

Our Neighbor the Orc

by Paul Strack

Adventure #4 in the *Rome: Decline and Fall* series

SPOILERS: PLAYERS SHOULD NOT READ

See the *Rome: Decline and Fall* campaign information for the background of this adventure series.

This adventure is for 4-7 characters, level 4. Scaling information is provided for party-size. No maps are provided; you should be able to use commercial maps or make your own. The adventure should run in about 6 hours. If you have less time, you can split the adventure over two sessions.

Power Notations: For monsters in this adventure, powers marked with a [○] can be used once per encounter. Some encounter powers can be recharged, as noted. Powers marked with a [□] can be used once per day. Powers marked with a [●] can be used at-will. Unmarked powers marked may be used freely and generally add bonuses to other abilities. You can print out and mark up the combat sheets for each encounter; power blocks and HP tracks are provided for each (non-minion monster).

Adventure Summary: As predicted, without the legion to block their way, the orcish tribes of Germany begin to migrate west. When the heroes move to stop them, however, they learn something shocking: the orcs are here by invitation of the governor of Gaul, Lucius Pinarus Tullius. That's means their presence is officially legal. Dealing with this situation presents a challenge unlike any the heroes have faced before.

Unlike the earlier adventures in this series, this adventure is much more open ended. There are several competing interests and many different ways the problem can be resolved. It is even possible for the heroes to "fail", allowing one or more groups of innocent civilization to suffer from the depredations of the orcs. The choices of the heroes will affect the fates of all who live in Lorraine.

Encounter 1: The heroes hear of a group of orcish brigands making trouble at a local farmhouse, and a fight quickly breaks out. The fight is interrupted by the orcish leader, Odulf.

Interlude 2: The heroes meet with Odulf and learn that the orcs are in Lorraine "legitimately".

Interlude 3: The heroes meet with the town leaders to plan what to do about the orcs.

Interlude 4: The heroes execute their plan in a series of skill challenges.

Encounter 5a: (Optional) The heroes fight with Brega and Wala.

Encounter 5b: (Optional) The heroes fight with Odulf.

Epilogue: The heroes evaluate the results of their actions and decide what to do next.

Note: This adventure is much more open ended than previous adventures. The heroes are present with a problem, and have many options for solving it. The DM should be prepared to handle a variety of player ideas.

NPCs and Their Motivations

This adventure involves several groups of NPCs with competing motivations. Understanding the goals of the NPCs is key to understanding the flow of the adventure. The player characters may learn some of what motivates the NPCs, but likely not all of it.

Lucius Pinarus Tullius: Although he does not appear in the adventure, the governor of Gaul instigated the entire situation. He ordered the XXII legion withdrew from Lorraine, and he was the one that gave the “friendly” orcish tribes the right to enter and settle in Roman territory. Tullius has ambitions for the Roman throne and plans to use both the legions and his orcish allies for an eventual march on Rome. The flowering of Tullius’s ambitions are the subject of the second act of this campaign.

The Black Root Tribe: One of the larger orcish tribes over the German border, this group of orcs has entered Roman territory at the invitation of Tullius. They are too powerful and numerous for the heroes and the people of Lorraine to attack directly.

Odulf: Leader of the orcs, Odulf sees Tullius’s offer of allegiance as a golden opportunity to win plunder in Roman. Odulf doesn’t know Tullius’s exact plans and expects that Tullius will betray the orcs eventually, but he thinks the potential riches outweigh the risks. Odulf wants to lay low for now, to settle his tribe into the empire and to wait for better opportunities for future plunder.

Brega: A hot-headed orcish woman-warrior, Brega is the weak link in Odulf’s plan to stay quiet. She has no long-term vision, and doesn’t understand why the orcs don’t simply take whatever they want from the now-defenseless citizens of Lorraine. If the heroes want to provoke the orcs into making a mistake, Brega is their best chance of doing that.

Wala: An orcish warlock, Wala believes that Odulf is a fool for trusting Tullius. He thinks the orcs should be focused on the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, to retake the Danubian provinces away from Roman. Although he is a hateful, treacherous creature, Wala may be an ally to the heroes if they approach him correctly, because he also wants the Black Root tribe to leave Lorraine.

The People of Lorraine: The citizens of Lorraine are terrified of the orcs, fearing that they will rampage among them. The people are ill equipped to handle the orcish horde without the help of the legions. Since it is unlikely the legions will return soon, the citizens of Lorraine would like the orcs to leave, or at the very least leave Lorraine itself alone.

The Elvish Village of Briodach: The elves of Briodach live in a hidden village near the town of Lorraine. The elves wish for the orcs to be gone, but also want to remain hidden. If their home is revealed, then the elves will be helpless before the Roman legions when they return. They are, however, grateful to the heroes for their help with the elf-bane (see the previous adventure, “Elf-Home Doom”), and are willing to pitch in if the heroes request it.

Combat 1

Level 5 (200 XP per player)

Use the Combat Sheet 1 for the monster stat blocks.

Setting: A farm near Lorraine.

Setup: The heroes hear of a group of orc raiders attacking a nearby farmhouse. They ride forth to deal with them. When they arrive, they see that the orcs are roughing up the farmers and seem completely unconcerned that they may be interrupted.

Starting Positions: The orcs surround the farm. The heroes arrive from one side of the map.

Tactics: The orc fighters and rogues don't expect serious opposition and initially don't take the heroes very seriously. They use only their at-will powers at the beginning of the battle. The orc drudges have more to prove, and charge eagerly into battle. After half the drudges fall, or if any of the fighters and rogues are bloodied, the orcs get more seriously, unleashing their more powerful encounter and daily powers. They still don't really believe they can lose, and will fight until half their number is down, at which point they will surrender.

Monster Stats: Use the Combat 1 Sheet for the monster stat blocks (on the next page).

Aftermath: When the orcs are beaten, another group of orcs ride up, led by their chieftain Odulf. After a tense moment, the heroes realize these orcs are not interested in fighting: they want to negotiate.

Interlude 2: A Conversation with Odulf

The orcish chieftain Odulf arrives accompanied by enough orcs to make the heroes hesitate to get in another fight (Combat Sheets 2 and 3). Odulf asks for a parlay. He holds forth a letter from the governor of Gaul, Lucius Pinarus Tullius. This letter invites Odulf's tribe, the Black Roots, to settle in the region of Lorraine in exchange for helping protect the area from other orcish tribes. The letter appears to be genuine, and has the governor's seal on it.

Odulf explains that the orcs attacking the farm are not used to civilized ways yet, and were trying to procure food the same way they would in orcish lands. Odulf promises to punish the survivors. The PCs can make a Insight checks (DC 17). If successful, they see that Odulf himself doesn't really believe the orcs did anything wrong. If the roll beats DC 22, the PCs know that, while Odulf will punish the orcs, the punishment will be light.

Standing near Odulf are two other orcs, a slant-eyed orcish woman-warrior with a sword (Brega) and a skulking orcish warlock festooned with skulls (Wala). An Insight check (DC 22) reveals that there is some tension between both of these lieutenants and their chief, but not what the tension is.

If the heroes insist on fighting the orcs immediately, they face all the orcs in Combat Sheet 2 and Combat Sheet 3 (Wala only appears once), without time for a short rest since the last battle. Very likely, the heroes will lose. If they do, the orcs will accept a surrender. They will not finish off the defeated heroes, letting them apply first aid and healing to save each other.

Otherwise, the orcs withdraw, taking their wounded with them. The heroes are left to figure out what to do next.

Interlude 3: Town Meeting

The heroes can talk among themselves or meet with the local officials in town to figure out what to do next. They may also invite the elder of the elven village, Gram, or talk with him separately.

Sollus: The town elder wants to keep his town safe. If that means giving in to the orcs, that's what he will do, but he would prefer to have them leave. He will offer what help he can to the heroes.

Titus Fabius Opis: The wealthy land-owner is terrified that the undisciplined orcs will ravage the area.

Ureth: The priestess Ureth will advocate calm and moderation. She doubts the heroes can defeat the orcs directly, and advises that they focus on containing them and minimizing their threat.

Gram: The elder of Briodach also wants the orcs out of the area, but he also wants the secrecy of Briodach to be protected.

The central problem is that the orcs are here legally, but no one believes they will act like good Roman citizens. Unless the heroes take steps to deal with them, the orcs will likely run wild through the area, despite the promises of their chieftain Odulf. The heroes should decide on a general goal for dealing with the orcs, which they can work toward for the rest of the adventure. Possibilities include:

- Drive the orcs back into Germany (challenge level 4).
- Force the orcs to obey the laws of Rome and live peaceably (challenge level 4).
- Get the orcs to settle elsewhere in Gaul, away from Lorraine (challenge level 3).

The GM should assess an overall challenge level for the heroes' plan. This level will be the number of skill challenges or combats the heroes will have to win in order to complete the plan. A simple plan would have a challenge level of 3. A moderate plan would be challenge level 4. A grandiose plan would have a challenge level of 5.

Interlude 4: Challenges to the Plan

Based on the heroes overall plan, the heroes must complete a certain number of skill challenges to complete the plan, based on the challenge level (3 or 4). The exact challenges depend on the nature of the plan. Each challenge should be complexity 2 and involve three skills.

Level 4: Skill checks for primary skills are DC 17 (house rules for assigning DC).

Complexity 2: Requires 5 successes before 5 failures (house rules balancing success vs. failure).

Primary Skills: Three skills (variable, see below).

Other Notes: Players that roleplay well when describing their actions get a +2 bonus to the skill check. If a player can justify using some skill other than the primary skills, that skill can be used once in the challenge but the check is more difficult (DC 22). Aid Another is not allowed for these challenges.

Victory: The heroes get one step closer to completing their plan. Each successfully completed challenge is also worth 350 XP.

Defeat: This part of the heroes' plan fails. Either because they have wasted time, demoralized their allies or tipped off the orcs that something is going on, future challenges are a +1 DC. This increase in difficulty is cumulative, so that three lost challenges means future challenges are at +3 DC.

The heroes do not all have participate in the same challenges. The heroes can split up and work on separate challenges, but each challenges should involve at least two heroes. The players have considerable leeway on suggesting what kind of challenges might move their plan forward. The exact nature of the challenge determines which skills can be used. Some possibilities are listed below.

Scouting the Orcs

The heroes scout out the orcs themselves, in their camps in the woods. The discover that the orcs number in the hundreds, with more arriving all the time. The heroes can try to learn more about their disposition.

Primary Skills: Nature, Stealth, Perception.

Victory: The heroes learn something that will help out their plan.

Defeat: The heroes learn nothing useful. Also, the orcs spot them skulking around and are more alert.

Rousing the Troops

The heroes organizes soldiers from the locals. The challenge is appropriate if the heroes' plan involves military action or the threat of military action. Possible sources of soldiers include the local legion base, the town of Lorraine or the elves of Briodach. Each source could be a separate challenge if military action is a major part of the heroes' plan. If military action is a minor part of the plan, rousing the troops can be a single challenge.

Primary Skills: Intimidate (for drilling the troops), Athletics (for showing them what to do), Endurance (for keeping up). For the elves, replace Intimidate with Diplomacy (a more subtle hand is needed) and replace Endurance with Nature (for wilderness training).

Victory: The local soldiers are well prepared.

Defeat: The soldiers are poorly prepared, and won't perform well in the final plan.

Negotiating with the Orcs

The heroes may negotiate directly with the orcs. Since the orcs are settling in, arranging a meeting is not difficult if the heroes are not too aggressive. The heroes might negotiate with Brega, Wala and Odulf himself. Each negotiation is a separate challenge. A negotiation with an individual orc will not resolve the overall situation, but it give the heroes an edge they can use to further their plans.

Primary Skills: Diplomacy, Bluff and Insight. Brega and Odulf don't react well to Intimidation, so this skill is not considered a primary skill for challenges involving them. Wala is less brave but more wily, so replace Bluff with Intimidate for challenges involving him.

Insight can be used to get a feel for what the orc's motivation is (see below). The other skills can be used to trick or persuade the orc into doing what they want.

Brega: Brega hates the citizens of Rome, and can't understand why the orcs need to show any restraint at all. Instead, the heroes might provoke Brega, into taking some rash action, such as attacking more locals. They can then uses this as an excuse to pressure the orcs further.

Wala: Wala is the orc most likely to help out the heroes directly. He that having the orcs move into

Roman territory is a mistake. Wala things the Black Root tribe should be raiding in the east instead, to recover orcish lands near the Danube. Wala can be convinced to undermine Odulf if it will get the tribe to leave but won't do the orcs serious harm.

Odulf: Odulf is the most difficult of the orcs to negotiate with. He holds all the cards, and all he needs to do is wait to get what he wants. He is in Roman territory legally, and once the rest of the Black Root tribe arrives, there is no one nearby strong enough to push him out. His biggest fear is that he will be undercut by his own tribesmen. Odulf might be cajoled into a challenge-fight with the heroes if his honor and standing with the rest of the tribe is at risk.

Victory: The heroes get what they want out of the negotiation.

Defeat: The negotiation fails.

Ritual Magic

The heroes call on the gods or use magic to gain an advantage over the orcs.

Primary Skills: Religion, Arcana and one other skill, appropriate to the type of magic.

Victory: The magic is successful.

Defeat: The magic fails.

Skulking and Sabotage

The heroes sneak into the orc camp and sabotage the orcs. This could be poisoning water supplies, destroying equipment or just setting fires and causing trouble.

Primary Skills: Stealth, Thievery and one other skill, appropriate to the type of sabotage.

Victory: The sabotage is successful.

Defeat: The heroes are caught and forced to flee. Alternately, they may fight (encounter 5a).

Raiding the Orcs

The heroes can raid the orc encampment and fight some of the orcs. This is a combat (encounter 5a). If such a battle is useful towards their plan, the heroes win the fight, this counts as a successful challenge towards completing their plan.

Encounter 5a

In this battle, the heroes fight with Brega, Wala and some other orcs. This could be as part of a raid on the orc camp or because they've provoked Brega into a fight. If Wala's participation in the fight doesn't make sense, he is replaced by another Warlock in the Black Root tribe (with the same stats).

If the heroes successfully complete their plan, the hot-headed Brega comes after them for revenge. Fight the same battle.

Use Combat Sheet 2 for this fight.

Encounter 5b

In this battle, the heroes fight with Odulf, Wala and some other orcs. This fight may occur if the heroes force Odulf into a 1-1 challenge. If Wala is already dead or his participation in the fight doesn't make sense, he is replaced by another Warlock in the Black Root tribe (with the same stats).

Use Combat Sheet 3 for this fight.

Epilogue: Repercussions

Assuming the heroes do reasonably, the Black Root Tribe is either driven away or cowed. A relative peace returns to Lorraine, though there is still a lingering threat of future incursions.

If the heroes do poorly, the orcs of the Black Root Tribe run rampant though Lorraine, make life very unpleasant for the Romans. They raid farms, stealing food and cattle, possibly killing a few locals. The people of Lorraine know that the heroes tried their best.

Either way, it should be clear that fighting the orcs directly is simply sticking fingers into a dyke with many leaks. The only way to permanently solve the problem is to travel to the capital of Gaul, the city of Massilia, and get the departed legions to return.

The heroes are unlikely to be able to simply get an audience with the governor, however. They need some additional clout to arrange a meeting. That is the subject of the next adventure, the Eagles of Varus.

Glossary

Note: For Roman names, the personal name (cognomen) is last, and the family name is in the middle. Sextus Aquillius Marius is known to his friends as Marius, and he is from the Aquillius family. Only members of his family address him directly by his praenomen (Sextus).

- **Lorraine:** The name a region near the border between Gaul and Germany. This is also the name of a town in the same region.
- **XXII Primigenia:** The local legion. It has withdrawn from the border for unknown reasons.
- **The Lost Temple:** An ancient temple of Athena, Apollo and Aphrodite, discovered by the heroes. It is the base of the heroes for their initial adventures.
- **Briodach:** Hidden elven village, connected to Ureth and possibly some of the PCs.

PCs

- **Arion Bassus:** Human paladin of Athena.
- **Dannicus:** A half-elf fey-pact warlock.
- **Diedre Meagher:** An elvish ranger.
- **Ismet:** A halfling rogue.
- **Sextus Aquillius Marius:** A tiefling warlord.
- **Tameri Kamenwati:** An eladrin wizard.
- **Xabier:** A dragonborn fighter.

NPCs Elsewhere

- **Gaius Nonnius Mico:** The now-departed legate of the XXII Primigenia legion.
- **Lucius Pinarus Tullius:** The governor of Gaul, who plotting created this situation.
- **Quintus Lepidus Gavros:** Adjunct to Tullius and jurist at the trial of Arion's parents.
- **Amulius Aquillius Justin:** Marius's uncle and legate of the XI Claudia legion.

NPCs in Lorraine

- **Vibius Gratus Vulso:** Roman centurion leading the remaining XXII Primigenia century.
- **Sollus:** Pious half-elven village elder.
- **Ureth:** Priestess of Mab-Athena (secretly elvish).
- **Titus Fabius Opis:** Wealthy Roman landowner.
- **Black Root Tribe:** Nearby tribe of orcs coming into Lorraine and causing trouble.
- **Odulf:** Leader of the orcs.
- **Gram:** Leader of Briodach and Diedre's father.
- **Brega:** A hot-headed orcish woman-warrior.
- **Wala:** An orcish shaman.