ORCS AT THE GATES

INTRODUCTION

Hoody-hoo! You are holding one of the last copies of Gary Jackson's epic **ORCS AT THE GATES** ever produced. Considered a classic for carnage and violence, this game holds the record for "most orcs killed in a single gaming session", set at GaryCon 7 (B.A. Felton killed 136 orcs).

As you've already probably figured out, this game uses the characters from the Knights of the Dinner Table comic strip. You will play the characters playing their characters in an effort to amass treasure and kill orcs, without regard for property or sanity. Why do they do this??? For the same reason you and I do: the gratuitous violence.

DISCLAIMER

These rules don't cover all possibilities. But it's your game, so until the new rule book (compatible with Cattlepunk™ 2.1, coming soon!) comes out, it's your problem! You deal with it. Hackmaster™ tradition holds that players solve any rule disputes among themselves (use of firearms is not allowed). If you can convince the others that a rule favors you, kewl!

NOTE: IN HACKMASTER™, THE GAMEMASTER IS ALWAYS RIGHT.

COMPONENTS

Your copy of the game should contain the following components: A genuine, made-in-the-USA rulebook, 8 player tokens, 30 orc tokens, 4 double-sided maps, 4 double-sided player reference sheets, two six-sided dice, one twenty-sided die, and three decks of cards. The decks are divided into Player cards (those with the characters' pictures on them), Hackmaster cards (those with a picture of B.A. Felton, on them), and Treasure cards (those with the "pieces of eight" on them).

THE OBJECT OF THE GAME

A Player wins by being the first to reach 1000 victory points. This is done by acquiring Treasure Cards and killing orcs. Each orc is worth 10, 20, or 30 points. Decide what value to use before the game begins. A low value makes winning more challenging for Players.

The Gamemaster wins by keeping anyone else from winning for two hours or by having all characters dead at the same time.

Whoever achieves their victory conditions first wins. Keep in mind that nice guys finish last.

(Gary Jackson has noted that in our first printing, we forgot to say how many points killing an orc was worth. He has graciously accepted our apology for this error--continuing to work for him is worth not being paid for the next year!)

CHOOSING CHARACTERS

Decide who will be the Gamemaster (GM). Only one player gets the glory of being the Gamemaster. All other players are characters (in every sense of the word). The choice of who will be the GM is left to the players. They may volunteer, roll dice, or thumb-wrestle to determine who will be the Gamemaster.

The other players must now select the character they will play. Because they are back-printed only one of each pair can usually be played. The choices are:

Bob / Gordo
Dave / Newt
Sara / Stevil
Brian / Weird Pete

It doesn't matter who is chosen. Bob, Dave, Sara, and Brian (and B.A.) are the Knights of the Dinner Table, while Gordo, Newt, Stevil, and Weird Pete (and Nitro) make up the Black Hand.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR SPECIAL ABILITIES

The characters' gaming styles give them special powers. These are also explained on the Character Reference sheets.

Brian aka "Teflon Billy": May always cast Fireball spells.

Sara aka "Zayre" When on a Treasure square, she can choose to pick up any one discarded or killed NPC card for free. She may have two NPCs at the same time.

Bob aka "Knuckles": When he rolls doubles, he may look at top card of the treasure deck and choose to place it in the discard pile. This is in addition to drawing a Player card.

Dave aka "El Ravager": May take the Hackmaster +12 Treasure card from the deck and start play with it.

Newt aka "Kragin Thriftaxe": May add +1 to all attack and movement dice rolls. Rolls of 1 remain critical failures.

Stevil aka "Rasputin": If he rolls doubles, he may steal a Treasure or Player card from another Player, instead of drawing one.

Weird Pete aka "Mephisto": If he rolls doubles, he may force the GM to discard all cards and draw an equal number of new cards.

Gordo aka "Fire Blossom": Can only be wounded once per turn by the GM. Attacks against him are -1 to their die roll.

OPTIONAL RULE: Players looking for "realism" should sit in character order: Bob, Dave, Sara, and Brian, OR Newt, Gordo, Stevil, and Weird Pete.

SETTING UP THE MAP

The next step is to set up the map. The Gamemaster chooses one side of one of four map sections and places it on the table. The Player to the GM's right then chooses a map section and places it next to the GM's map so that two roads (one on each map) meet, without overlapping the maps. Similarly, a third map is placed by a Player chosen by the GM, and the final map is placed by the Player to the GM's left. Yes, this is arbitrary, but you try arguing with Hard Eight's award-winning design team.

When the Dungeon map is used, it should not touch another map. It can only be reached via spiral staircases.

TOKENS, ORCS, AND CARDS

Once the map is done, each Player (starting with the one on the GM's left) places their character token on any road intersection on the map. These intersections are tinted a different color than other road squares. (In case this idea is too advanced, remember that a road intersection is where two roads cross — GJ).

Then the GM puts four orcs somewhere on the map. These orcs can't be placed within five squares of any character.

Finally, shuffle all three decks of cards and deal one Player card to each Player, and a Hackmaster card to the GM.

BEGINNING PLAY

Now that the game is set up, play can start. The Player to the GM's left begins, then play proceeds clockwise.

Once the first Player rolls the dice, the Gamemaster notes the starting time. The game ends after two real-life hours.

IMPORTANT: After the game begins, only the GM may consult these rules. In the Hackmaster™ universe, players are not allowed access to rulebooks or manuals. The GM must be honest. It is bad form to lie to the other players.

GAME PLAY – PLAYER TURNS

Each Player decides what their character will do on each of their turns. The following rules govern what they may do.

DETERMINE AVAILABLE ACTIONS

At the start of his turn, a Player may roll both of the six-sided dice to determine how many actions are available to his character that turn. Subtract one from the roll for each wound the character currently has. Regardless of modifications, a character always gets at least one action.

EXAMPLE: Bob rolls a 3 and a 5 for a total of 8. But poor Bob has two wounds currently (we told Knuckles he should have checked for pit traps first!) and therefore his number of actions for this turn is 6 (8-2=6).

ROLLING DOUBLES

Whenever a Player rolls doubles for his actions, he receives a Player card. This is great! Player cards give advantages that may be used during play. The catch? The first time each turn that one of the players draws a card, the Gamemaster gets to take the top card from the Hackmaster deck, too. The GM, however, can never receive more than one card between each of his own turns.

EXAMPLE: Sarah rolls a pair of fours, doubles! She gets a Player card and the GM gets a Hackmaster card. Then on his turn Brian also rolls doubles and gets a Player card, but this time the Gamemaster does not receive a card.

HOLDING PLAYER & HACKMASTER CARDS

No one can hold more than four of these cards at the end of a turn. Anyone who has more than four at the end of a turn must discard cards until they only have four.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

A special type of Player card is the Non-Player Character or NPC. These are minor allies that enhance characters. To use a Non-Player Character, the card must be played in front of the Player during their turn. Once in play, NPCs don't count towards the number of Player cards the Player holds in their hand. With the exception of Sara, no one is allowed to have more than one NPC. Sara may have two in play at the same time.

PLAYING CARDS

Players can only use Player cards on their own turns, unless the card says differently. They don't have to play a card, but may play as many cards as they have. An exception to this rule is that a Player may use a Player card (that does not require an action, so no

spells!) to immediately bring their character back into play when he or she dies, rather than discarding the card. When this occurs the character still counts as having died.

EXAMPLE: Dave suddenly dies from the Black Poppie dust that Brian just accidentally released. The Player controlling Dave loses 100 victory points and must discard all cards, including the +12 Hackmaster sword card! But one of the Player cards is the "Bribe the GM with Food" card and, rather than discarding the card, it can be played to bring Dave back. Dave is placed back on the board. Because the "Bribe" card lets Dave start with one card from the discarded Treasure deck, his Player grabs the +12 Hackmaster sword card again and smiles nastily at the GM.

SPENDING ACTIONS
In order to have characters do anything, Players must spend actions. A character cannot spend more actions than he gets each turn, but may spend less. They can never carry over actions from one turn to the next, nor give or trade actions with another Player. Actions may be spent on any, or all of the following, in any order desired.

Move – Each action spent allows the character to move one square in any direction: up, down, sideways or diagonal. However, a character cannot move diagonally when going around a corner or through a doorway. Characters CAN move through a square containing another character or orc, so long as the character doesn't end the turn in the occupied square. The only action a character may make while in a square occupied by someone else is a move action.

IMPORTANT: Each time a character moves into a square occupied by an orc, the GM gets a free attack with that orc. If the attack misses, the character dodges the orc! *Wounds suffered this way cannot be countered by playing a card.*

Moving through a door costs two actions, while a Secret Door costs three. Characters can move through other characters or orcs standing on the other side of doors.

IMPORTANT: Printed on the maps are walls, columns, statues, and a creek (as designated on the map key). Neither characters nor orcs can move through these squares. They block all movement.

Spiral Staircases: Small spiral staircases are printed on some maps. Now, since the maps are one-dimensional (and weren't drawn by Dave), there's gotta be a reason for them. And so there is. When a character moves onto a staircase and spends another action, he is teleported to a staircase square of his choice elsewhere on the board, and may continue his turn. If there is only one staircase on the maps in use, it is treated as if there is no staircase there.

Attack – A Player may spend actions to attack; each attack requires one action be spent. This can be a hand-to-hand attack with the target in an adjacent square, **OR** it can be a ranged attack (assuming you have found the proper equipment). Roll the twenty-sided die once for each attack.

A hit in hand-to hand combat requires a roll result of 15 or higher. This can be modified by cards. The normal chance to hit with a ranged attack is stated on the relevant card. If modifiers make it impossible to hit, too bad.

Players cannot attack other Players with weapons, unless a card says otherwise. No one can attack through walls, Secret Doors, diagonally through doorways, or diagonally around corners. This applies to all forms of attack.

Characters that wish to attack through a regular door only have to spend one action to do so. The attacker and defender must be on either side of the door.

For ranged attacks the character must be able to see the target. This "line of sight" is blocked by walls, pillars, etc. When unsure, run a ruler from the center of the character's square to the center of the target. If the edge crosses over anything that blocks sight the attack can't be made.

IMPORTANT: In hand-to-hand attacks, a natural roll of "1" is a Critical Failure. Instead of hitting the target, the character has hit the nearest other character instead, causing one wound to them. If there is a tie, the Player that botched chooses which one suffers the wound. On the roll of a natural "20", the attack does not use up the action spent for it (the character got a free action!).

Loot / Pillage / Search – By spending an action, a character may loot a square. The only squares that can be looted are those marked with the picture of a Treasure Chest. When a square is pillaged the Player immediately takes the top card from the Treasure Deck and turns it over. If it is a Treasure, it should be placed in front of the Player. It may be used immediately and the victory points are immediately recorded (as listed on the Treasure card).

If it is an Orc or a Trap, the player drawing the card immediately follows the directions on the card. Any orcs that are to be placed on the map are placed by the GM unless the card says otherwise.

A character may not pillage the same square again until they have searched a different Treasure space first.

CARRYING TREASURES
Characters can only carry so much loot. Players may not hold more than five Treasure cards at any time (unless modified by other cards). When a player gets six Treasure cards, one must be discarded to reduce the total to five immediately.

Exchange Loot – Whenever a character is adjacent to another character they can spend an action to trade treasures with that character. Both Players must agree to the exchange or there is no trade. *Only Treasure cards can be exchanged.* Make sure that the victory points for traded Treasures are subtracted from the giving Player's total and added to the receiving Player' total. Good luck in trying to pry the Hackmaster +12 from the hands of El Ravager . Players can make promises, but there are no binding contracts…so be careful with members of the Black Hand.

Cast a Spell – Players may spend actions to cast spells. Each casting requires an action and a Spell card. For each spell cast the player rolls the twenty-sided die.

When the result is a 1, the spell backfires. The casting character suffers one wound, the Spell card is discarded, and the Player is laughed at by all the other Players. When the roll is 20, casting the spell does not cost an action and the Spell card is NOT discarded. Follow the directions on the Spell card and return it to the Player's hand. On any other roll the spell is successfully cast. Follow the directions on the Spell card and then discard the card.

IMPORTANT: Remember that Brian is always allowed to cast the Fireball spell. Also, he never checks to see if that spell fails, just to see if he hits his target.

Heal – A Player may choose to not roll for actions, but "bandage wounds" instead and remove one wound from his character. The decision must be made BEFORE rolling for actions. Since no roll is made, there is no chance of receiving Player cards. A player MAY still use Player cards that require no actions to be spent (most non-spells).

EXAMPLE: Sarah rolls a "9" on the two six-sided dice for actions, but loses 1 because she has a wound. She moves through the door beside her (cost 2) and then spends 2 more to move two squares to a Treasure Chest (total 4 so far). She spends her fifth action pillaging the Chest, and turns the top Treasure card over. But instead of loot, one to six orcs appear beside her. She rolls a six-sided die and gets a 2. The GM places the two orcs in the room beside her. She decides to try to kill them and attacks one with her sixth action, but rolls a "7" on the twenty-sided die and misses. She attacks again with her seventh action, and this time rolls a "19" and kills the orc. The Player records the experience on her Character Reference Card. With her last action she attacks the remaining orc and rolls a "1", a critical failure! Bob, the next nearest character, shouts in pain as he takes a wound. Sarah apologizes and tells Brian that it is his turn.

SUSTAINING WOUNDS AND DYING

Characters begin the game healthy, but they won't stay that way – Hackmaster™ games aren't for sissies and Gary doesn't let us produce any without lots of violence.

Orcs have a nasty habit of trying to kill the characters, and there are lots of nasty traps. This is bad for Players, because their characters can only take a few wounds before succumbing to inky black death. Characters can survive with up to three wounds, but any wound taken after the third results in the character being killed. Of course it is possible to heal wounds, and even bring characters back from the dead, so things aren't quite as bad they seem.

IMPORTANT: Wounds are kept track of on the Character Reference Sheets using pennies, gum or anything else handy. Try to avoid using candy, as it makes flanking maneuvers with the miniatures system (sold separately) difficult to carry out. Remember, each wound reduces the character's available actions by one, to a minimum of one.

EXAMPLE: Brian has taken three wounds and is on the verge of death. On his turn, before he rolls for actions (otherwise his roll would be -3), he uses a card to cure all three wounds. He can now take three more without dying. It's time to get some payback for B.A.'s Critical Hit Tables.

GAME PLAY – THE GAMEMASTER

"Never let the players take control of a game. The players are your enemy."
    –Gary Jackson, Hackmaster™ 1ˢᵗ edition

The GM places and controls all of the orcs. During each GM turn the following sequence should be followed.

IMPORTANT: Each orc gets four actions during the GM's turn. There is no roll for actions, unless required by a card.

REINFORCEMENTS
The Gamemaster can receive new orcs at the start of each of his or her turns, or as a result of cards played. At the start of each GM turn, the GM rolls a six-sided die and subtracts two from the result. This is how many orcs that can be brought into play. If the result is negative or zero, no orcs enter the game that turn, except through card play.

New orcs enter the game on any road at the outside map edge, or as directed by a card. If entering from off map, the first action of each orc MUST be used to move onto the map.

There are only 30 orcs available to the Gamemaster. If this is insufficient all excess reinforcements are lost.

PLAYING HACKMASTER CARDS

The GM may only use his or her Hackmaster cards during the GM's turn, unless otherwise stated on the card. Playing cards doesn't cost actions. Remember that only four cards can be held at the end of the GM's turn.

SPENDING ACTIONS

Each orc receives four actions per turn, excluding benefits or penalties due to cards.

The GM may spend as many actions for each orc in a turn as he wishes, up to its maximum. ALL the actions each orc will use must be done before starting to move the next orc. An orc's actions are not transferable, nor can they be accumulated. Use them or lose them. The following actions are available to orcs.

Move - For one action, an orc may move one square in any direction; up, down, sideways or diagonal. However, it can not move diagonally around a corner or through a doorway.

Orcs can move through squares occupied by other orcs, so long as they don't end their turn in that square. The only action an orc can make while in an occupied square is a move action. The GM may never move an orc into a square occupied by a character.

Moving through a door costs two actions, while a Secret Door costs three. Orcs are allowed to use spiral staircases, for the same cost as characters.

Attack - The GM may spend one action per turn per orc to have that orc attack a character in an adjacent square. An Orc may not attack more than once unless affected by a card in play.

When orcs attack the GM rolls a twenty-sided die. Rolls of 15 or higher hit and the targeted character suffers a wound. The attack roll may be modified by cards. Orcs are not hurt by Critical Failures, nor do they get a free action when they roll a 20. In all other respects, orcs use the same rules as Players when attacking.

EXAMPLE: The GM activates an orc and spends two actions to move it next to Bitter Stevil. He uses its third action to attack. After hacking at Stevil, the GM backs it up one square, opening the space so the next orc can also get at Stevil.

KILLING CHARACTERS— A GOOD THING

When a character takes a fourth wound, he or she is dead (killed, KIA, RIP, DOA, etc.) A player must discard ALL of his cards whenever his character dies. He also lose the victory points for all the Treasure cards discarded. Plus, every time a character is killed his Player loses 100 victory points. But even if their characters are dead, Players still get to roll on their turn. If they roll doubles they draw a card. If it can be used to bring their character back they can use it, otherwise they must discard it. Players usually choose where their character will appear on the board when entering the game again.

Remember that the GM wins if all the characters are dead at the same time, or by preventing any of the Players from winning within the two-hour time limit. Thus, there may be times when the GM might want to resurrect a character, and others when it is best to let the dead rest in pieces.

OPTIONAL RULE: For groups that hate having players sitting out, dead characters return when their Players roll doubles. They then place the character on the board, draw a card (as does the GM if applicable), and take their turn.

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CREDITS