

Orc Warfare

Osprey Books 2015, £9.99 / \$14.95

By Chris Pramas; illustrations by Hauke Kock and Darren Tan

Review by Jonathan Aird

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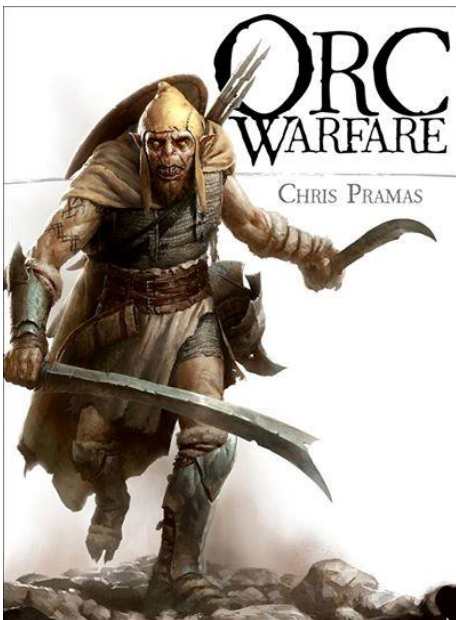
The Orcs

Orc Troop Types

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Well, this is a book that doesn't even know its own number! Listed on the Osprey web site as part of the Open Book series (OBK) it has Osprey Dark Adventures as the series name on the spine of the book. Whichever it is, we are in the bewildering world of Osprey Fantasy titles. Bewildering because Osprey's reputation is built on its thousands of historical military titles – but over the years they have had a side line in publishing a few similar looking books covering fantasy subjects, such as Zombies. This title is one such of these – covering the 'history' of Orc



warfare in the same way as any other Osprey would tackle an historical subject.

In order to avoid clashes with literary estates or game manufacturers this book doesn't cover Middle Earth or the worlds of Warhammer or Warcraft or Dungeons & Dragons or any of the other myriad settings that already exist – although Chris Pramas acknowledges the existence of these (and more!) in his introduction. Instead, his Orcs exist in a 'fictional' fictional world – the book is written as if we all are fully aware of the World background. I have to wonder, with the success Osprey has had with the skirmish rules Frostgrave and also with the soon to arrive fantasy set Dragon Rampant (a variant of the highly successful Lion Rampant medieval rules) if this book, and similar titles on dwarves and elves, will become the background books for Osprey's emerging Fantasy Worlds. Perhaps, in the long run, all the novels that it feels this book is drawing

on – with character Orcs and fabled kings of men that are frequently mentioned, will be written. Who knows? I do know that it worked well for Games Workshop, so why not for Osprey's fantasy wargaming series?

However, that's all speculation about the future – what of this title? Well, taken on its own, it's a very entertaining read, and is exceptionally well illustrated. We're taken through a world of Goblins, Common Orcs and Great Orcs who make up tribes that inhabit the fringes of civilisation – very much a cross between the Hun or Mongol hordes and Celtic armies – with their wild charges and love of chariots. Different types of Orcs have also adapted to living in different terrain – so the swamp Orcs have changed from the forest Orcs and both are quite distinct from the hill Orcs. There's a chapter describing different troop types, such as

skirmishers, all the way up to elite regiments of huge and even more brutal Orcs ó clearly a template for gathering an army together and working out unit strengths for wargame purposes. Orc approaches to battles and sieges ó and also combat at sea ó are discussed in the third chapter and again would serve to constrain the way such an Orcish opponent would fight. Low cunning is emphasized ó and is dwelt on again in the chapter on five famous Orc Victories, each of which would make for an interesting setting for a series of wargames or as background for a Role Playing Game.

As mentioned above, the art work depicting the brutal orcs is quite excellent. I particularly liked the sneaky looking skirmisher, arrow ready on bow, and also the imposing thuggish Troll (mentioned in the Orc óSpecial Weaponsö section of the troop types chapter). Anyone looking for inspiration for painting their Orcs will find plenty in this title. I don't really know though how to rate Orc Warfare. I enjoyed reading the book -- it's well written and entertaining. If I was looking for a new stand-alone fantasy setting (which I am not!) then it would probably be very useful indeed. As a book of fantasy art with an accompanying text, it is a success. These are all good things ó but unless you fall into one or other of the latter categories then I can't really say that anyone óneedsö this title. If it does become part of the background to Osprey's game worlds, then it would then be highly recommended.