

Merrgsh

(The Usurper, the Wolf-Rider)

Lesser Power of Acheron, LE

PORTFOLIO:	Succession by combat, mounted combat, hatred of goblins, usurpation, wolves
ALIASES:	None
DOMAIN NAME:	Avalas/Nishrek (the Trenches)
SUPERIOR:	Gruumsh
ALLIES:	Armmegh, the orc pantheon (nominally)
FOES:	Bargrivyek, Khurgorbaeyag, Maglubiyet, Nomog-Geaya
SYMBOL:	Pair of squinting eyes
WOR. ALIGN.:	LN, N, CN, LE, NE, CE

A relatively new member of the orc pantheon, Merrgsh (MERGSH) represents the ambition of strong, vital youth with designs on rulership. He is skilled at riding and seen as the patron of orcish cavalry, and his well-known hatred of goblins has led to him being called upon by those orcs looking to gain revenge on goblin or hobgoblin foes. As yet, Merrgsh lacks a solid place within the hierarchy of the orcish pantheon, and it is widely believed he will perish if he is unable to secure such a place in the near future.

Despite his relative youth among the orcish pantheon, the precariousness of his position is not lost on Merrgsh. He is vigilant for moves by Ilneval or Baghtru to eliminate him as a potential rival, while also constantly looking for opportunities to prove his worth for the pantheon. Rumor has it that Gruumsh has decreed that neither his son nor lieutenant are allowed to make a move against the Wolf-Rider, and it is believed he gains much amusement from the trio's attempts at discrediting the others. Whatever the case, Merrgsh has embraced his position as commander of Gruumsh's cavalry forces, which gives him ample opportunity to face the goblins and hobgoblins of Maglubiyet.

Merrgsh features little in orcish myth, mostly being mentioned in mature stories told about the pantheon as a whole rather than having any tales told about him exclusively or with him in a leading role. He has no explicit origins in these tales, but he is often referred to with an epithet that indicates he slew another deity; the name is typically not further known in the mythology and varies from world to world. Many sages speculate that this reflects a real history of Merrgsh, and that he overthrew an older, now forgotten orcish deity and replaced him, thus gaining the title Usurper. A minority opinion holds that the evidence points to Merrgsh being an outsider who somehow managed to gain Gruumsh's favor. In their telling, Merrgsh's hatred of the goblin pantheon is related to his origin, and he has joined the orcish pantheon as a means to most effectively prosecute his hatred. One sage, the now-missing Vriedman of Bria, even speculated that Merrgsh was once a subordinate of Maglubiyet himself; other sages scoff at this notion, however.

One universal element in all of Merrgsh's appearances in orcish myth is that he is always riding, or at least accompanied by, a great, one-eyed wolf named Armmegh (arm-MEGG). Like Merrgsh, no tales are told about this lupine monster, but unlike the Wolf-Rider, he has an explicit origin in orcish myth. In the tales where he is mentioned, he is said to be the spawn of One-Eye and Five-Heads, which orcs take to mean Gruumsh and Tiamat, although no other source of this tryst is known. His hatred of goblins is also mentioned, for it is said he lost his eye to the bite of a goblin's arrow during a pitched battle against a goblin army. Orcs hold that Armmegh was saved by Merrgsh in this fight, and that is the origin of their bond. Despite serving as a mount for Merrgsh, Armmegh is a savage beast, barely tolerating the orcs around him, and permits no creatures to touch him save the Wolf-Rider; the only creatures he is said to be comfortable around are dragons.

Merrgsh seeks to expand his influence on the Prime Material Plane by directing his followers to overthrow their leaders and, upon gaining power, replacing their tribe's tutelary deity with himself. Only those

tribes that currently look to Gruumsh as their tutelary patrons does he leave alone, for now, so as to avoid One-Eye's wrath. However, should his followers choose to take such actions on their own, he does not object. Due to these activities, his avatars are frequent visitors to the Prime Material Plane as he seeks to encourage strong orcs who are not in power to join his faith and wrest power for themselves.

Merrgsh's Avatar (Fighter 29, Cleric 14)

While his true appearance is that of a shadowy figure with glowing red eyes, Merrgsh more commonly appears as a burly, grey-skinned orcish warrior wearing black dragonscale armor. At his waist is a wide belt of goblin-hide leather with a silver buckle depicting an orcish face in profile, shouting a war cry. His head is shaved and adorned with a steel skull cap, and hanging from his shoulder is a great horn with an open skull at the end. He draws his spalls from the spheres of all, animal, charm, combat, healing, necromancy, protection, summoning, and war.

AC 0; MV 12; HP 186; THAC0 -8; #AT 5/2
Dmg 1d8+11 (long sword +2, +7 STR, +2 spec. bonus in long swords)
MR 25%; SZ M (7 feet tall)
STR 19, DEX 18, CON 18, INT 17, WIS 16, CHA 18
Spells P: 8/8/6/5/3/2/1
Saves PPDM 3; RSW 5; PP 4; BW 4; Sp 6

Special Att/Def: Merrgsh favors melee combat, typically riding Armmegh and wielding his blade *Maglubiyet's Bane*, a long sword +2, +4 vs. goblins (goblins, hobgoblins, norkers, koalinh's, chakchaks, sligs, and ghagglers). His *belt of protection* +2 functions as a +3 belt against good creations, and a +4 belt against all goblinoids.

The Wolf-Rider carries the death's head horn, which can be sounded to create a *symbol of hopelessness* against goblinoids (as his sword) once per day and produce the effects of a *power word, kill* spell once per day as well. He can summon 2d6 dire wolves once per day, and three times per day he can issue a *taunt*.

The black dragonscale armor Merrgsh wears renders him immune to acid. He can only be struck by magical weapons and is further immune to spells that would weaken his physical strength. Wolves, dire wolves, and winter wolves will never attack him unless magically compelled.

Merrgsh is always accompanied by an avatar of Armmegh.

Armmegh: AC 1; MV 21; HD 14; hp 112; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d10+special; SA acid saliva, spells; SD regeneration; MR 10%; SZ L (6 feet high at the shoulder, 12 feet long); ML Fearless (19); Int Average (10); AL LE; XP 7,000.

Notes: Armmegh appears as an enormous one-eyed wolf with a thick hide. It is said he is the offspring of Tiamat and Gruumsh and hates all life save dragonkind and Merrgsh. He lost his eye in his first battle against goblins and takes great pleasure in taking revenge upon them.

SA—In addition to 2d10 points of damage, Armmegh's bite carries acidic saliva, dealing 1d12 points of damage, with a saving throw vs. breath allowed for half damage. He can cast both priest and wizard spells, 5 from both first and second levels, drawing from all schools and spheres.

SD—Armmegh can regenerate 5 hit points of damage per round, and his thick hide absorbs the first 14 points of damage from each attack.

Other Manifestations

The Wolf-Rider prefers to manifest physically, in order to encourage individual orcs to seize power. When he manifests in other ways, he favors doing so when a follower is engaged in combat against goblins. In such situations, he has been known to send a ghostly dire wolf the shade of blood that the follower can ride in battle for up to an hour. He has also been known to inspire a berserk fury in a follower outnumbered by goblin warriors, or the granting of a *strength* spell. Both only last until the follower's enemies are dead.

Merrgsh is served primarily by wolves of all sorts, as well as black dragons, imps, incarnates of pride, sword spirits, and all normal animals who commonly serve as mounts. He also displays his favor through the discovery of broken goblin artifacts, skulls and bones, and goblin corpses. His disfavor is shown through the sounds of baying wolves that send shivers down the spines of those who hear it and the sounds of animal mounts in pain.

The Church

CLERGY:	Clerics, specialty priests, crusaders, shamans, witch doctors, fighters
CLERGY'S ALIGN.:	LE, NE, CE
TURN UNDEAD:	C: No, SP: Yes, Cru: No, Sha: No, WD: No, F: No
CMND. UNDEAD:	C: Yes, SP: No, Cru: No, Sha: No, WD: No, F: No

All clerics, specialty priests, crusaders, shamans, and witch doctors of Merrgsh receive religion (orcish) as a bonus nonweapon proficiency. All members of the clergy must take a land-based riding proficiency suitable to their tribe and homeland.

The clergy of the Wolf-Rider is small compared to that of the other orcish gods, and he is the tutelary deity of few tribes. His worship is mostly found among the cavalry forces of larger tribes, as well as those rare orcish tribes that live a nomadic life on plains or steppes and utilize mounted combat almost exclusively. When found in smaller tribes, they tend to be ambitious with a desire for gaining leadership positions, and as such are often seen as political threats by the established leadership. The greatest antagonism exists between the clergy of Merrgsh and those of Ilneval and Baghtru, both of whom see the military matters that Merrgsh claims as falling within their domains. Despite this, their skill at leading cavalry forces is acknowledged and even relied upon in orcish kingdoms, even if the motivations and goals of the Wolf-Rider's clergy are held in suspect.

Temples dedicated to Merrgsh are almost unheard of, except among wealthy, sedentary tribes that have long been dedicated to the Wolf-Rider, as well as large kingdoms with strong emphasis on mounted combat. These temples are large and fort-like, while also featuring breeding facilities for horses or other creatures used in mounted combat. A large statue of a great orc sitting astride a one-eyed wolf always features prominently in the worship hall and trophies from past battles, especially with goblins and hobgoblins, adorn the walls. Much more common, even among tribes dedicated to Merrgsh, are small shrines in the form of a wolf skull with the skull of a goblin placed within the jaws. This totem is placed above the altar used for worship and sacrifices, and may be painted in black and red.

Novices in the service of the Wolf-Rider are known as Whelps. Full priests in Merrgsh's service are known as the Riders in Black. Titles used by the clergy, in ascending order, are Mounted Scout, Mounted Archer, Skirmisher, Light Cavalry, and Heavy Cavalry. High ranking priests have unique titles, often describing personal deeds. Specialty priests are called goblinenders. The majority of Merrgsh's clergy are orcs (77%), followed by orogs (13%), half-orcs (8%), and a smattering of ogrillons (1%) and scro (1%). No orc with goblin blood is ever allowed in the clergy. Clerics (including multi-classed fighter/clerics; 45%) and specialty priests (38%) dominate the priesthood, with smaller numbers of crusaders (14%) and fighters (3%) making up the remainder. Shamans and witch doctors are not part of the clergy hierarchy, although they are considered brothers in the faith; tribes with shamans are about five times more common than those with witch doctors. Females find welcome in Merrgsh's clergy somewhat more often than that of the other male deities particularly among tribes with unusual mounts with lower carrying capacity than warhorses; that said, males (89%) still dwarf females (11%) among the priesthood.

Dogma: Wrest power from those weaker than you. The Wolf-Rider makes you strong; reward his favor by turning your tribe's faith to him. Utilize mounts and cavalry in your warmaking, for the mobility and

power they bring are unmatched. Destroy the sniveling goblins and arrogant hobgoblins at every opportunity, as Maglubiyet's spawn deserves neither mercy nor life.

Day-to-Day Activities: While many members of Merrgsh's clergy are ambitious with a strong desire for power and leadership, most spend their days associated with the cavalry and mounted forces of orcish society. They may lead such forces, train them, or breed and take care of the community's mounts. Finally, those who are drawn to Merrgsh's due to his hatred of goblins often spend all of their time watching for incursions by goblins on their lands, planning out attacks, or unleashing their martial might upon them.

Important Ceremonies/Holy Days: The most holy day in Merrgsh's faith is held on the spring equinox, known as the Foaling. This day celebrates new births among their mounts, as well as the coming of warmer months in temperate climates which means more opportunities for raiding and military action against their traditional foes. This celebration consists mostly of feasting, drinking, and members of the clergy boasting about their coming exploits during the year.

Major Centers of Worship: Merrgsh's church is not large enough to have developed any great holy sites on any worlds where he is worshipped, although any battlefield where orcs triumphed over goblin forces or where orcish cavalry won the day is considered sacred by the local clergy.

Affiliated Orders: The Bloody Lupines are a nomadic force of orcish warriors who ride dire wolves. They are found on many worlds, springing up spontaneously when tensions are high between orcs and goblins. Dedicated to raiding goblin tribes and lands, they frequently disappear just as swiftly, having eventually faced a goblin force too strong for them, but not before inflicting considerable damage on goblin settlements.

Priestly Vestments: The formal raiments of members of the Wolf-Rider's clergy consists of a suit of scale armor painted black, while their heads are shaved and adorned by a steel skullcap. The holy symbol used by the clergy is a horn with the skull of a humanoid forming the mouth; these horns are typically made from an animal's horn but may also be made of metal or wood if the priesthood lacks access to appropriate animal horns.

Adventuring Garb: Members of Merrgsh's clergy outfit themselves in the best available armor for their role. Those who operate as mounted scouts typically wear light armor while those who are members of a heavy cavalry force usually utilize heavy armor, for example. In general, scale armor is the most common, however. Swords, lances, and horsemen's weapons are almost universally used, while few members of the church, if any, outfit themselves with footman's weapons.

Specialty Priests (Goblinenders)

REQUIREMENTS:	Strength 14, Wisdom 9, Charisma 11
PRIME REQ.:	Wisdom, Charisma
ALIGNMENT:	LE, NE, CE
WEAPONS:	Any
ARMOR:	Any
MAJOR SPHERES:	All, animal, combat, healing, necromancy, protection, war
MINOR SPHERES:	Charm, summoning
MAGICAL ITEMS:	Same as clerics
REQ. PROFS:	Land-based riding (choose creature type)
BONUS PROFS:	Animal handling (wolf & dire wolf) or animal training (wolf & dire wolf)

- Goblinenders must have orcish blood. Most goblinenders are orcs or orogs, but half-orcs, ogrillons, and scro are all called to Merrgsh's service.
- Goblinenders are not allowed to multiclass.
- Goblinenders may select nonweapon proficiencies from the warrior group without penalty.

- Goblinenders receive a +2 bonus to any riding proficiency checks.
- Goblinenders gain a +1 to hit against goblins, hobgoblins, norkers, koalinths, chakchaks, sligs, and ghagglers.
- All orcs, save priests of Gruumsh One-Eye, make their saves against any mind-affecting spell or power with a –1 penalty. Gruumshan priests are completely immune to such spells and powers when used by a goblinender. Items that duplicate such spells, as well as psionics, that a goblinender uses are not modified and work normally against all orcs, including Gruumsh's priests.
- Goblinenders may cast *command* (as the 1st-level priest spell) or *taunt* (as the 1st-level wizard spell) once per day.
- At 3rd level, goblinenders can cast *mount* (as the 1st-level wizard spell) twice per day.
- At 5th level, goblinenders can cast *summon animal spirit* (as the 3rd-level priest spell) twice per day. They must quest for a suitable spirit and best it in a contest of wills or combat before it will serve the goblinender. Such spirits are always one-eyed wolves and are considered minor spirits (as described in the Shaman class entry in Players Option: Spells & Magic or Faiths and Avatars), only differing insofar as to match the spell description. The spirit does not grant the goblinender any special powers outside of what is detailed in the spell description, but it may serve the goblinender as well as nearby shamans. It cannot be destroyed, only dispelled if reduced to zero hit points.
- At 7th level, goblinenders can make three melee attacks every two rounds.
- At 7th level, goblinenders can cast *phantom steed* or *protection from normal missiles* (as the 3rd-level wizard spells) once per day.
- At 9th level, goblinenders can cast a special form of *monster summoning IV* (as the 6th-level wizard spell) that summons either 1d3+1 worgs or 1d3 dire wolves (50% chance for either).
- At 10th level, goblinenders can call for a steed, much as paladins can. They must perform a quest just as paladins do, and their steed will match the preferred type of mounts used by their community. All benefits and restrictions that apply to a paladin mount apply towards this special mount; for example, they must be well-treated or they will leave, and the goblinender can only ever call for one steed.
- At 13th level, goblinenders can make two attacks every round.
- At 15th level, goblinenders can cast *animal summoning III* (as the 6th-level priest spell) once per week. This spell always succeeds in summoning 16 dire wolves, even if none should be in the area.

Merrgshan Spells

2nd Level

Goblinlayer (Pr 2; Alteration, Enchantment/Charm)

Sphere: Combat
 Range: Touch
 Components: V, S, M
 Duration: 1 rd./level
 Casting Time: 5
 Area of Effect: 1 weapon
 Saving Throw: None

With this spell, a priest can enchant a single weapon to aid in combatting goblins. For the duration, any creature who uses the weapon gains a +1 bonus to their attack and damage rolls for every four levels of the caster (so +2 at 4th level, +3 at 8th, etc.) against goblins, hobgoblins, norkers, koalinths, chakchaks, sligs, and ghagglers. This spell can only be used to enchant a nonmagical melee or throwing weapon. It fails if cast upon anything else. If the weapon so enchanted is thrown, the spell expires prematurely on a hit or miss.

The material component for this spell is the priest's holy symbol.

3rd Level

Armmegh's Hide (Pr 3; Alteration)

Sphere: Animal, Combat
 Range: Touch
 Components: V, S, M
 Duration: 1 rds./level
 Casting Time: 6
 Area of Effect: 1 creature
 Saving Throw: None

When this spell is cast, a single creature touched by the caster gains a thickened hide, much like that possessed by Merrgsh's wolf companion Armmegh. For the duration of the spell, all attacks of any kind deal three hit points of damage fewer than normal, to a minimum of one point. While the thickened hide has no Dexterity penalties, a creature under the effects of this spell becomes quite hirsute, looking almost like a bugbear or other heavily furred animal, and thus suffer a –2 penalty to their Charisma in most encounter situations.

The material components for this spell are the priest's holy symbol and a piece of hide from any creature with a very thick or scaled hide (crocodile, elephant, rhinoceros, etc.).

6th Level

Merrgsh's Horn (Pr 6; Conjuraction/Summoning)

Sphere: Combat
 Range: 0
 Components: V, S, M
 Duration: Special
 Casting Time: 1 rd.
 Area of Effect: 60-ft. radius
 Saving Throw: Special

By means of this spell, the caster can sound a horn and bring fear and hopelessness to his enemies. All goblins, hobgoblins, norkers, koalinths, chakchaks, sligs, and ghagglers within a 60-foot radius of the caster must make a saving throw versus spell or be affected as if by a *symbol of hopelessness*. All other foes within the same area with less than one hit die, as well as all normal, untrained, and non-threatening animals flee at their maximum movement rate, while trained animals and all other foes with between 1 and 6 Hit Dice are allowed a saving throw to avoid fleeing. Hopelessness lasts for 2d6+2 rounds, while fear lasts 1d4+1 rounds.

The material component for this spell is a hollow animal horn affixed with a mouthpiece and a skull on the open end. The horn is consumed in the casting. Note that using the priest's holy symbol as the horn for this spell does consume it.