

Defending Orokon



by: Joshua Gracey

Kaihzan Rellicose poked at the fire before him, shifting the burning logs to better ventilate them. He would not go in search of firewood again this night. He looked around at his few companions but said nothing knowing that they were all too busy worrying about the coming battle. The stars above glistened, flickering as if to laugh and mock those men destined to die protecting their homeland of Orokon. Not if he could help it.

“Captain,” one of his companions addressed. The speaker was a wiry man, built for speed rather than strength. In contrast he wore a heavy suit of copper, the long sword at his side crafted of the same material. “Is it possible they would ambush us in our sleep?”

He too had pondered this question long and hard, coming to the conclusion that he would simply remain awake as the camp’s sentry. The camp was large, several hundred fires scattered over the plains that bordered the regions of Orokon and Dog’Mur. If the Orcs wanted to ambush the idle soldiers it would not be difficult to slay a good number of the weary Oroki before the majority was assembled.


“It is,” Kaihzan replied. He wore armor and carried a sword identical to that of every other man around him. Standard-issue was the best way to describe it. Cheap, effective, expendable; these adjectives worked for both his men and their equipment. “I will keep watch as sentry tonight. I want you to go and tell one man from every pit to do the same.”

With a respectful nod the man stepped from the ring of light emitted by the fire pit. Kaihzan watched as he moved to the nearest group and relayed the orders, then the next and so on. Efficient, authoritative, reliable. He put down the stick he had been using to adjust the fire and leaned back on his elbows. Looking up he sighed, all too aware of the chaos that would ensue at the latest the next morning. *Sleep well, men...* he thought, his eyes now scanning the distant groups, *You may never have a chance to do so again.*

The neighboring lands of Orokon and Dog’Mur had been at war for as long as any resident of either country could remember. It was not as if one side craved what the other had, for both had their own ways and execute them with a surplus of resources. Kaihzan did not wonder why he fought but simply accepted the fact that he had to. The isle of Heroin Birth, more resembling a mountain in the middle of an ocean, was a place of war and always had been.

The padding of armored feet against hard earth brought him out of his thoughts and he looked up to see a disheveled, wild looking Orok standing over him. “Sir!” The soldier began, his words strained as he panted for air, “a forward party of Orcs has been seen on the northern end of the blockade.” Kaihzan thought about this for a moment, considering his options before replying, “assemble the northern units, get them ready for combat.”

He rose to his feet as the soldier ran off once more, obviously tiring with every step. He knew how it felt, to be in the heat of battle knowing your body cannot take much more yet your opponent, your task has a lot more to throw at you. He retrieved his sword and started to wake his group. There was no need for a shield; the Orcs were physical anomalies. Be it your shield or body their blows are connecting with, you was doomed to meet the earth.



One soon learns it is best to avoid their assaults altogether. Known to most humans simply as Green-Skins, the Orcs' defensive measures went as far as loins. Their weapons, however, were not meant to kill as swiftly as those of the Oroki they faced. Armed with large axes and heavy war hammers, the Orcs meant to painfully crush their victims.

He had seen into the eyes of an Orc, its lust for blood surpassing his own desire to live. Something about these creatures both amazed and terrified him, the former being their fervor in combat, the latter being their reputation for stomping their enemies, sometimes quite literally. After having awoken every one of the ten present men under his command he explained the situation. They were neither happy about it nor in the shape to deal with it. A weary warrior was one dead before he entered battle. The only thanks they could give were for a clear night.

All around him the fires were put out, consequently masking the majority of the Orokon army from the opposition's sight. It was of no use. In the distance he could hear cries of anger and fright as the battle flared up. "Stand your ground," he commanded as one of his men started toward the battle, "if we are needed, we will be called." As if on cue the blast of a distant horn pierced the night in a signal calling all available militia to the battle. "Now you may go." He shook his head as his men ran off, apparently anxious to die. If there were so many of the Orcs that help was needed there was little chance for them. The creatures were superior warriors even with their primitive weapons and little to no protection or formal training.


He himself started toward the battlefield at a calm pace, his stride short as if he was on a walk solely for leisure purposes. Where mud did not conceal it his armor shined in the light of a nearby fire. Apparently not everyone had been so eager to be consumed by total darkness in a vain attempt to hide themselves. He appraised his sword briefly as he went, coming to the conclusion that the copper blade was little more effective than the stone hammers his foe battled with.

"Kaihzan!" A voice called from behind. He turned around to find a man in a long, gray robe, its tail sweeping across the earth as if to remove its surface. The man's face was withered, age taking its toll. Thin, white hairs ran to his backset jaw, the consequence of a slight overbite. "Some of the southernmost units have been attacked as well; they will be needing us." This man was Kaihzan's old mentor, Salazar Cley. They had met when he had first joined the academy and had been good friends since. "All right," he replied, looking around. "Let's go."

The two of them ran south, moving around and leaping over the partially invisible fire pits. Embers kicked up as Kaihzan ran through one, wood and stone scattering at the collision with his boot. Not far ahead he saw them, the behemoth Orcs bearing down on their Human foes with ease. He leapt over yet another fire pit, sword gripped tightly on both hands as he swung at the nearest Green-Skin. The blade managed to cut through its tough skin, though not enough to stop it. With a snarl it fought back, large arms imbuing its weapon with power as Kaihzan narrowly avoided the stone axe it wielded.

"Remember, Kaihzan," Salazar called from his own personal battle. He ducked as a heavy mace passed over him in a wide, reckless arc that toppled several nearby Oroki. "Aim for the throat!" The old man rose to his feet, sword tearing through the Orc's neck with relative ease. It dropped its weapon, a hand clutching at the wound in a vain attempt to stop the flow of crimson. He then disappeared into the dark, his battle cries joining those of the hundreds of soldiers around him.

Kaihzan himself was thrown to the ground as he foolishly attempted to parry the crushing blow of his opponent's axe. He rolled aside just as the weapon cleaved its way through the air and into the dirt then jumped to



his feet, bringing his sword up, muscles screaming as he decapitated the struggling beast. He leapt over the corpse then ducked as the limp form of one of his fallen companions soared by before engaging yet another of the large creatures.

A short distance to his left was Salazar, mercilessly hacking away at a foe devoid of the agility to retaliate. It fell quickly, body jerking as it became a heap of mangled flesh. "Kaihzan, protect me for a moment!" The order was farfetched. He moved back, dropping his sword to the ground to fulfill the need of both hands free.

"I'm trying!" Kaihzan retorted as his companion repeated the order. He rolled aside, hacking at an Orc's ankles as he went. It fell with an agonized cry and he himself came back-to-back with Salazar. "Hurry it up!" Although brought up with the belief that no person could thrive without the aid of another, it was nearly impossible to be courteous in such a time as this. "I doubt I can keep them all away and I don't think I should die trying." He was an excellent warrior, but if he had to fight Salazar's share of enemies as well as his own he would exhaust far too quickly.

"Always the selfish one," Salazar replied as a miniature orb of light materialized between his parallel palms, "You would sooner let me die than risk your neck." This was somewhat true. Kaihzan had always been slightly egocentric, worrying more about himself than those nearby. A few moments passed in which several other Oroki joined the effort in defending their magician ally before the spell was completed. Countless daggers of ice leapt from Salazar's hands, driving themselves deep into the bodies of his enemies. Several dozen Orcs fell, many before they had even gotten within reach of their first Orok victim.

"You've always been the one to save our hides," a soldier replied. Blood ran from a wound in his arm and he was in obvious pain. "Maybe you could do it again?" There was a mixture of jest and pleading in his tone as he said this. "Do not rely on him," Kaihzan barked over the tumultuous battlefield, "Fight for yourselves!" Although this was yet another hint at his friend's egocentricity, Salazar was thankful that it had been said. It took some of the burden off of his tired heart.

"We need more light," Kaihzan explained as he engaged another of Dog'Mur's warriors. "At the least we will know how many there are left." Salazar nodded as a second, more rapidly growing orb formed in his hands. The orb shot high into the air and exploded with a brilliant flash that lit up the vast battlefield from end to end. Those in lands as far away as Vinaran would have no trouble seeing this. The orb hung over their heads, illuminating the plains.

"God save us all," Salazar said with a sharp intake. Not too far away, behind several lines of the Orc butchers was a Troll. It towered a fair eight feet over the Orcs and Humans alike and was nearly four times as wide as the largest of its allies. It stormed forward, throwing its brethren aside as it moved for the Orok frontlines.

Several screams rose above the chaos as the Troll lifted a threesome of Oroki in one hand, crushing them as it closed its fist. In its other hand it held a club that better resembled a small tree. It swung this weapon in a huge arc across the ground that sent soldiers from both regions through the air.

"Salazar," Kaihzan muttered as he moved to his mentor's side. "This would be the perfect time for something fancy." Again Salazar felt the burden of his kin, the weight of his country upon his shoulders as he shook his head. "I can't do anything; it's too big."

“The hell you can’t!” Kaihzan yelled before turning away to parry a rather meager blow, “You better do something or we’re all dead!” He jumped onto the Orc’s back and drove his sword into its gut. Tumbling away as the fallen brute reached the ground, he couldn’t help but wonder why Salazar was hesitating to stop the Troll. He had seen him do spectacular things, the least of which would be enough to slay such a beast. *What are you playing at, Cley?*

He turned to see Salazar once more combating the Orcs, his sword moving as quickly as the Human eye could keep up with. He definitely did not believe in senility. “Sal-” Kaihzan was cut off as a heavy blow to the side knocked him to the ground. He looked up, ribs searing with pain to see an oversized Orc. Unlike its kin it wore a heavy vest and skirt of fur, its muscular arms and bony face decorated in purposely-smearred blood. It was this tribe’s war chief.

“Captain!” An Orok ran into sight and leapt at the Orc only to be swatted away like some pestilent insect. The war chief gave a booming snarl and dove on him, its axe splitting through skin and bone with a violent spurt of fluids. Kaihzan climbed to his feet and swung at the Orc’s back in vain; it rolled away before the blade could reach its mark. Enveloped in a bloodlust mankind would never understand the Orc charged at him, axe in both hands. Even though Kaihzan managed to parry the impending blow he was thrown to the ground yet again, the brute strength of this creature more than he could handle.

Salazar struck down several more of Dog’Mur’s fervent citizens before he noticed Kaihzan’s predicament and ran to his side. The elder man not only parried but repelled the war chief’s attack then helped the grounded warrior to his feet. “I’ll deal with him, you get back to the others!” Kaihzan did not hesitate to fulfil this order. Over time he had come to have great confidence in Salazar’s abilities. He would be able to handle the war chief.

After a few moments he noticed that the Troll had disappeared from sight and frowned, barely dodging a rather large club. *Where’d that thing get off to?* He wondered, looking around as he slew another Orc. He did not have time to wonder any longer as he noticed several of the Orcs veering off to assist their chieftain. He raced toward the battle, leaping over the corpses of man and beast alike as he went. The cries of the wounded joined those in the fray, a chaotic ballet that only the darkest of souls could appreciate.

Do not call to him, he instructed himself, sword high as aimed for the nearest Orc. *Do not distract him.* He hacked at the Orc’s arm several times before it moved away and he pushed further in. Salazar was moving with inhuman speed now, successfully combating several opponents at once. It almost looked as if Salazar had been joined by his non-existent twins. The magician never failed to amaze him. Although his skill was keeping him alive it was doing nothing to reduce the numbers that bore down on him. In relative silence Kaihzan joined the fray and crossed weapons with several distinguished Orcs. They too were smearred in blood and wore the fur skirts, but their chests were bare. The war chief’s personal guard.

How is he able to do that? Kaihzan wondered as the withered magician fought off a handful of the most powerful Orcs on the battlefield simultaneously. He struck down one of the skirted Green-Skins with ease, the creature too busy defending its chief to combat even notice his approach. He engaged a second, slaying it equally as swiftly. “Kaihzan, your sword!” Salazar called from within the circle of green flesh. Kaihzan paused for a moment then threw his sword over the mass as a hand shot up to catch it, the sleeve of the robe sliding down the respective

arm. *Remember that next time you refer to me as selfish*, he thought spitefully as he armed himself with one of Dog'Mur's war hammers. He spun around, the heavy weapon clumsy in his arms as its head crashed into an approaching foe. The Orc fell to the ground with a muffled cry, its ribs shattered under the force of the weapon. Inertia was a powerful thing when used correctly.

Salazar seemed to dance, both swords jumping from one opponent to the next as he gradually thinned out the mass around him. Although he spent the majority of his time studying the arts of magic, he did not let his physical prowess go to waste. Everything was a blur, as if time had sped up significantly. He did not need to think, only fight. Before he knew it the fight had come down to him and the war chief, the presence its personal guard disbanded. The chief backed away from the robed Human and gave a snarl as if to warn him to stay away. Despite all their lust, all their spirit in a fight, an Orc was not at all friends with the idea of losing one. Salazar took matters into his own hands and, with skillful execution of both weapons, slew the chief where he stood.

The surrounding Orcs stopped in their tracks, several dying as a consequence before the nearby Oroki stopped to look as well; all eyes were on the fallen chief as its torso slid free of its legs. The war chief was their spirit, the embodiment of their desire to be victorious. If one were able to slay the chief they would be able to slay any of the Orcs. One of them, appearing to be the last of the chief's guard retrieved a horn from the pouch in his skirt. He blew into it, three long blasts that signaled the chief's death. The massive Orc lines backed away and spun around, retreating into the night. The latter portion of the Oroki would pursue them a long while before giving up the chase.

"They'll be back," Salazar said as he dropped both swords and sat. "They always come back with a new chief." The old man had looked so alive, so young when he had been fighting off the leader of that particular tribe of Dog'Mur. Now he looked older than ever, his features strained, his form thinned out beneath the large, torn robe he wore. "Are you all right?" Kaihzan asked, dropping his own weapon and crouching at Salazar's side. Behind them a guttural cry rose up over the cheers of victory. Apparently not all of the Orcs who lay upon the ground were dead.

"Tell everyone to go around and make sure every last one of them is dead," Salazar ordered. Kaihzan remained still, observing him for a moment before running off. The battle had been won, Orokon had survived Dog'Mur's wrath once more. As Salazar looked over the battlefield he couldn't help but wonder if it all had a purpose or if it was just plain prejudice that caused man and Orc to hate one another so. "Do you know what happened to that Troll?" He asked as a soldier walked by. The Orok had removed his leggings in the midst of battle, an effort that contributed to him now being alive. "The Orc dressed in fur slew it. I guess it was because the damn thing was killing too many of its own men."

Salazar could not help but laugh.