

A CALL TO ARMS

introduction

The citizens of Phent, which is a large town in Thesk, are a proud, yet warm and accepting folk. For the past nine years, they have been host to over six hundred orcs, which is certainly an anomaly in the average Faerûnian community. In 1360 DR, Zhentil Keep sent one thousand orcs to aid in the fight against the westward-sweeping Tuigan hordes.

The orcs fought well—well enough that the citizens of Thesk welcomed them as citizens when Zhentil Keep abandoned them in this land in 1363 DR. Still, a current of unsettling concern lingers. Some believe that the orcs are still part of Zhentil Keep's strike force, but that they went on standby to wait for the moment when their masters give the signal. Once allowed, these orcs may launch a crippling attack from within.

However, in nine years, no signal has been given—at least none that any of the paranoid folk have noticed. The orcs are enthusiastic citizens and, apart from some rowdiness during breaks from the mines or fields, they have hurt no one.

And then, a prophet comes, with a message of war . . .

In *A Call to Arms*, the player characters (PCs) have a chance to

prevent orcs from rising up against some humans. This adventure is designed for four 9th-level D&D® characters. The encounters can be adjusted up or down to suit your group's needs, however.

preparation

You, the Dungeon Master (DM), need a copy of the *Player's Handbook*, the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual* to use this material. You may also want to have a copy of *Unapproachable East* and *Magic of Faerûn* handy. Boxed text that appears throughout this adventure is player information, which you can read aloud or paraphrase when appropriate. Monster and NPC statistics are provided with each encounter in abbreviated form or, where appropriate, the *Monster Manual* is referenced.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

If you need to scale the adventure up or down for your PCs, you may find these guidelines helpful.

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5–7th-Level PCs: Cut the giants and ettins by a fourth, rounding down. Drop the Zhent fighters to 6th level, and make Thule less willing to engage in combat—he can be more of a “till we meet again” sort.

11–14th-Level PCs: Increase the number of giants, ettins, and undead by a fourth, rounding up. Add two more Zhent fighters.

15th-Level +: Double the numbers of all monsters that don’t have class levels, and add 2 levels to all NPCs that have character classes.

Adventure Background

Despite what some may think, those in Zhentil Keep haven’t forgotten about their orc troops in Phent. In public discussion in Zhentil Keep, the leaders of the Zhentilar, the military branch of Zhentil Keep, have confidently asserted that the orcs in Thesk are completely loyal to Zhentil Keep. They maintain that the orcs are just biding their time and building up trust among the citizens, until the appointed time when the word is given.

In private, these same leaders are gravely concerned. The leaders didn’t get to positions of command by being idiots, and they know that the orcs are treated well and accepted in Thesk, which is a rarity for them with the humans and humanoids of Faerûn in general. The leaders know that many of the orcs would be reluctant to destroy the source of this acceptance.

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But what if the orcs’ chief god, Gruumsh, told them to? The Zhentilar turned to the Black Network and presented the problem. The Zhents knew what to do. The Zhents have dispatched a powerful cleric, a master of persuasion and deception, to pose as an orc prophet of Gruumsh and whip the orcs into a destructive frenzy. In addition, the Zhentilar have staged raids against human caravans by what look like orc warriors so that they can start anti-orc sentiment among the population of Thesk.

Adventure Summary

The main portion of this adventure is the investigation of the mysterious orc prophet, who is located in the eastern foothills of the Thesk Mountains about 20 miles due east of Phent. The party needs to do some snooping around Phent to collect some information, and they must help prevent a bit of misplaced mob justice by stopping the self-styled prophet of Gruumsh before the less acclimated orcs decide to follow his words.

Character Hooks

While the heroes can get involved in this adventure in several ways, the best way includes an encounter that occurs about ten miles northeast of Phent, along the Golden Way. Here are some hooks to get the adventurers into this region:

- A new Thayan enclave could possibly open up in Phent. Not only do certain individuals want it checked out to make sure that everything’s aboveboard, some say that the proprietor plans to have an “opening-day sale” with some fantastic bargains.
- Reports of increased bandit raids on the Golden Way between Phent and Pshant have prompted various councils to send adventurers out along that route to investigate. Ideally, these groups

will find traces of the bandits, track them back to their lair, and eliminate the problem.

- A merchant and his son hire the group to escort the pair from Telflamm to Tammar. If this hook is used, bear in mind that the group needs to come up with some way to be released from their obligation so that they can address the serious matter at hand.

Encounters

The following encounters begin in a somewhat linear progression, but once the heroes become engaged in the adventure, they should have some options about which course to follow. In the end, they should discover the prophet, but if they don’t, some consequences follow that DMs may want to use in their campaigns.

The Raid (EL 10)

The heroes encounter a brutal attack on a caravan about ten miles northeast of Phent. While the attack looks as if it is conducted by the local orc population, the perpetrators are in fact a squad of elite Zhent half-orc warriors who have been subtly “touched up” to resemble full-blooded orcs.

The Golden Way, famed trade route, is a well-maintained road that is usually a pleasure to travel upon. As you move along, though, you see the beginnings of a plume of smoke rising at a point around a small bend in the Way. The plume drifts up to the heavily overcast sky. The scent of burning wood and grass reaches you, as well.

You can also hear faint sounds of the clashing of steel, the frightened whinnies of horses, the mingled din of guttural war cries, and the shouts and screams of panicked victims coming from that general direction.

Once the PCs get within 700 feet of the plume, they can make Spot checks (DC 13) to see the attacking Zhents and their foes. The Zhents and their foes Spot the approaching PCs at the same distance if they make Spot checks of their own (DC 20). If the PCs try to approach with stealth, the Spot DC to see them coming is 25 + the worst Hide skill modifier in the group; however, the PCs also receives a –2 penalty to their own Spot checks. Any group that fails the Spot check automatically sees their foes when they get within 350 feet.

Since the “orcs” and their victims are rather busy with the work at hand, both of these groups receive a –5 penalty on any Listen checks they might make to notice the PCs. Read the following aloud, adjusting as necessary, when the PCs successfully see the combat ahead:

A caravan of four wagons is halted on the road, and one of them is in flames. The drivers and the well-dressed merchants have run from the wagons, desperately trying to get out of harm’s way. A group of six warriors, possibly hired guards, are busily engaging a force of ten orcs mounted on horseback. The orcs move and fight with the practiced air of experienced warriors.

Anyone who can understand Orc, will make out the phrases “No more peace!” and “All humans must die!”

The “orcs” are disguised half-orcs. If the PCs get a good look at them (as they might if they attack them or try to parley with them), they can make Spot checks (DC 25) to note the disguise.

Creatures: The “orc” fighters are mounted on horses, and they use the horses to their advantage in combat.

➤ **“Orcs” (8):** Male and female Half-Orc Fighter 4; CR 4; Medium-size humanoid (half-orc); HD 4d10+12; hp 34; Init +2; Spd

20 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Atk +9 melee (1d6+7/18–20, +1 scimitar); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4, Intimidate +1, Ride (horse) +7, Spot +2; Cleave, Dodge, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack.

Possessions: Masterwork scale mail, +1 scimitar, 6 javelins, potion of cure light wounds (3), potion of cure moderate wounds, 50 gp in pouch, light warhorse.

➤ **Light Warhorse:** CR 1; Large animal; HD 3d8+9; hp 22; Init +1; Spd 60 ft.; AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 13; Atk +4 melee (1d4+3, 2 hooves) and –1 melee (1d3+1, bite); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.; SQ low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide –3, Listen +7, Spot +7.

Scent (Ex): A light warhorse can detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell.

➤ **Caravan Guards (6):** War 3; hp 18; see *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*.

Tactics: The orcs focus on eliminating the caravan guards first, unless they see evidence that the party is quite proficient; spell-throwing characters are noticed particularly. If the orc group loses half its number, the remaining members make a retreat into the hills, but they do *not* go back to the prophet. Rather, they attempt to go deeper into the mountains in hopes of shaking off pursuit.

Development: The merchant is named Boren (NG male human Exp5), and his son is Baderan (NG male human Exp2), and they had set out from Phent with intentions to reach Tammar. Should the party rescue them, they are most effusive in their gratitude and promise the group some excellent bargains the next time they are in Phent.

If all the caravan guards are dead, Boren asks the heroes to escort him and his son to Tammar, and he offers 3 gp per day of travel (plus food and drink) to each adventurer in exchange for guardian services rendered. Should the group do this, roll normal chances of encounters during the trip.

In any event, Boren gives the party one very crucial piece of information: Rumors abound of the orc population in Phent getting restless, and some orcs are always at the Resthaven Inn, in Phent, arguing orc politics and such. Boren believes that the restlessness is causing the orcs in Phent to resort to banditry such as they have seen, though if confronted by the fact that the orcs are actually half-orcs, he gets puzzled and wonders aloud if a plot is afoot to rile up the folk in Phent so that they get angry at the orcs there.

If the PCs decide to head for Phent to discover more about these rumors, they have to cover ten miles of the Golden Way to hit the Resthaven Inn, which is one of the larger inns right off the Golden Way in Phent. DMs can roll for random encounters as the PCs cover the terrain to Phent.

At the Resthaven inn

The Resthaven Inn is one of the larger inns that the PCs see when coming into town via the Golden Way. The group can get some idea about what's going on in Phent. This is an excellent place to pick up rumors.

The inn is a two-story stone building with a stable out back, an interior common room with a bar, and stairs leading up to rooms. The innkeeper and his staff bustle about serving patrons. The place is full of people, and most give you only a passing glance.

At one table, a particularly tough orc watches you with an appraising eye.

The Resthaven has nice rooms for 2 gp per night, though some lesser facilities are available for 5 sp per evening. The place is run by Golvas Winterhaven (NG male human War5/Exp2), a huge man with a laughing manner about him.

A few hours of drinks and chatting with the locals earns each PC doing so a chance to make a Gather Information check. The following table presents some information and the DCs for the Gather Information check to discover that information. In each case, success at beating a DC usually grants that DC's information and all the information provided by succeeding at any lower DC. DMs might award slightly more information than what is provided depending on how much a player's roll exceeds a given DC. If a bard is in the group and performing for the patrons successfully (as in having an "enjoyable" or better performance as listed under the Perform skill in the *Player's Handbook*), decrease the DC listed below by –5. Additionally, each bit of information notes whether it is true or not beside it.

GATHER INFORMATION

| DC | Information |
|----|---|
| 5 | Bandit raids on the road have been on the rise (true). |
| 10 | A new Thayan enclave may be opening in town soon (true). Agents of Cyric have been spotted lurking about town (false). The bandit raids consist primarily of orcs these days, it seems (true). |
| 15 | Recently, orcs have been heading off to the nearby hills for some odd nightly meetings (true). The more established bandit gangs are getting upset over the fact that orcs are taking their plunder (true). |
| 20 | An actual temple of Mask is due to be constructed here soon, so strong is the power of the Shadowmasters that it now can be done out in the open (false). One bandit gang in particular, the Tarnished Blades, is watching the town closely and trying to use the information they gain by doing so to get a jump on caravans before the orc bandits do (true). Some say that the bandit orcs aren't local orcs (true). |
| 25 | Some believe that the Tarnished Blades are one step away from seeking out and confronting the orc bandit leader (true). |

The orc looking at the party is Sergeant Kraansh, leader of the town watch. If the PCs show a strong interest in getting to the bottom of the bandit raids, he eventually approaches the PCs and asks their business—all politely done, of course. If asked about orc raids, he frowns and appears concerned. The sergeant does his best to keep the orcs from getting too rowdy, and, in fact, he has a dilemma.

According to the good sergeant, meetings take place almost nightly in the hills just outside of town. Local orcs attend these meetings, and some say that a prophet has come from the wilds—a prophet of Gruumsh, talking "crazy talk." Kraansh himself refuses to go. But if the party is interested in what's going on up there, and if it has some bearing on the raids, then Kraansh can tell the group where the meetings are. He does advise, though, that the party be somehow disguised or invisible. (If the party has no way to remain hidden or invisible, he can make some potions available, but they'll need to be used wisely, and he'll barter for them—they certainly aren't free, but possibly discounted if used for the meeting.)

Kraansh tells the interested heroes that the meetings are usually held an hour after midnight in a small ravine in the foothills to the southeast, which is about an hour's walk or half-hour's ride. He advises them to be careful and not to repeat any of it to anyone. If the PCs decide to head out to see this meeting, the encounter called A Nightly Meeting covers the events of this meeting.

➤ **Sergeant Kraansh:** Male orc Fighter 9; CR 9; Medium-size humanoid; HD 9d10+45; hp 94; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16; Atk +16/+11 melee (1d8+9, +2 *morningstar*); SQ darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity; AL N; SV Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 20, Dex 14, Con 20, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 17. Height 5 ft. 10 in.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Handle Animal +13, Jump +10, Ride (horse) +14, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5, Swim +7, Wilderness Lore +5; Cleave, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Leadership, Power Attack, Track.

Possessions: +2 chain shirt, +2 morningstar, purse with 5 pp, 20 gp, 33 sp.

Kraansh is a grizzled, scarred old veteran who fought the Tuigan hordes as part of the contingent sent by Zhentil Keep. He is a gruff, no-nonsense sort who has a fondness for a "favorite seat" at the Resthaven. Kraansh is 50 years old, with salt and pepper hair trimmed extremely close to his head.

A SPY AMONG US

The Zhentarim have an agent in Thesk: a young man who looks wholesome and behaves decently—a hardworking sort. Boridin, the agent, keeps in close contact with Zhentil Keep and gives them tenday reports.

Boridin does odd jobs all over Thesk, but he spends a lot of time at Resthaven Inn. He keeps an eye on the good sergeant, since he is wary of the old veteran's stabilizing influence on the orcs. If at all possible, he ingratiates himself with the PCs, though he is extremely careful not to overplay his hand.

Boridin, Zhentish Agent: Male human Cleric 5 of Bane/Rogue 8; CR 13; Medium-size humanoid; HD 5d8+20 plus 8d6+32; hp 102; Init +10; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 15, flat-footed 17; Atk +16/+11 melee (1d8+9, +3 morningstar), or +12/+7 melee (1d4+5/19-20, +1 dagger) and +12 melee (1d4+/19-20, +1 dagger); SA rebuke undead 4/day, sneak attack +4d6; SQ evasion, traps, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +11, Will +9; Str 19, Dex 19, Con 19, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Balance +6, Bluff +14, Concentration +7, Diplomacy +9, Disguise +5, Gather Information +14, Heal +6, Hide +10, Intimidate +5, Jump +6, Listen +12, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +10, Pick Pocket +10, Read Lips +5, Search +5, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +5, Spot +12, Tumble +14; Ambidexterity, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Street Smart, Thug, Two-Weapon Fighting.

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, Borodin takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

Cleric Spells Prepared (5/5/4/3; save DC 13 + spell level): 0—*detect magic, detect poison, light, read magic, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear, command*, cure light wounds, divine favor, sanctuary*; 2nd—*aura against flame**, curse of ill fortune**, enthrall*, spell shield***; 3rd—*bestow curse*, dispel magic, mystic lash***.

* Domain spell. Domains: Hatred (+2 profane bonus on attack rolls, saves, and AC for 1 minute against selected opponent, 1/day), Tyranny (+2 to save DC of compulsion spells).

Possessions: +3 morningstar, a pair of matched +1 daggers, bracers of armor +2, ring of protection +1, Heward's handy haversack, masterwork thieves tools, potions of cure moderate wounds (2), purse with 100 gp, 100 sp, and six small topazes worth 50 gp each, holy symbol of Bane, 4 vials of unholy water, light warhorse.

** Spell found in *Magic of Faerûn*.

Boridin is in his early twenties, and he has a very open, guileless face. He has tousled brown hair, freckles, and bright blue eyes. Boridin acts like a wholesome, hard-working lad. Secretly, he's a spiteful, hateful, devout servant of Bane and the Zhentarim. He often works for Resthaven Inn, where he keeps tabs on adventurers and reports them and their activities to the Black Network.

Loose ends

Some of the rumors presented in the inn may cause the PCs to find some fun that isn't quite related to the adventure at hand. Here are

some short encounters that cover the false rumors, as well as those rumors that aren't entirely relevant. (This can also be used as part of a larger Phent Random Encounter chart. In this format, assign each mini-encounter a 20% chance of happening.)

The Tarnished Blades (EL 9): The bandits have a pair of representatives anxious to find information about caravans leaving town (so that they can jump on the caravan before the orc bands do) and extremely interested to discover where the orc bandits are hiding out (so that they can "deal" with the orcs in some manner of their own choosing). The one who usually works around the inn arranges for a few of her friends to meet up with the PCs at some appropriate time and location. (If the PCs go about town looking for information about bandits, they invariably draw the attention of the second bandit, as well, with the same result.) The two prefer dark alleys or wilderness settings, but they aren't averse to getting the PCs to a remote location via subterfuge. For instance, Stace (the female of the pair assigned to gathering information) often uses the ploy of saying that her sister was badly mauled by a brute of an orc (or other creature) outside of town, and she can't possibly move her given her current wounds unless she has help or until her sister has been healed a bit first. If the PCs fall for this bluff, they meet up with a band of eight bandits from the Tarnished Blades. DMs should note that the PCs may in fact find themselves forging a temporary alliance with the bandits in return for information about the current orc problems. Be sure to allow any interactions that the PCs wish; the leader of the Tarnished Blades is quite willing to make a deal as long as it benefits her group in some way. This aspect of the adventure is left to DMs to flesh out, however, but it can help get the PCs on track if they overlook the orc meetings.

Bandits (8): Male and female humans Rogue 1/Fighter 2; CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 1d6+1 plus 2d10+2; hp 17; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2/18-20, masterwork scimitar) and +3 melee (1d6/19-20, masterwork short sword), or +4 ranged (1d2/0, whip); SA sneak attack +1d6; SQ traps; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will -1; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Balance +5, Bluff +5, Climb +5, Diplomacy +3, Jump +5, Move Silently +5, Read Lips +2, Ride (horse) +3, Search +2, Spot +1, Swim +7, Tumble +5, Use Rope +6, Ambidexterity, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (whip), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar).

Possessions: Masterwork chain shirt, masterwork scimitar, masterwork short sword, whip, potion of cure light wounds (4).

The Thayian Enclave: If the PCs decide that they need to check into this rumored new enclave, they find that this rumor is true. Tracking down some visiting representatives of Thay is easier than the PCs might expect, but that's due to the fact that things are not yet finalized, and these representatives are still looking into various matters (and not all of the representatives are here in Phent right now due to various negotiations going on). If the PCs seek an audience with the Thayians, they find out only that the enclave will come about after various matters have been reconciled (and nobody wishes to speak about these matters). However, the PCs also can walk away with a task from the Thayians if they wish. The task is up to the DM, but it can include delivering a message to another existing enclave, ensuring that the spot chosen for the enclave is free of any hidden dangers, or something similar. (DMs might also want to use this as a way to introduce some *potions of invisibility* to the PCs so that they can sneak around when appropriate later.)

Meetings at Night (EL 7): Should the PCs decide to look more into the matter of night meetings among orcs, they find themselves dealing with some rowdy orcs during their investigation. The orcs noted their interest at some appropriate point before, and now they want to make sure that no pesky humans are messing with their

business. Use the statistics below, but be ready to have the sergeant and his own troops come bust up the battle by the third round of combat (unless this takes place outside town). This gives the DM another opportunity to introduce the sergeant and send the PCs to the section called The Nightly Meeting.

• **Orc Fighters (4):** Male and female orc Fighter 7; CR 7; Medium-size humanoid; HD 7d10+21; hp 59; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16; Atk +12/+7 melee (1d6+5/18-20, +1 scimitar); or +9/+4 ranged (1d6+3, javelin); AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +5, Intimidate +3, Listen +3, Ride (horse) +7, Spot +5; Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (scimitar).

The Temple of Mask: As with the bandits, interest shown by the PCs in anything dealing with Mask is soon rewarded by a confrontation with a few followers of Mask—but only if the PCs persist in following up on this lead after the first evening in town. If the PCs make a successful Gather Information check (DC 20) that first evening, they do find out that the Mask temple was a rumor started by Fiskus Evanson (CN male half-orc War3), who was actually quite drunk one evening. (He was proposing that the bandit problems were actually the work of Mask's followers and that he wouldn't be surprised if a temple was forming up somewhere nearby. Others misheard and took that as word that this was actually happening.) Should the PCs fail at the Gather Information check with regards to following up on the Mask temple, they don't learn of this information. Further investigation is up to them and may lead to some interesting problems later (DM's option).

Cyric Followers in Phent: Again, if the PCs spend time outside the inn doing some follow-up research on the rumor about Cyric followers, they can learn (Gather Information DC 20) that the rumor they had heard is completely false. This time the rumor comes from the speculation of a local merchant's daughter, whose father had just been assassinated. While some believe an unscrupulous merchant from another town set up the assassination, the daughter Lesta Fording (CG female human Exp3) is certain that a follower of Cyric set up the assassination since she knows that her father and the so-called opposing merchant were about to come to an agreement on something. If the PCs follow up on this lead, they can talk to the daughter and find out that the agreement included her marrying the son of the "enemy" merchant, and that this union would bring together these two families in a manner that would allow for further mercantile expansion. She believes that she saw someone wearing purple and silver leaving her father's rooms just before he was discovered dead by poison. She also thinks she had a glimpse of a skull-and-sunburst symbol. If pressed, though, she'll reveal that she isn't so sure about the symbol. DMs can allow PCs to further investigate this death, though this investigation goes beyond the scope of this current adventure. Suggestions for the killer include having it be the son of the enemy merchant (who loves another despite what he has told Lesta and his father), the "enemy" merchant (who decided that he'd rather absorb Lesta's father's trade completely instead of sharing it with the Fording family, who is a fairly recent arrival to the area), or perhaps even a current foe from among the enemies that the PCs have already made who would have reason to disrupt a fortuitous trade alliance. Should the PCs fail at their Gather Information rolls, they may well end up spending some wasted time trying to track down nonexistent followers of Cyric. (Of course, another option is to have this rumor be true and integrate this adventure into an existing Cyric-based plot in your campaign.)

The nightly meeting

The nightly meeting is the meeting where the prophet comes down from the hills and talks to the gathered assembly of orcs. Should the PCs make their way to the meeting, read the following aloud, adjusting as necessary:

Picking your way carefully along the barely discernible trail, you eventually come to a ravine. Arrayed in a sort of amphitheater-like setting are lots of orcs. At least three hundred of them are all focusing on one spot. They are eerily, unsettlingly silent. Standing at the spot they are all staring at is a huge orc who is clad in the priestly vestments of a servant of Gruumsh, including an eyepatch to cover the orb he gouged out as service to his god. As the crowd watches, the cleric speaks, and his voice rings through the ravine.

If one of the PCs has the ability to understand Orc, this is what he or she hears (adjust as necessary for PC actions):

"Orcs! Again I come to you, as I have every night for the past tenday, to stir your blood! For years now, you have settled down and lived side-by-side with humans. Instead of lifting the sword of war, you lift an axe . . . a plow! Instruments of the weak!

Have you forgotten who you are? Have you forgotten *what* you are? Our god calls us to battle—to be *orcs*—and you sit in human taverns and drink ale, instead of drinking their blood? Listen to your instincts. Heed the pounding savage blood in your veins. Rise up, lift off this mantle of false human civilization, embrace your orc heritage, and go forward! Forward, in the name of Gruumsh!"

Some of the orcs stand and cheer; most just sit and ponder, and a few shake their heads and scoff at the priest's words. The priest simply stares at the orcs, drops something on the ground, then, gradually, his body fades away.

Eventually, the assembly starts to leave the area, most of them in small groups, talking about what they saw. About a half-hour after the priest fades away, the area is silent and empty.

If the PCs didn't make good use of their invisibility and hiding options, it's possible that they will have to deal with a nasty situation in terms of orcs. First of all, none of the orcs care for the fact that the PCs are sneaking around spying on them, but enough orcs are around who don't want to see this break into a fight that they can all calm each other down somewhat. Since there are so many orcs, it makes no sense for the PCs to attempt to face them all down, and it would become rather hard on the DM to run that many. (Remember, hundreds of monsters does not equate to a good fight for four PCs.) As an added situational modifier, several of the orcs who weren't so impressed with the priest also may have seen the PCs talk to the sergeant back in town, so they could easily become spokespeople for the PCs and help the situation evolve into one of the following outcomes. DMs should use the NPC Attitudes section in the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide* to help adjudicate the situation; orcs range from hostile to unfriendly initially:

- PCs are escorted back to the sergeant and left in his custody, with a slew of complaints about their presence at the meeting.
- The PCs must fulfill some task for some of the orcs to appease them and help calm down the angrier ones. This task could include working the jobs of some of the orcs present for a couple of days and would invariably involve mining iron.

If the PCs have time to investigate the site of the meeting, they can find the following information:

- A Wilderness Lore check (DC 12) reveals that there was indeed someone where the priest stood; it wasn't an image or an illusion. The thing the priest dropped was a holy symbol of Gruumsh, and apparently the orcs didn't pick it up.
- A Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) around an area about 60 feet from the priest's location in a direction that none of the other orcs went reveals tracks that head out in the direction of the hills.
- Any spellcaster who makes a Spellcraft check (DC 20) can hazard a guess that the vanishing was in fact a *gaseous form* effect.

If the PCs wish, they can attempt to follow the tracks. If they don't pick up this information, they may need to come to another meeting and try again. (Go to Hot on the Trail if the PCs find the tracks leading away.) If the PCs find these tracks later, adjust the DC of the Wilderness Lore checks appropriately (see Track in Chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*).

Hot on the Trail

The tracks head due east through the hills and place the PCs in a direct line of sight with the Thesk Mountains. The trail requires 5 hours of travel, with an hourly Wilderness Lore check (DC 15). Each of the first 3 hours has a different problem, as shown below:

Hour One: Two Heads Are Better Than One (EL 10) (H4)

The orc priest, knowing that he may be followed, has set up some guards. These guards consist of beings he has bullied or persuaded to aid him in his cause. The first is a group of ettins. Read the following, adjusting for time of day as necessary:

The stars are a brilliant canopy overhead as you follow the trail over the broken terrain of the Thesk foothills. The dips in the trail get steeper and rockier in turns, and you occasionally hear the breeze through the grasses and trees of the foothills.

About 30 minutes away from the site of the meeting, six ettins lurk. They have attempted to hide themselves in their cave off the path, which is about 40 feet ahead and to the right of the PCs. The cave has an uninterrupted line of sight to the path (putting the encounter distance at 40 feet). However, the conditions of the night allow the ettins a chance to hear the PCs before they come within line of sight, so the ettins should make an opposed Listen check before the PCs approach the initial encounter distance. After that, use the rules as presented in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* for determining how the encounter runs. The night is starlit with no moon, and the ettins tend to remain still until they hear the PCs (if they hear them). (If the PCs don't start tracking the priest immediately after the ceremony, adjust the visual conditions as necessary. There is also a 10% chance that one of the ettins is out and about near the path instead of in its cave.)

The ettins were swayed to the point of fanaticism by the cleric, and they guard the pass with their lives. The large cave serves as their resting point, and the bones of many orcs litter the cave's floor. These are the remains of curious orcs who sought to follow the cleric back to his starting point.

➤ **Ettins (6):** hp 70; see *Monster Manual*.

Tactics: The ettins are quite emphatic in their tactic about not allowing anyone to get away, and they especially do not want anyone following their cleric friend. As a result, they fight to the death.

Treasure: The cleric doesn't permit the ettins to keep much. Anything truly valuable goes to the priest and his cause. However, under a rock in the cave lies 1,000 gp, a token of the cleric's esteem. Also,

an exceptional greataxe hangs on the wall. The weapon is, in fact, a +1 *elfbane greataxe*.

Hour Two: Bigger Problems (EL 9)

As the tracks continue eastward, the terrain gets rockier and the footing becomes more difficult. The second set of guards, a small group of hill giants, is determined to succeed where the first group failed. Again, the giants have an advantage in terms of knowing when the PCs are coming if the PCs started after the priest right after the ceremony. They not only have the higher ground (and a better line of sight), but they are listening for the nightly followers. (They've had much fun with orcs over the past several evenings.) Read the following aloud, adjusting as necessary for vision concerns, and so on:

As your group continues to doggedly follow the tracks, a boulder crashes in front of you—not blocking the path, but certainly getting your attention. About 60 feet above you, to your right, is a sheer cliff side, and on top of that cliff stand four huge forms. Their laughing rumbles deeply in their throats, and they are about to throw more rocks.

If the PCs come at another time, the giants are most likely slumbering in their own dwelling, which is another cave set back from the cliff that they usually set up ambushes upon. Sometimes one comes out to go hunting (10% chance of this happening when the PCs near the area in their second hour of tracking). They do, however, keep one person on watch at all times.

Aside from climbing or magical means, there is no easy way to get up the cliff. If the characters reversed direction, they'd find a small path 5 minutes away that eventually winds its way to the cliff overlooking the path. They can stumble upon it by accident as they wander, or a Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) allows the PC to see the path before they pass it. Anyone attempting to climb the cliff must make a Climb check (DC 12); the surface is fairly good for climbing.

A cave on top of the cliff is filled with boulders and also serves as the shelter for the giants. Atop one rock shelf 20 feet high is a large sack with 600 gp, which is the cleric's pay for the giants' loyalty. There aren't any orc remains here, but PCs can find some further behind the cave if they care to look (Search check DC 15).

➤ **Hill Giants (4):** hp 90; see *Monster Manual*.

Tactics: The giants happily toss boulders down at the characters, hopefully knocking any off the cliff who dare to attempt to climb up. Eventually, if they think they have the advantage, or if the heroes are running off, the giants use their Jump skill to leap off the cliff, land down below, and chase down the victims, engaging them in melee.

Hour Three: The True Colors Come Forth (EL 11)

The third obstacle should tip adventurers off as to what the true nature of the threat is. Read the following aloud, adjusting as necessary:

Still eastward you march, and the mountains loom closer and sharper. The terrain is rougher now, and the moon casts a cold pale light over everything, creating shadowy shapes everywhere. A cold wind cuts through you, but it's not just the cold air of a night in the highlands; the air carries a scent of death and decay.

The cleric has placed a mixture of banedead and baneguards as guards behind numerous rocks and talus piles. The cleric's own temporary base is about 2 hours ahead. (If the PCs are fresh and of a higher level than 9th, you may want to place these undead 200 yards

from the next encounter called The "Orc" Cleric and allow them to be an early warning system for the cleric.)

• **Banedead (8):** Medium-Size undead; CR 3; HD 6d12; 40 hp; Init +4; Spd 30; AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 16; Atk +4 melee (1d4+1 plus 1 point Dex damage, 2 claws) and -2 melee (1d6, bite); SA Dexterity damage; SQ DR 15/+1, undead traits; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Wil +6; AL LE; Str 13, Dex 10, Con —, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Hide +8, Listen +9, Move Silently +8, Spot +9, Search +5, Knowledge (religion) +3; Improved Initiative, Multiattack.

Undead Traits: A banedead is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. It is not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, or death from massive damage. A banedead cannot be raised, and resurrection works only if it is willing. The creature has darkvision (60-foot range).

• **Baneguard (10):** Medium-Size undead; CR 2; HD 4d12; 25 hp; Init +0; Spd 30; AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13; Atk +3 melee (1d8+1, longsword), or +3 melee (1d4+1, 2 claws); SA *magic missile*; SQ *blink*, undead traits, immunities (cold, half damage from piercing, slashing weapons); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Wil +5; AL LE; Str 12, Dex 11, Con —, Int 9, Wis 12, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Hide +7, Listen +8, Move Silently +7, Spot +8, Search +4; Blind-Fight.

Magic Missile (Sp): Once every 3 rounds, a baneguard can use *magic missile* (caster level 4th). Each use creates two missiles that deal 1d4+1 points of damage each.

Blink (Sp): Once every 10 minutes, a baneguard can use a *blink* spell (caster level 4th; duration 4 rounds).

Immunities: Baneguards have cold immunity. They take only half damage from piercing or slashing weapons.

Undead Traits: A baneguard is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. It is not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, or death from massive damage. A baneguard cannot be raised, and resurrection works only if it is willing. The creature has darkvision (60-foot range).

Tactics: The baneguards pepper the group with *magic missiles*, then blink in for melee attacks, while the banedead simply wade through the ranks of the heroes.

The "Orc" Cleric (EL 11) (H3)

The group finally sees what they're up against. If the previous encounter fired up their suspicions, those suspicions will be confirmed here.

A big bonfire blazes in the center of a circular depression 90 feet in diameter, and it has been cleared of most rocks and debris. The borders of the depression are choked with debris; rocks, boulders, deadfalls. A small wooden hut stands off to one side at the edge of the circle farthest away from you. Between the hut and the fire stands an orc cleric.

If the PCs allow the cleric to speak, they learn or see the following. You can also allow some interaction with the cleric, but this is what should result in the order it should occur:

- "You shouldn't have come," he says, and his voice is surprisingly not like an orc's in timbre. In fact, it's a rather cultured voice. "This was none of your business. You should have left well enough alone and remained content with guarding caravans, exploring old ruins, then drinking a few ales." He sighs and shakes his head. "Now, it's too late. You can't be allowed to return. You can't be allowed to tell others what you see. You cannot be permitted to interfere with the plans of Zhentil Keep."

- The orc cleric doffs his headgear and his features twist and change into a human male in his forties. His clothing changes to armor, with a holy symbol of Bane displayed prominently.
- Once the cleric reveals himself, four armored men peek out from behind the debris, bows at the ready, and let fly with arrows.

• **Thule Orveth:** Male human Cleric 10 of Bane; CR 10; Medium-size humanoid; HD 10d8+30; hp 75; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17; Atk +12/+7 melee (1d8+6, +2 *morningstar*); SA rebuke undead 11/day; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +12; Str 17, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 15, Wis 20, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +11, Concentration +13, Diplomacy +8, Gather Information +6, Heal +6, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Ride (horse) +3, Sense Motive +10, Spellcraft +12; Power Attack, Cleave, Extra Turning, Leadership, Street Smart.

Cleric Spells Prepared (6/7/6/5/5/4; save DC 15 + spell level): 0—*light* (2), *purify food and drink* (2), *read magic* (2); 1st—*bane*, *cause fear*, *command** (2), *random action*, *summon monster I* (2); 2nd—*bull's strength*, *darkness*, *enthrall** (2), *hold person*, *summon monster II*; 3rd—*magic circle against chaos**, *negative energy protection*, *remove disease*, *speak with dead*, *summon monster III*; 4th—*discern lies**, *dismissal*, *lesser planar ally*, *restoration*, *summon monster IV*; 5th—*circle of doom*, *dispel chaos**, *flame strike* (2).

* Domain spell. Domains: Law (cast law spells at +1 caster level), Tyranny (+2 to save DC of compulsion spells).

Possessions: +2 *breastplate*, +2 *morningstar*, *potion of gaseous form*, *bat of disguise*, *scroll of word of recall*, holy symbol of Bane, 3 vials unholy water, purse with 10 gp, 25 gp.

Thule is a 45-year-old priest of Bane, and he is part of the Zhentil Keep contingent. He is witty, charming, urbane, and unflappable. He enjoys dressing up as an orc priest and playing the part, knowing that his efforts will create an instant army for the Keep.

• **Zhentarim Fighters (2):** Male and female human Fighter 7; CR 7; Medium-size humanoid; HD 7d10+28; hp 66; Init +6; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17; Atk +13/+8 melee (1d8+7/19-20, +1 *longsword*); or +9/+4 ranged (1d6/[TS]3, shortbow); AL N; SV Fort +9, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +5, Jump +7, Ride (horse) +9, Swim +14, Wilderness Lore +5; Cleave, Denied, Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, *Quick Draw*, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Possessions: +2 *chainmail*, +1 *longsword*, shortbow, *potion of cure moderate wounds*, holy symbol of Bane, light warhorse, purse with 50 sp.

Tactics: The fighters hit the group with arrows, though they first attack clerics and spellcasters. Thule's spells are used mostly to take out individuals and finish each one off before moving onto the next person.

If the battle goes badly, the fighters do their best to cover Thule's escape. The cleric is a good recurring villain and can use his scroll and the *word of recall* spell on it to send himself back to Zhentil Keep if matters go badly.

concluding the Adventure

Although the group may have halted Thule's plans for now, the Zhents will not stop in their efforts to get the orcs rallied back to their cause. The Black Network has agents all over Thesk, and they're just waiting for another chance to strike. For now, though, if the PCs succeeded in stopping Thule, the orc community is unaffected by the events. In fact, if it is made known to the sergeant exactly what happened, it will strengthen many of the orcs' resolve to live in peace with the humans and humanoids of Phent.

If the PCs don't put a stop to the false prophet, here are some suggestions for what happens next:

- The town of Phent is a town divided. The orcs in the area find themselves with a bad case of infighting. Some of the younger orcs want to follow the path that the false prophet claims is theirs, and they start to do so by stealing things from outlying folk, causing fights wherever they can, and making their own raids on caravans. Those who wish to live peacefully with the folk of Phent find themselves forced to take up arms against their own kin. At the same time, the humans and other folk who already feel a bit paranoid about the orcs point to the raids and thefts and general call to arms that these young orcs follow and cause problems in town, making the already difficult situation even worse.
- The Tarnished Blades find themselves with new recruits: humans who want to put a stop to the orcs and gain a little extra money at the same time. These bandits step up their predations on caravans while they start to target those orcs that mine ore, claiming

that killing these orcs will prevent future bloodshed since it diminishes the forces and support that the orcs may call upon. (They also appropriate their victims' belongings.) The leader of the Tarnished Blades, while angry at the orc bandits who have started taking her caravan raiding opportunities away from her, also sees a chance to strengthen her hold on the area in terms of gaining strength of force and uses it.

Of course, other consequences can result that better suit each DM's own campaign.

About the Author

John Terra has been playing D&D since 1978 and writing freelance gaming stuff since 1986. He lives in New Hampshire with his lovely wife, four kids, and one cat. When not freelance writing, John runs a couple of D&D games, visits haunted cemeteries, and works on his novels.