

THE GRADURIAN PORT OF GURSHA

Note from the author: Word count is 4,530 on the web expansion.

A Timeline for the Town & Immediate Area

(For ease of translation, all dates are based on the Tre'Ratriun Calendar, Current Year 174 TR)

22 TR Goblins are hauled to Gursha Rock (the name by which the island used to be known) and forced to "settle" there, establishing an informal port for freshwater, victuals and supplies for orkin warships and slave vessels. The goblins are gathered from a variety of locations and clans, so there is much in-fighting. The orcs do not care what the goblins do to each other so long as they perform their required duties.

31 TR The goblins blow it and don't have anything ready when a flotilla of raiders comes in to top off their water barrels before going off to have fun burning the town of Okar. In a fit of justified irritation, the orcs slaughter them all with the intention of replacing them later. They then sail off towards Barsara and are caught in a freak storm. Those that don't perish in the weather are eaten by harpies from the Island of the Vultures and Carjarr Island. No one back in Graduria gets the word that the goblins working in Gursha have been asked to resign.

33 TR When a prominent orkin admiral, just returned from looting Jorfel, in Da'Neer, puts into harbor with tattered sails and a cracked mast, he is outraged to discover that there is no one at Gursha to service his vessel. He immediately corrects the matter, taking great care that *this* time all the goblins come from one clan, to prevent a repeat of the prior problems. He also strips his ships of non-essential sailors and marines in order to appoint the town's first orc governor and leave him a number of suitable thugs to act as administrators and disciplinarians. These orcs take mates and slaves, etc., and by the end of the year the town of "Gursha" is showing up on nautical maps.

44 TR An outbreak of disease afflicts the goblins of Gursha (probably the Gibbering form of Rabies or perhaps Goblin Pox) and they are all put down. A raid on Baroza is conducted in the hopes that robolds might be better, longer-lived workers than goblins. They aren't. Thus begins a long, bitter relationship with Baroza.

45 TR A small mercenary fleet is hired by an alliance of three Barozan robold kingdoms. It is a mixed flotilla of ships crewed by several different races (including robolds of course, but also humans, disaffected sea orcs and even some gnarl-ron marines from far off Tulmar). The fleet lands at Gursha, which has just been "staffed" with its *third* population of goblins, and burns it to the ground, butchering nearly everyone there. The fleet returns to Baroza immediately, sacking Pantory on the way back for good measure. It is then paid and dismissed, after which at least three vessels crewed by gnolls, humans and gnarl-ron *returns* to the still-smoking ruins of Gursha and set up shop as an independent pirate observation. They are successful for about a week before vengeful orcs sweep in and remove them. In pieces. In *lots* of pieces. Thus begins a long, bitter relationship with Tulmar—a relationship that continues quite bloodily to this day.

48 TR Gursha is wrecked by other Gradurian orcs during a period of civil war but is soon rebuilt. The only orkin Arch-Mage ever identified by the Council of Sequestered Magics hangs his hat in Gursha in the waning months of summer. Prior to embarking on his evil plans of world domination, he is distracted by a half-orc wench on the arm of a ship captain and pursues her

across the sea. Some say he catches her, woos her and is now a lich in the mountains near Farzey. Others say he drowns and returns to Gursha as a waterlogged corpse to set up shop underneath the harbor. Others yet say he does indeed catch up with them, but rather meets his end by the blade of her jealous boyfriend. The only thing certain is that no one is certain.

49 TR News of The Great Purging of 46 TR reaches Graduria to great consternation, distress and at least a little humor. In an unlikely display of orkin solidarity, the Gradurian chieftains (who have been successfully mauling the coasts of the Kardune peninsula for generations and have gotten pretty cocky) decide to dispatch a fleet of war galleys and transport vessels northwards into the Gulf of Kaldacia with the intention of conducting a landing at Linkard, driving through Neer Hozmel Pass and attacking the belly of the Dwarves of Praxter by sacking Riz (and hopefully taking some of the pressure off the tribes being driven into the Frandorian Mountains). Typical infighting and arguments delay the assembly of the fleet for over two years, at which point word of the first great orkin invasion into the Sustain Valley galvanizes the feuding chieftains into action. The fleet is marshaled and deployed in the Spring of 49 under the command of Ahk Nelskund; unfortunately for the orcs it is met by well-prepared Goremunyan, Doomsaekuran and Hazaari squadrons just a week after it departs Slawd and Jankus Orlay. The orkin fleet is destroyed in a running battle that starts within sight of Jorheem and ranges through the Grygar Islands all the way to Boar Isle. A handful of desperate orkin survivors make it ashore, taking refuge in the Drake Far Forest, where they take refuge in the most difficult terrain to be found. From there, they and their descendents prey upon travellers using the Roark Road for the next hundred years. One or two vessels make it back to Graduria; the reception there is less than hospitable after their "failure". The ships and their crews are banished to the eastern islands and ordered to rebuild Gursha. Thus begins a long, bitter relationship with Goremunya and the Kingdom of Hazaar (which also continues to this day).

51 TR In a single horrific 24 hour period that has since come to be called The Great Crow Feast, a significant portion of the Gurshan population is dismembered, hewn apart or chopped to pieces by a seemingly unstoppable dwarf hero who arrives unheralded and unlooked for one morning at the north end of the island. The dwarf, wearing full plate armor of enchanted hard silver with the twin rings of the Bride of Moradin upon it and wielding a Praxterian vortal axe, slaughters everything and everyone in his path. He comes close to razing the city itself and doubtless would have had he not suddenly (and unexplainedly) keeled over dead. An orkin bounty hunter that claims to have poisoned him is found smashed to a barely recognizable by a huge mace the morning after making the assertion. The dwarf is never identified and the body is carried away by stone giants to the mainland, whence it vanishes.

80 TR The successful and ongoing raiding conducted by sea orcs demands that Gursha grows. It soon has a population of over 2,000 orcs, goblins, assorted other humanoids and various ne'er-do-wells with a permanent, formal military garrison (though not a very big one).

85 TR Gursha is wrecked by rival bands of Gradurian orcs during a brief period of civil war but is soon rebuilt.

102 TR Gursha, Ting and numerous nameless villages along the Gradurian and Skarish coasts are inundated by terrible tidal waves with great loss of life. Gursha is all but destroyed. The cause is later determined to have been a titanic Ocean Camel surfacing in Zardeez Bay to fill its hump with air. Once again new goblins must be brought to town.

111 TR Gursha is wrecked by rival bands of Gradurian orcs during a brief period of civil war but is soon rebuilt.

127 TR Orcs of the Drake Far (descended from the survivors of Ahk Nelskund's fleet) gleefully join in the revelry when orcs, goblin, kobolds and other humanoids come out of the Vespar Mountains and sack the Pars Felli (later to become Goremunyan) village of Roarke. Thus begins what is to become a long, profitable relationship between the Brotherhood of the Bloody Whip

and the Gradurian orcs of Gursha.

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162 TR A large raiding fleet bound for Zumbra gathers at Gursha. Most of the orkin fighting population of the town gets caught up in the enthusiasm and throws in their lot with the fleet (among them the Mayor). The fleet enjoys limited success at Crijarri, Tangar and Jovar, gaining a lot of plunder but losing many ships. Among the casualties are at least ten score orcs from Gursha, along with their leader. This leaves the town relatively headless, which over the course of next many months gives the numerous goblins of the town delusions of grandeur.

163 TR The Jaundiced Grappler known as *Conirode* emerges from the caves outside of Gursha. He is believed to be a Beholder by the ignorant goblins. Conirode takes power quickly, slaughtering many goblin and orc leaders and cowing the rest. Conirode sets himself up as the Lord of Gursha. Population of the time once again reaches 2,000.

165 TR Gursha is very nearly wrecked by other Gradurian orcs during a period of civil war; warships of at least two factions heave to with the intention of sacking the place. Conirode, however, is able to maintain Gursha's neutrality and keep the town from suffering *too* badly (though many goblins are killed or taken as slaves aboard ship).

166 TR Conirode is now firmly in control of Gursha, using orkin pawns to keep the population in line and to prevent any trouble with the various chiefs of Granduria. The population has now grown past 3,000, swelling to twice that during times of peak activity (and fleet movements).

169 TR Conirode is joined by Slavver Loog, a cunning half-orc with connections to Harmotz and Jaurdaay, the two main chieftains of Granduria. With Slaaver Loog as an ally, Conirode feels free to begin his ambitious plans for Gursha, including an expansion of the harbor and the construction of a long, narrow bridge to connect the town to the mainland.

174 TR PRESENT DAY

PEOPLE, CRITTERS AND PLACES OF NOTE

Conirode (Jaundiced Grappler)

(HF 10, EP 1600, Int 15, AL NE, AC 4, MV Fly 6" (D), HD 10, HP 79 SZ L, #AT11, D 1-2x10/2-16, SA: None, SD: Nil, ML 16, Crit BSL, Reference HOB 4 p 43)

Conirode "the Terrible" is the self-proclaimed despot of Gursha. He is a very intelligent but slightly smaller than usual specimen of Jaundiced Grappler. He views the town as his private fiefdom to be ruled as he sees fit, though he has remained in power this long only because his accomplishments thus far have served the ends of the orc chiefs of Graduria. He only rarely enforces his own mandates, having grown dependent upon his half-orc "steward" to issue and assure the compliance of his edicts. Like most Palm Tyrants, Conirode is overweening and full of himself. It was Conirode (at least in Conirode's eyes) that made Gursha more than just a simple humanoid encampment (and there is some truth to his pride). He expended great effort to make the town what it is today, and continues to work to improve the place (though the sad truth of it is that the town has outgrown him, and Slavver Loog effectively governs now). The puffed-up creature remains valuable to the half-orc Steward however, so Slavver lets him retain his

delusions of grandeur and continues to act as though he is the creature's right hand man. Conirode doesn't use weapons, by and large, but he does own several magic items that make him a formidable opponent (another reason the orcs have yet to rid themselves of him). Among these are a pair of *Gauntlets of Wuss-Slapping*, a pair of *Gauntlets of Swimming & Climbing*, a *Wand of Remote Eye-Gouging* (acts much like *Hyptor's Pronged Ring of Remote Eye Gouging*, except that the expenditure of 5 charges all at once will affect everyone within 25') and two or three as-yet unidentified items. Conirode dwells in a small warren of passages accessible from the surface by a pair of large caves. These two caves were once the living quarters and temple of the goblin shamans that lorded over the original humanoid encampment here. Though none of the original goblin population still lives, there are a few die-hard goblin folk that resent their servitude to the palm tyrant and his orcs. They dream of sneaking in, killing him off and taking over (though none of them actually have the courage to attempt it).

Slavver Loog (Steward of Gursha, Half-Orc Fighter/Assassin 7/7)

(HF 5, EP 1470, S 18/25, D 12/55, C 16/74, I 17/01, W 13/12, Cha 9/02, AL LE, AC 3 [*Leather Armor of Armored Skulking* (leather armor +3, acts as Cloak of Stalking)], MV 12", HD 7, HP 79 SZ M (6'2" tall, 225 lbs), #AT 3/2, D by weapon + Strength, SA: Assassination (with surprise), +1damage with shortsword, backstab +2 damage dice, SD Disguise, spying Lang: common, Orcish, Hon: 44, Crit BSL, Age 35, Quirks and Flaws: facial scar, small bladder. Talents: ambidextrous, damage bonus, endurance, sleepwalker; Skills: armor maintenance, brawl, dirty fighting, eye gouge, evil speak, groin punch, weapon maintenance; Thief abilities: pick pocket, open locks, find traps, remove traps, move silently, hide in shadows, detect noise, climb walls, read languages). Possessions: Numerous. Significant items include magic armor, several doses of poison, *Ring of Stone Splitting*, *Loog's Longknife* (unique magical shortsword with unknown powers).

Slavver Loog may not be the biggest or strongest creature in Gursha, but he is without a doubt the most ruthless. He rules the town as an absolute despot, all the while allowing Conirode to believe he is in charge. Slavver has not been a resident of Gursha long. He didn't arrive until after the first few "Stewards" had come and gone. None of them lasted nearly as long as he has in the position, largely because he has cleverly managed to reverse the relationship between Steward and Tyrant. The half-orc is actually related by blood to the so-called Brother Chieftains, Harmotz and Jaurdaay, the two most powerful orcs in Graduria. After proving, with a well-placed knife at a tender age, that he shouldn't be picked on because of his mixed parentage, Slavver became one of the Brother Chieftains' most important and oft-used followers. He is now in Gursha at their behest, to keep an eye on Conirode and make sure he doesn't do anything that wouldn't ultimately benefit them or Graduria. Slavver is currently considering whether or not it would be worth the effort to infiltrate the Brotherhood of the Bloody Whip with his own followers. He wouldn't mind slaving with some of his underlings along the coast of Mara Deesh, but there is something to be said for staying home and torturing people that annoy him. He is not interested in becoming "independent" or betraying the Brother Chiefs, though he hopes that his illicit governorship is not to be a permanent post. It's been some time since he got to study someone's portrait and then go kill them. One of the reasons Slavver has been so successful as Steward, and why he has not yet fallen victim to the frequent civil conflict that wracks Graduria, is that he secretly owns the loyalty of a strong band of Orkin Bounty Hunters, two or three of whom are always lurking around town keeping an eye out for anyone that wishes him ill.

Gorshrigosh Horgoil (Greater Bugbear)

(HF 9, EP 2000, Int 15, AL CE, AC 3, MV 12", HD 8, HP 83 SZ L (11' tall), #AT 3/2, D 2-8+7 or by weapon +7, SA: Surprise, Strength 19, SD: Nil, ML 15, Crit BSL, Reference HOB 1 p 96)

Gorshrigosh Horgoil is the biggest and probably the smartest greater bugbear in Gursha—what he lacks in intelligence he makes up for with animal cunning and terrible determination to succeed. He is the chief of the militia and constabulary, such as it is, and not even the other members of the Privy Council will gainsay him. He was rescued by Slavver Loog

from a Goremunyan gibbet twelve years ago and has remained faithful to the half-orc ever since. A half-decade as the Steward's "Chief Constable" has made him rich and, more importantly to a bugbear, very well fed (he is known to pay large amounts of coin and bestow favor upon those who bring him new and unusual fare—or creatures—upon which to dine). Chief Horgoil is accompanied everywhere by a pair of absolutely loyal bodyguards, each a greater bugbear as big as he, and usually be two or three particularly vicious goblins known to put venom on their blades. Interestingly, there are about two-dozen goblins that worship him almost like a gawd—any one of them would give their life for him. In point of fact, several have. There have been more than one attempts to remove him since he was placed by Slavver over the Privy Council. Chief Horgoil carries a hammer shot for a missile weapon and wears an unlikely helmet inlaid with floral designs that he goes nowhere without (he does not abide teasing on the matter; the speculation about town is that it is something akin to a Helm of Lordship, but effective only amongst goblinoids). He also owns a Bag of Devouring, given to him as a birthday present by Slavver a couple of years back, into which he has stuffed more than one particularly recalcitrant subject or overly ambitious underling.

Five Furlong Height

Little remains of this former Raagean fortress, built here by the Imperial Navy in –432 TR as an outpost and victualling station for the far-flung ships of its Orlidian Sea squadrons. Little more than a few tumbled stones, the outline of walls and part of an ancient drum tower (now less than thirty feet tall) is all that is left now. Ghosts of Raagean legion auxiliaries that died far from home have been seen stalking the grounds here, and the caves and cellars beneath these ruins have recently been settled by a strong and warlike flock of Dire Corbies.

Muckraker Isle

Muckraker Isle is a stinking mud flat just outside Gursha Bay. Thrusting less than a foot above sea level at high tide (and often submerged during rough weather), the stinking atoll is barely a mile long and half a mile wide. Sailors have reported seeing Muck Trolls there, and of late the isle has been the source of several mysterious lights and haunting noises.

The Monolith (the Gursha Stone)

The monolith on the very north edge of the island has been here as long as anyone can remember. Lucras Beerbitter, a Saramoran schooner captain, mentioned it in his log *fifty years* before the first goblins were settled. It appears to be built of Saren Mantzi black marble, and has been here long enough that it is actually not as tall as it was when first erected (the weather having worn off nearly half an inch of the top, and it having sunk a fingers length into the rocky soil).

The orcs and goblins of Gursha avoid the rock, having been told by the scraggs living offshore that it is unlucky (the sea trolls having learned the hard way that folk occasionally disappear when they stand too close to the thing). This is in addition to the time a maniacal Baramoran dwarf paladin of Berronar Truesilver walked *out* of the thing and murdered over *three hundred* innocent orcs and goblins before dying of heart failure. That terrible slaughter, known as the Great Crow Feast, may have occurred nearly two centuries ago but it echoes still today. There have been many who've said he'd have slaughtered every living humanoid in the town if his ticker hadn't given out, and there are still plenty (including Slavver Loog's three pet ogres) who won't go near the place for fear that history will repeat itself.

The symbol carved into the north face of the rock is of uncertain provenance, *however*, Mydrus Ka'Jari, Master of Kala'Ja Hara and the Island of the Four Gates, has averred that the monolith is a trail marker placed by none other than the gawd Fharlaghn, and only one of several. No one had ever really put two and two together before, but there is another identical monolith in the southern reaches of Fangaerie, outside the town of Farzey. The symbol on *that* stone faces south.

Mydrus Ka'Jari was the one who pointed out that Gursha and Farzey lie on virtually the

same longitudinal line—if the symbols on the monoliths were faces, they'd be looking at each other across the leagues. You can very nearly draw a straight line between them on a map (though whether this is significant or not is purely a matter of conjecture). The Gursha monolith's brother is a landmark for travellers who venture south of Farzey (close to the Fangaerian City State-Meletian Kingdom border, northeast of Frandor's Keep) on the road to Purge. It is considered to be a great place to sit and think when one is planning a great journey (regardless of intended direction of travel or destination), and certain travel-related spells (i.e. *Teleport*, *Astral Spell*, *Timmy's Ethereal Stroll*) are known to function with much greater efficacy when cast in proximity to it.

The Farzey Stone, like the Gursha Stone, has been there for a *long* time. It has been mentioned in manuscripts predating the Five Years War, and has been found depicted on rare Meletian pottery behind the face of the despotic King Morsaad.

Some local legends say the thing is hollow and that a person can walk into it if he knows how, though care must be taken not to become trapped. Other tales (and who can say which is more likely) opine that the stone is some kind of extra-planar doorway, or portal. Not only have people disappeared on the hilltop, others have *appeared*, often wearing strange fashions and speaking an unknown tongue. One such time was the abrupt appearance of the man who called himself by the improbable moniker "Drog of Grayhack" during the War Council of the Clangsteels and the 2ND VEB prior to the so-called "March for Gurgus" during the Long War.

One notable local attraction in Farzey is, in fact, a painting on the wall of the Whistling Pig that depicts this very event. This excellent work depicts Brigadier N'ton Verscheegin of the 2ND Varturan Expeditionary Battalion planning their route of march beneath the monolith with his staff and Field Marshal Dubrowga Clangsteel of the Praxterian Dwarves. The expressions on the faces of the two generals is superbly rendered, down to the white-knuckled grip of the dwarf on his short-bardiche.

Local rumor has it that the owner of the Whistling Pig has sent to Arz for a limner to do a matching picture, one of Clangsteel and Verscheegin separating Drog from his head (which is what occurred next, incidentally, hard upon the words, "Hail and well met, I am Drog of Grayhack!", and unfortunately before anything else could be learned of the newcomer).

Whatever the relationship between the Gursha Stone and the Farzey Stone (if there is one), its true nature remains a conjecture. Like most wizards, Mydrus Ka'Jari figures if you don't know something it must be a secret worth keeping and refuses to say anything else.

Access to the NetherDeep

There is indeed access to the NetherDeep from the town, though not from the caverns under the town and hewn into the cliffs. Conirode's cave provides access to that subterranean realm. Just last summer a Fra'Neerian adventuring band called the Clarion Cockerel snuck past the Jaundiced Grappler's guards and found their way down into the darkness. The reemerged *months* later in the bottom of a mine near Kevaar Pass, in Polst, without ever having come above ground (a journey that cost the lives of eight of eleven members of the company, plus those of half dozen torchbearers, a pair of henchman and one poor scroll caddy).

Though it is not widely known, there is actually a writhing, convoluted series of primary and secondary passages NetherDeep that run from far beneath the western end of the Orluian Islands, east north-east to the southern reaches of the Kardune Peninsula and then north below the Eder Soult nearly to the Ginge. These particular caverns, tunnels and passageways are connected to the remainder of the NetherDeep of course, but they have one important and singular distinction—the form the traditional migration route of several loosely allied, nomadic Grimlock tribes. This wandering coalition numbers in the *thousands*, traveling year after year from one end of the route to the other, a migration that takes over a decade to complete. This is just long enough for the NetherDeep settlements and realms they despoil and raze during their passage to recover and repopulate, which is handy indeed for the Grimlocks.

This migration of Grimlocks has occasionally caused worry for surface kingdoms over the centuries, though as of yet no one has realized the extent of the problem. Bands of ravaging Grimlocks burst occasionally forth onto the lands above like ravaging locusts and then retreat back below ground. These raids can range in significance from minor irritations (like the

numerous forays that plagued the Barcenoran province of Hasbaria a decade and a half ago) to national tragedies (such as the utter destruction of Mew-Kish and the extirpation of its population two centuries ago).

The NetherDeep passages beneath Gursha are tertiary only (see HM Module D1-2 for more on the NetherDeep) but do connect to this route. There are any number of small enclaves and creature lairs along this route, but there are some major populations of humanoids as well. Among these are the expansive troglodyte settlements in the abandoned dwarf holds beneath Mt. Shakorri, in the Theocracy of Saryn Ar'Keet, and powerful (though insular) duergar realm beneath Baruvia Bay (to which fortress-city occasional subterranean Gradurian expeditions from Jankus Orlay and Slawd will periodically travel in search of superior weapons and armor).

Campaign and Adventure Coordination

GMs wishing to introduce this Gradurian port town have a variety of ways to do so, depending upon where their players are currently operating and what adventures they are currently involved in. Between the NetherDeep connection, the Monolith and the migratory routes of the Grimlocks, it should be fairly simply to arrange this sort of connection with several of the published HackMaster adventures. Little Keep on the Borderlands, Descent Into the NetherDeep and White Doom Mountain in particular offer avenues for such coordination (though it may take some game time to do so, given the distance involved). Other HM modules can doubtless be connected in some way with just a little work, much as with the GM's own creations.