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orc, n.²

Pronunciation: Brit. /ɔːk/, U.S. /ɔ(ə)rɪk/

Forms: 16 **orke**, 16 **orque**, 18– **orc**, 19– **ork**.

Etymology: Probably < Italian *orco* man-eating giant (see *OGRE n.*).

The word is unlikely to be a survival of Old English *orc* demon (probably directly < classical Latin *Orcus*); in Old English also as the first element in the compound (plural) *orcneās* evil spirits, walking corpses (see *NEED n.¹*); compare:

eOE *Corpus Gloss.* (1890) 86/2 *Orcus*, orc,..ðyrs, heldiobul.

OE *Beowulf* 112 Þanon untydras ealle onwocon, eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnēas, swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon.

The word was revived in the 20th cent. by J. R. R. Tolkien (compare quot. 1937 at main sense), probably partly after Old English *orc*; compare:

1954 J. R. R. TOLKIEN *Let.* 25 Apr. (1995) 177 Orcs (the word is as far as I am concerned actually derived from Old English *orc* 'demon', but only because of its phonetic suitability).

A devouring monster; an ogre; *spec.* a member of an imaginary race of subhuman creatures, small and human-like in form but having ogreish features and warlike, malevolent characters.

Popularized by the novels of J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973) and now used chiefly in fantasy novels and games.

- 1605 J. SYLVESTER tr. G. de S. Du Bartas *Deuine Weekes & Wks.* II. i. 337 Insatiate Orque, that euen at one repast, Almost all creatures in the World would waste.
- 1656 S. HOLLAND *Don Zara* I. i. 6 Who at one stroke didst pare away three heads from off the shoulders of an Orke, begotten by an Incubus.
- 1854 *Putnam's Monthly Mag.* Oct. 380/1 The elves and the nickers, the orcs and the giants.
- 1865 C. KINGSLEY *Hereward* I. i. 71 But beyond, things unspeakable—dragons, giants, orcs, [etc.].
- 1937 J. R. R. TOLKIEN *Hobbit* vii. 149 The slopes of the Grey Mountains..are simply stiff with goblins, hobgoblins, and orcs of the worst description.
- 1974 R. HELMS *Tolkien's World* iv. 80 The Orcs are covered with hair, in part to represent their sexual voraciousness and animality.
- 1989 *GM* Nov. 56 (*advt.*) Choose to play an Elf, Dwarf, Orc or Human.
- 1992 *City Limits* 2 July 22/4 The heroes are the orcs, usually (and quite rightly) considered to be the scum of fantasy society.

COMPOUNDS

General *attrib.*, as ***orc army***, ***orc speech***, etc.

- 1954 J. R. R. TOLKIEN *Fellowship of Ring* 23 With the help of the ring he escaped from the orc-guards at the gate and rejoined his companions.
- 1954 J. R. R. TOLKIEN *Two Towers* 48 Orc-speech sounded at all times full of hate and anger.
- 2017 J. R. R. TOLKIEN *Silmarillion* (1977) x. 96 And when Thingol came again to Menegroth he learned that the Orc-host in the west was victorious.
- 1994 *White Dwarf* Mar. 54/1 The Ork Warboss is the brains (such as they are) of an Ork army.

DERIVATIVES

'**orc-like** *adj.*

- 1954 J. R. R. TOLKIEN *Two Towers* 171 He was not so obviously orc-like as most of these were.
- 2001 *Truth* (Auckland) (Nexis) 28 Dec. 7 The trouble is that many of them [*sc.* people attending the official Lord of the Rings party] are just too ork-like to cut the mustard.

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