth forever, doing whatever they want. This makes his tribe both brutal and unpredictable.

Since maturity among orcs is learned only by imitation of older broods, by refusing to allow adult orcs into his horde, the Child can make good on his promise to never age – at least not mentally.

### "The Kumaj"

The secrets of goblin sects allow many initiates to become skilled in the arts of murder – none more so than the semi-mythical assassins of the Kumaj sect near the Blasted Plain. Their agents are renowned for unbelievable feats of infiltration.

In one memorable episode, a human warlord disdainfully agreed to a parlay before his attack against a nearby Garden. When the goblin envoys asked to speak to the prince without his hobgoblin bodyguards, he refused, saying he had known them since they were grotlings and trusted them absolutely. The envoy nodded, and gestured to the bodyguards. At once they put their swords to the human's throat, proving they were true goblins and had never really served him.

### **“Clever Mwayta”**

Anyone who’s fought them will tell you that orcs are not as stupid as you think – often they are thoughtful strategists, especially the adults. One powerful chieftain in Taphria, known as Mwayta, is particularly acclaimed for her canny planning of future battles.

In one of Mr Smiley’s notorious tales, which I later saw confirmed in the chronicles of Hudhaifa Uddin, Mwayta was able to direct the broods under her command to breed at very specific times and places, causing hundreds of new feral orcs to emerge all at once. While the local humans were dealing with this major outbreak, her main forces attacked on a new front where the enemy defenses were now much weaker, overwhelming them in a mighty battle and sacking a great metropolis.

### **“I-Kuruka”**

Mr Smiley claimed that in Virentia they venerate a *gogtuk* initiate called I-Kuruka, which means she who walks the path of Kuruka, the prime god of cunning and death. I-Kuruka is acclaimed for having survived endless drug-induced insanities, especially for firing herself from all kinds of ballistic devices. Before she could be made *darrmu*, she built an especially clever set of mechanical wings, believing she had “not flown close enough to the sun”, and one day she was launched into the clouds and never came down. The goblins of the great jungle Garden of the Green Heart believe she will fall to earth again in their hour of need.

### **“Heavy Gwuja”**

This is the moniker of a famous iron orc said to be operating in Arcalea. The oldest orcs often become talented blacksmiths, but Heavy Gwuja has taken his skills to a new level, building bizarre yet ingenious (and invariably bloodthirsty) inventions. Maces with hidden iron fists that fly out on a spring, axe heads that rotate like scythes when you turn a peddle, armour that can be extended with cunning switches to reveal sharp and spikey new sections – many unfortunate souls have met the business end of a Heavy Gwuja device on the battlefield.

—From the correspondence of Senator Vesari Milotta.

## PETS

This season I have been particularly struck by the tribe's coexistence with various forms of local fauna. This matches the findings of my colleague Prof Lorens, and his observations of goblin Gardens, as well as many descriptions of Warborn battle mounts.

It seems that both orcs and goblins have a natural affinity with the majority of wild beasts of every environment, seeming to bond with them swiftly and effortlessly in many cases. The Warborn put such creatures to many kinds of uses, from military action to transport, entertainment, socialisation and, when desperate, consumption – but they are considered pets rather than merely domesticated.

The following excerpts from my recent field notes illustrate these findings, as I continue to observe the development of certain individuals within the tribe. The monikers are the same as those I used previously:

**Gustav** – *Has become calmer since adopting the boarlet. A number of the young orcs found the babies amusing to play with when they were discovered frolicking in the mud-pools. The ease of bonding between these two species is astonishing. Though it didn't stop them eating the small boars' mother.*

**Heidi** – *Jealous of Gertrude's boarlet, I suspect, she spent several days with a colony of giant crabs as soon as the tribe reached the coastal flats. The broad-shelled animals were initially timid but after patient coaxing with offerings of fish, she has succeeded in convincing the creatures to play with her and carry her about. Her problem now lies in isolating a single friend, for the crabs' natural inclination is to swarm, and they all seem to like Heidi equally. There is some tension within the brood, for Marcus and Ingrid are more inclined to befriend the large, flightless waterfowl feeding in the estuary, eschewing Heidi's crustaceans. Since the brood is never divided for long, I believe they will settle for one choice or the other soon, possibly when the alpha makes his decision, but more likely following a long brawl.*

**Henning** – *Worked for several weeks on armour specifically fitted to Percy, Gustav's boar, who is now old enough to ride. Gustav spends days at a time atop his back, sharing food and bedding. The rest of his brood has copied his technique – this is clearly a breakthrough for the youngsters.*

In the summer, the tribe must have passed near a Garden, and a large number of goblins joined the throng as it moved towards the mountains. More than half of the new arrivals ride their own mounts – so far I've seen large wolves, howler monkeys, and a strange form of giant weasel, none of which were mentioned by Lorens, whose subjects used mainly feline mounts as well as deer and rodents. I have also seen the legendary gnasher, a subterranean creature with a squat armless body and an enormous mouth with large teeth. According to Forini's research, they are fed the same pharmacological brews as goblin initiates, which only enhances their unpredictable behaviour and ferocity. He also claimed that they can sometimes grow to titanic size, like many creatures of the Deeps. The specimens I observed were not too large but did show a significant variety of forms – some with more legs, some with huge ears or other adaptations.

To my amazement, the goblins' menagerie interacted mostly peacefully, not just with each other, but also with the animals befriended by the orcs. Perhaps strangest of all is the Warborn cultivation of insects – they seem to possess a knowledge of how to stir up nests of ants, termites and even bees to direct them (usually) in a manner that suits their purposes, persuading them to carry or build useful items or even attack prey. On the other hand, I did also see Ingrid swell up with bee stings after one such attempt apparently backfired.

—Field notes of researcher Johan Möhring

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# TROLLS

There once was a family of trolls who were very hungry. They knew there had been a big battle on the other side of the river, and they wanted to eat the carcasses left on the battlefield. The only way across was a wooden bridge guarded by a huge, bloodthirsty goat-man with long horns.

The youngest troll went plodding up onto the bridge, but before he was even halfway across, up jumped the horrible goat-man, brandishing a mighty cleaver.

“Who’s that plodding over my bridge?” roared the goat. “I’m going to gobble you up!”

“Please, don’t eat me,” said the youngest troll. “I’m just a small troll and my skin is quite poisonous! But if you wait for my parents, they will make a much finer meal.”

The goat-man allowed the youngest troll to pass, and it went galumphing into the battlefield to feast on carrion.

Next, the mama troll came plodding over the bridge.

“Who’s that plodding over my bridge?” roared the goat. “I’m going to gobble you up!”

“Don’t eat me,” said the mama troll. “I’m just a medium-sized troll and my skin is covered in razor-sharp barbs. But if you wait for my husband, he will make a much finer meal.”

And the mama troll went galumphing into the battlefield to feast.

Finally, across came the papa troll, biggest of the three.

“Who’s that plodding over my bridge?” roared the goat. “I’m going to gobble you up!”

“You can try,” said the papa troll, “but I will not be so easily eaten!”

The man-goat struck him with his cleaver, but the wound simply healed itself, for the papa troll could regenerate his own flesh. The big troll pushed the goat off the bridge, and went galumphing into the battlefield to join his family.

—*Anonymous*

“Stupid” is not quite accurate. Most trolls can show cunning and are able to learn the languages of other peoples. A better word would be “slow” – both to think and act. Complex social interaction is beyond them, so they live in small families and are typically gentle creatures, fearful of other species who they know to think them ugly. Indeed, their appearance and the fury they display when attacked has combined to give trolls an undeserved reputation for malevolence among many cultures.

There is a great variety of subspecies, as they tend to be quite territorial, adapting to local conditions sometimes quite dramatically. Different specimens have demonstrated a range of defensive attributes – most extraordinary of which is the regenerative capability found in certain wetlands families.

Trolls are scavengers and omnivores, and will not hunt living beings for food. Some scholars have claimed that their affinity for the Warborn results from the latter’s unexplained tendency to leave piles of corpses wherever they go. Whatever these stores of meat are for, it seems that the trolls have learned to defend them from other predators, which largely explains why naturalists have found the meat deposits so difficult to get close to. At a certain point, when the pit of carrion has served its purpose, the trolls permit themselves to consume whatever is left over, making their relationship with the Warborn one of symbiotic mutual assistance.

—*From the correspondence of Sir Edmur de Corvigny.*

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## GOGYAGS

I had never seen such darkness. The Citadels are aglow with forge fire and lamps day and night. Even in my bedchamber, the flames outside had always illuminated the murk. But the hole before us yawned away into eternity, the world seemingly ending a dozen furlongs away from my burning brand. Every sound was eaten by the Deeps, making my words whisper fearfully.

Suddenly, I felt a need to be sure of our plan, a need A'ta anticipated.

"Amarad, do not worry. This is the will of the Hamikish," soothed my goblin companion, referring to her pantheon of gods. "My sisters were sure a big beastie would come this way. When we make friends with it and it becomes a new gogyag, it will make the best introduction we could hope for. Even one of your kind would be allowed to stay nearby with such a clear display of divine favour.

"Now, I know we don't know what kind of gogyag is coming. It could be a Fat Gnasher, perhaps, or a Gnorpion, a Gargantula, or something never seen before. Point is, prepare for anything, but don't fret."

At that moment we both fell on our backs, as the side of the large cave exploded and debris rained around us. An enormous mouth had smashed through the stony walls of the cavern. A vast round maw, ringed with circle after circle of jagged teeth, it turned towards A'ta and me. I could see death in that horrific maw.

Then Big Rock jumped on it, and the maw closed.

I breathed a thankful sigh that I had brought the biggest citizen of the Citadel with me when I fled. I barely come up to that brave young Giant's knee, and he needed every cubit of height he could muster in this struggle.

"Protect!" he bellowed as he wrestled the fleshy behemoth that had burst into the cave. The creature easily outmassed even Big Rock, and it thrashed as he gripped its neck in a full-body clench. He slowed it, but he could not stop it. It was coming for us.

Barely able to move, A'ta and I desperately rolled into the darkness.

We fell. We landed heavily. Lighting a brand, I shuddered to discover that various goblin corpses had broken our fall, freshly crushed by the heedless passage of this underground leviathan. A'ta was there too, curled up and broken-looking. I pulled myself to my feet. We were on the lip of a ledge, about eight cubits from the top. Finally I could clearly see the entirety of our new toothy foe: huge pallid coils of flesh. It was a death worm, a creature of fell legend, said to be able to move through rock like a fish through water.

The two titans crashed down into the endless pit below us, still struggling against each other.

"Bad worm!" Big Rock yelled. "Stop hurting!"

I looked around. There had to be something that could save us down here. Peering into a nearby cavern, I received a terrific fright as I gazed into two vast, multifaceted eyes. A third titan was here – an enormous insect, almost as big as the worm. Its long thin body rose up on tall legs, brandishing particularly large and serrated forearms. Our troubles had doubled, not abated.

I dashed back to A'ta's body. If I was going to die, I wasn't going to die alone. The giant insect followed on my heels, smashing huge chunks of rock from the cave as it struck at me. I barely made it to the pile of corpses for one last stand against death.

Just then, A'ta flashed past me, not broken at all, but brandishing a stoppered jug of some foul substance. She unplugged it, and sloshed it into the mouth of the oncoming mantis as it leaned down to chomp at us. It slowed, stopped and halted. It put an antennae to the goblin's mouth, and she whispered to it. I don't know what she said, but the mantis turned on a grain and bounded into the deeps.

By this time, the worm had pinned Big Rock and was chewing on his shoulder while he screamed loud enough to shake loose various stalactites. But then the mantis entered the fray. With a strike like a rocket missile from its spring-like arm, so fast I could barely see it, the massive insect carved a deep gash in the death worm's roiling body.

"He's teaching Big Toothy a lesson", cried A'ta, elated. "He's loyal! This is how gogyags should be! How they are, normally. Defending goblins, making us strong!"

The worm lurched up in pain, flinging itself at its new attacker. The two monsters grappled, but the worm was heavier, and despite its gaping wound, still full of energy. Just as it seemed poised to crush the mantis, it suddenly found itself hauled clean off the rocks. There stood Big Rock, huge as he'd ever been, gripping the creature in a tight embrace despite his shredded shoulder. The mantis seized the moment, rearing up and delivering a titanic punch to the worm's head. The *gogyag* gave a final thrash, and went still.

I turned to A'ta, astonished.

"What was in that jug you found?" I asked.

"Lovely goga," she said. "Good for all that ails you. Even wurms."

—*Diary of an Infernal Dwarf exile*

## IDOLS

...It had always scared me, ever since Grandfather brought it back from his mysterious adventures. He was an incurable explorer, as I've told you before, and at times it felt like half the items in the museum had been personally found by him in some unlikely corner of distant Augea or darkest Virentia.

Of all his findings, it was the idol that I found the most memorable. It took the form of a wide pillar of stone, at least nine feet tall, taking twenty men to maneuver it onto its display. It was carved in the form of a stylised man or god with huge arms down the side of the pillar, and a long, disturbing face at the top with the bearing of great strength and wisdom. Under the chin shone a vivid green gemstone, its only adornment.

I was seven years old when Grandfather brought it to the museum, and from the start it left me feeling both fascinated and terrified. Somehow its still and unearthly countenance made me think of drums: I could hear the primal beating in my bones, if not my ears, and I had the strangest impression of violent movement or dance, despite the stillness.

Years passed, and eventually I took over as the museum's curator. Our exhibits changed with the seasons, but I could never bring myself to move the idol from its perch in the centre of the western gallery. While he lived, Grandfather would never talk of it except to say it was a totem of the Warborn – I could see that something of the same sinister sense I felt affected him also, and it confirmed my feeling that the idol was in some manner cursed. Yet it was a major attraction, and could not be removed from the museum.

Three days ago, I was passing through the western gallery after hours when I had the fright of my life. The idol had vanished, after forty years on the same spot. A search was made, and it was found again two hours later in the corner of the walled garden behind the west wing, facing the wall. Instead of returning it to its display, I ordered it taken to my office for examination. It seemed the same as ever on the surface, but the uncanny sense of an unheard drumbeat was stronger than before, and I thought its gem glowed with extra malevolence.

I had all of Grandfather's records brought out from storage, and I searched them until I found a set of notebooks I had never found before. After hours of reading, I came across a passage that confirmed my worst fears:

*The stone is carved as a symbol of tribal unity and greatness: goblins direct the shape and design, while orcs complete the heavy labour. Too heavy to carry, the idol is left where it is when the tribe moves on, explaining the various idols found in otherwise unremarkable areas of open country, all around the world. They appear nothing but stone statues, despite my guide's insistence they are dangerous and should be avoided.*

*Determined to follow the tribe to see if they made anything else of value, I was almost killed by the sudden onset of a sylvan warparty. I just managed to hide before they set upon the Warborn in a ferocious battle. When silence finally fell, the forests were littered with the bodies of the slain. I surmised that the Warborn had prevailed, for their survivors were looting the battlefield even as I watched. All at once there was a great commotion as one of them found something: a large emerald gemstone. The celebration of this treasure lasted for several days, though its import became clear on that first night, when a great ritual was held by moonlight. The entire horde gathered, chanting and dancing in concentric circles, bedecked in paint, feathers and other such finery. At the center of the ritual, goblin and orc mages stood together with the gem. According to my guide, they were using the very essence of the united horde to usher the souls of the Warborn who had died in the battle into the gemstone, where they would be stored.*

*I could not understand the purpose of such soul-binding, but I stayed near the tribe, and a week later it was made clear. This time the tribe entered the forest, clearly seeking a second battle with the sylvans. The night before the battle, they worked industriously to construct a new idol. The sylvans were waiting for them in the trees, and everything grew very quiet.*

*Then, as a full moon rose over the horizon, I heard drums begin to beat. Slowly, ominously at first, but growing in tempo and enthusiasm. The Warborn became increasingly restless, finally letting loose with a cacophony of howling and hollering, a frenzy of anticipation, goblins cartwheeling all over in manic delirium, orcs pounding the earth with hands and feet. As the warchant reached its zenith, the mages came forwards and placed the gem into a slot carved for it within the idol.*

*All at once, the statue came to life, animated by the souls within the gem. A “keystone”, as the guide called it, designed for this very purpose. The drums redoubled as the stone being awoken and walked forwards, the very spirit of its tribe, unstoppable and driven only by the urge to fight alongside Warborn against their enemies.*

*Despite their losses from the previous battle, the Warborn again emerged victorious that night, thanks to the power of the idol, which no elf arrow or blade could damage. After the battle, with nothing left to fight, the idol reverted to unmoving stone, the gem was removed, and the tribe moved on without it.*

*I returned with my guide and informed the natives of everything we had witnessed. They sent out forces to ambush and destroy the Warborn threat, and in gratitude, they allowed me to transport both idol and keystone back to the museum. I am confident that it poses no threat as long as a Warborn battle does not occur in its vicinity. Do not let it hear the drums!*

I almost jumped out of my armchair upon reading this last line, for at that very moment I distinctly heard the sound of deep drumbeats, far away. It was night in the museum, and I was all alone with the idol. I stared up at its barbaric countenance in the flickering candlelight, primal and full of power. I jumped again at a knocking from the front door. Running to open it, I found a messenger boy.

“Orcs! At the gates! The city is attacked!”

I stared, horrified. The drumming was already distinctly louder. All at once there was a great crash from my office. I shrieked as I turned to see the door ripped off its hinges. The mighty statue rumbled into the corridor, veering drunkenly into one of the walls and obliterating several display cabinets. Green light beaming from its keystone, it began to lope towards me, gaining momentum. Transfixed, I was only saved by the boy, who gallantly tackled me about the waist just as the idol cantered straight past me, smashing the ancient front doors of the museum into matchwood. I looked up from the floor to see it rampaging away into the streets, directly towards the sound of the drums.

I’m afraid to say that much of what befell the city that day might have been avoided were it not for Grandfather’s idol. I was told that, surprising the guards defending the gates, it likely swung the balance of power in the Warborn’s favour. The museum is largely still intact, thank the gods, but much of the city has been burned, and all our grain and livestock was despoiled.

So you will understand why I ask for your generosity at this time, if you could see your way to providing just...

—Excerpt from a letter to Countess Walpurga of Mavaria.

# THE IX AGE FANTASY BATTLES

Gather close, ye who would learn of the strange peoples and wondrous places of the Ninth Age. None of us can know the secrets of the entire world, but if you seek a little wisdom on a particular culture or nation, open up this tome and discover what there is to tell.

Many seek riches or glory in war, but there are few who embrace conflict for its own sake quite like the Warborn. Both orcs and goblins are dangerous expressions of nature's ruthless violence, but together... Who can hope to stand against them?



The 9<sup>th</sup> Age: Fantasy Battles is a community made miniatures wargame.  
All rules and feedback can be found/given at <http://www.the-ninth-age.com/>  
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