

Orcs of the Scarlet Sail

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Background: The origins of the Scarlet Sail is a matter of dark tales told in the sanctuary of taverns far from the ocean's reach. What sages and captains are certain of is that the first orc warship sailed from the north over fifty years ago. From the beginning their raids were savage, swift, and carried out with a surprising amount of skill; especially for orcs. The fleet's name comes from the blood-stained sheets that are orcish sails. Those they capture in battle are strung up on their yardarm as a tribute to the living gods they worship that follow in their bloodied wake.

With the coming of the spring winds the Scarlet Sail can be seen prowling the coasts looking for easy prey. The ships are crewed by both male and female orcs, each given whatever standing they can claw out for themselves among their peers and keep such posts and wealth they might find only as long as they are able to fight and hold it tight. Only orcs that have managed to survive 15 years in the crew are given leave to retire to some unknown location that is thought to be their only permanent home and the place their whelps are raised and trained to survive in the bloodthirsty fleet.

The Fleet

Each ship is captained by a veteran orc whose savage experience and primal strength makes him far superior to the common, lesser, orcs that serve as crew. Master mates are chosen by the chief-captain and hold the post until their captain is displeased or a lesser orc wins the tradition of the death challenge for a coveted post. The captain-chief feels the act of challenges is the best way to ensure the mightiest orcs serve as his seconds.



The Thanatos: This war galley serves as the flagship and is captained by the captain-chief himself. His crew numbers 300 orcs that serve as marines, sailors, and oarsmen. They also keep between 100 and 150 slaves to help fill out the remaining oarsmen posts and to serve as sport or food depending on the needs of the day. The captain-chief also has three massive trolls that act as his personal guard and are never far from his side.

Locked within the captain-chief's chest is the bulk of the fleet's treasure consisting of several gemstones with a total value of 2,000gp, a dwarven crown (1,300gpv), a cast aside brooch (40gpv), a cask of quality whisky, 9,130gp, 10,200sp, 10,019cp, and a magic barrel that purifies seawater rendering it potable. In addition to fleet's hoard, the captain-chief wields a magic sword with the power to locate any object once per day within one mile.

The Other Ships: The fleet currently includes *The Horrendous*, *The Pestilence*, and *The Vengeance* which are captured longships. Like the *Thanatos*, they carry a full compliment of orcs but in place of trolls two of them have a pair of ogres and the third recently lost theirs in battle. The combined treasure carried in the holds of these three ships totals 3,110gp, 9,270sp, 12,019cp, a small stash of gems totaling only 900gp and some jewelry worth 3,000gp total. The captain of the *Pestilence* carries a magic silver sword that is thought to be baneful to lycanthropes while the captain of the *Horrendous* is a powerful shaman.

The Living Gods

Following the Fleet is a shark pack consisting of a dozen bull sharks and one great white. The orcs worship them making sacrifices to them at dawn and dusk each day. If slaves or prisoners are unavailable, the weakest of the crew is offered instead.

Suggestions for Play

The Orcs of the Scarlet Sail serve the same purpose the stories of monsters on the edge of the map do. At low levels the PCs should only hear tales of the atrocities of the fleet. When in the mid-levels the PCs could flee from the sight of the sails or help others escape a town about to be raided. By the time the PCs reach high levels they should be ready for a confrontation with the fleet.

While they are "only" orcs, the GM should keep in mind they are shrewd, experienced, and brutal. This combined with their great numbers, and willingness to retreat if faced with defeat should make them a real challenge.