

Wanderwar

Well. You can bring the orcs, ogres, goblins, hobgoblins, and even the more reasonable sorts of giants firmly into the benevolent grip of civilization. You can even install their most prominent families firmly into the local aristocratic and other power structures. But the, ah, *Vigorous* Races will still have their little ways.

For example: it has been long been the practice, among various noble families, to encourage their younger scions to go out into the world for a bit, soak up some culture, and generally get accustomed to other ways of doing things. As is usual, the elves invented the concept, the humans perfected it (including in disreputable ways that the elves publicly deplore, and quite privately enjoy), the dwarves distilled it down to an almost unrecognizable lump, and the gnomes made it prone to explode. The end result? Travel, culture, quite a bit of drunkenness, a half-hearted duel or two and quite a thorough education in the ways of the world, particularly those rough-and-ready parts of it willing to trade goods and services for money. The orcish version isn't honestly that much different, except that it includes serving in at least one mercenary company during the campaign season.

There are two separate considerations that come into play when picking one's Wanderwar (as the orcs call it), and every family has a different opinion. The first is: fancy, or hard-boiled? Many orcish nobles feel that it's important for their sons and daughters to get a head start on at least seeing the politics that swirl around the best mercenary groups. Many others think that there's just something more *satisfying* about fighting right down there in the muck and the smoke and the din of battle. In neither case, of course, will a proper orcish scion join a mercenary company that does **disreputable** things, like run away from battle, or not stay bought; and it is expected that while on one's Wanderwar one should avoid activities that will get one hanged later on for committing atrocities*.

The other consideration is: officer, or enlisted? Here, the emphasis is on joining in the enlisted ranks, at least at first. Genuine orcish prodigies will have commissions arranged for them, as will the occasional non-warlike orcish scion who needs to be put somewhere safe like the quartermaster's; but generally orcs on their Wanderwar start at the bottom and spend their campaign season going up the ranks. It's easier that way anyway, as the idea is to enjoy the mercenary life, not adopt it. Not that there's anything really wrong with deciding to make a

career of it, at least in theory: some families have a problem with that in practice, which means that sometimes somebody has to be sent to tell the scion in question that it's time to stop mucking about with tercios and get back to an exciting life of rural land management.

Generally, any sensible mercenary company is just fine with the concept of Wanderwar. Orcs are tough and strong; and the ones on Wanderwar are invariably both literate, and given formal training in useful weapons like polearms or crossbows. The traditional bag of gold 'for your troubles' that accompanies one is extremely welcome, too.

True, the young idiots are usually far too eager to fight, which can cause problems, but that usually sorts itself out in the first couple of battles. Unlike human nobles, the orcish nobility doesn't get its collective nose out of joint if one of their scions gets a certain amount of attitude adjustment in the process (that's one of the troubles that the bag of gold is for), and they're accepting of the fact that people die in wars. Just don't throw the precious little tyke's life away stupidly, and everything will be alright.

The contacts for later life don't hurt, either. There's at least one free regiment that owes its current reputation and

fortune to the regular patronage of several generations of orcish nobles who in turn packed their own children to the old squad-and-blank-shield. Plus, many orcish nobles are military, and they're absolutely likely to be sentimental in later years about the humble mercenary company that first showed them what was what. Although, oddly: orcish-led mercenary groups themselves do not get many on their Wanderwar. It's some sort of cultural thing.

Then again, orcish free companies will often get half-wild *human and elvish* scions, eager to fight like 'real' warriors. That's a completely different social situation, though. Not to mention, one that's a good deal more fraught.

*Or, at least, that one not get caught. But that's only for the more unreconstructed orcish families. Many orc noble houses embraced *noblesse oblige* with a convert's zeal, because it was safer in the long term anyway.

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