BATTLE BROTHERS

LORE & ART

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This Lore & Art book comes at the end of the development cycle for Battle Brothers, as the finished game has been released a short while ago. The game has been a long time in the making, and it's been both a wonderful and at times taxing experience for us.

This book documents many of the artistic choices and iterations we made during the development, and our reasoning behind it. As such, it is as much a documentary on the visual aspects of the game as it is an art book to flip through.

At the same time, you'll also find additional lore on the game's factions, written by the game's writer, Casey Hollingshead. As you'll see, the game's visuals and lore are often intertwined.

This book is dedicated to our brothers-in-arms who supported the development of Battle Brothers above and beyond by getting the Supporter Edition. The game wouldn't be the same without you - thank you from all of us!

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT

Battle Brothers has come a long way since its conception and has seen some significant changes in development. It started as a hobby into which we invested many an after work-evening before it turned into our full time jobs. The original art assets had to be created in short sessions late at night. As we gained the means to invest more time into the game, we eventually redid most of the assets in order to bring them up to a higher standard of quality.

To control our cost effectiveness, we dynamically scaled our workload to better match our resources. Most systems began with a very basic, functional version which was then improved on once everything else was in place. Some concepts completely changed during the course of the development. For example, helmets were not planned to be shown at all on the character busts, and instead of dead bodies only a generic pile of bones was shown.

As the game design evolved, so did the art style. It went from a light-hearted comic approach to a somewhat more serious and gritty, albeit still exaggerated one. This development is best reflected in these vastly different iterations.

Game logo first iteration

Game logo final version

First iteration

Second iteration

Final version

Early screen concept

CHARACTER ART STYLE

As we prototyped the game, we started out with full body figures painted and animated in Flash. Below you can see an early mockup having full body characters. Note that at this point we still had square fields instead of hexes.

Given that we were a team of just three people (and only one artist) working on the game in our spare time, we soon discovered that this approach wouldn't have worked out. Not only would we have needed each character drawn in several directions, it was also important to us that the player would see all equipped gear on the characters, which would have multiplied the work further.

We were looking at an extremely high workload and limited resources with which to tackle it. Something had to give – we had to set priorities and respect our resources if we ever wanted the project to see the light of day.

The first step was to cut character animations like walking and turning. Animations are a great way of having a scene feel alive, but with 2D visuals they can require an immense amount of work. We also had to take into account that animations tend to get repetitive quickly and players would often speed them up or switch them off completely when playing for many hours.

Not having to deal with animations relieved a great strain on our time and resources, but some things still posed problems with full body representations.

Our design goal was showing all equipment on the character, including weapons, but a character would need a different pose to wield a two-handed weapon as compared to a one-handed one. This issue is compounded further as we include weapons like bows, crossbows, polearms and more exotic weaponry. Since we also wanted to show different armor types on the characters, each pose would then have needed to be drawn for every armor type. So, as it turned out, just cutting animations wasn't enough.

To take it one step further, we imagined the look and feel of a tabletop game or board game where abstracted figurines exist within a fairly lifelike environment of miniature terrain. We decided to experiment with a similar look using busts placed on sockets, where weapons would simply show as individual icons added to the figure and without any hands showing.

This approach solved a lot of our problems. We could still go with a painted, detailed look and on top of that include all the customization we wanted. By placing one layer on top of the other, much of the workload was streamlined almost instantly. As we're only showing the top half of a character and without any animations, we wanted to show as many details as we could. Characters received individual heads, haircuts and beards. We added visible injuries and damage layers for every type of armor and helmet that can be worn.

Ultimately, our resource constraint led to a unique visual style that is very distinct from other fantasy TBS games and features an unrivaled level of detail.

Character Design

All characters in Battle Brothers feature large heads and prominent facial features, resulting in an exaggerated, almost caricature style. The smaller a figure gets, the more iconic and readable it has to be. We support seamless zooming in and out on the tactical map, so faces have to be readable wherever the camera is. Not using real proportions for weapon icons followed similar reasoning. Real weapons tend to be thin and long, which makes them hard to read from afar. For example, a real sword's hilt and handle are miniscule compared to the overall length of the sword.

Character busts first iteration

Character busts final version

BUST SETUP

All character busts in Battle Brothers are composed by layering a multitude of graphic assets one over the other. This system brings a lot of strengths in exchange for only a few weaknesses. Combining layers multiplies the visual character variation achievable with a low amount of assets. This is important not only to create a great variety of individual characters, but it also sets the base for our equipment system. Did you know that there's 342,720 different body looks in the game, even before equipment?

Changing equipment simply swaps individual layers. If items get damaged or characters injured, additional layers are added or removed. This system allows for dynamic changes of a character's look and equipment to match their actual condition. As a side effect, the quick swapping of layers also gives more visual impact to combat. As all human characters use the same equipment layers, the various factions can share graphic assets with simple alterations when needed. Diversity is almost exponentially created at the drop of a footman's helmet!

One drawback of this system is that all layers have to match up perfectly, which limits the possibilities of anatomical variation like large facial features, figure sizes, and overall shape. Another consequence is that helmets and haircuts can not be combined, because some haircuts would not be covered by the overlying helmet in their entirety.

1. REFERENCE

2. CONCEPT

3. FLAT COLOR

4. BASIC SHADING

5. FINAL SHADING

6. ADDING DETAILS

7. OVERLAY DIRT

8. FINISHED ASSET

WORLD MAP LOOK

1. Paper Map Concept
The hand drawn paper look was one of the first attempts at designing the world map. While providing an intriguing look, it proved to be difficult to break down into tiles. The biggest issue here was the repetitiveness of the parchment texture. Furthermore, the low detail paper look could become dull and boring after extensive hours of play.

2. Basic Hex Map Concept
An early hex based version featuring two abandoned systems: a "terror level" for settlements and different interaction icons for locations. Just like the paper map, these hex tiles are not perspectively deformed, so there is a visual discrepancy between the map and the location graphics.

3. Detailed Square Map Concept
This map shows two big advancements; a detailed look for more visual engagement and a sense of perspective. On the downside the square tiles tend to have an artificial, constructed look.

4. Detailed Hex Map Prototype
The first version with all the basics in the right place. Neutral parties were represented by chessboard figurines and there was only one type of settlement graphic. The scattered icons were supposed to represent some sort of "enemy activity". The overall look is still very repetitive and artificial.

5. Final Prototype
We started to use tiles with transitions to blend the borders of different environments, which is a great way to achieve a more organic look. In spite of these improvements the map has an overall lack of geographical and visual diversity and the locations are not properly embedded into the environment.

6. Final Version
The extensive use of tile transitions and additional details create a very organic look, the underlying hex tiles are hardly recognizable. The environment shows a lot of detail and is generally pleasant to look at, even for longer periods of time. On top of that the map finally features big bodies of water and a coast line as well as various different climate zones and environments.

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WORLD MAP SETUP

1. Base Tiles
The first layer is made up of hex tiles arranged in a scale pattern. While the tiles allow for a detailed, procedural map generation, their irregular shapes, different for each terrain type, help blend the different environments.

2. Details
The second layer is the so called 'detail layer'. It contains mountains, hills, forests and other geographical features. Each base tile set has its own associated set of details. A tile of green plains would have flowers and lakes, for example.

3. Objects
The third layer contains objects that the player can interact with, like locations and moving parties. Locations may come in different states to show whether they are intact or destroyed, and use an additional layer for lighting effects at night, which is gradually faded in at dusk.
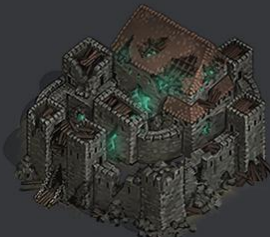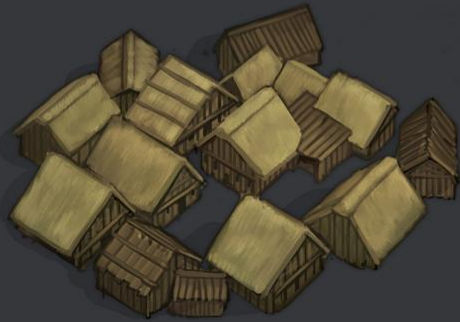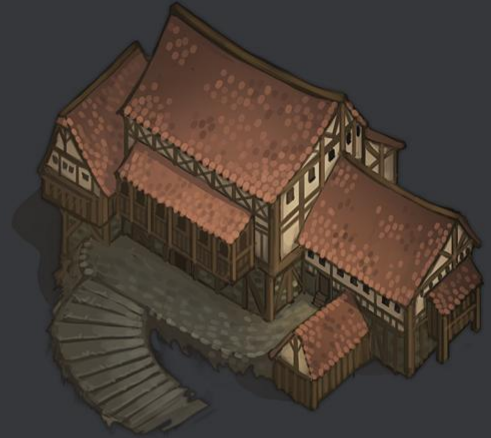
WORLD MAP ASSETS
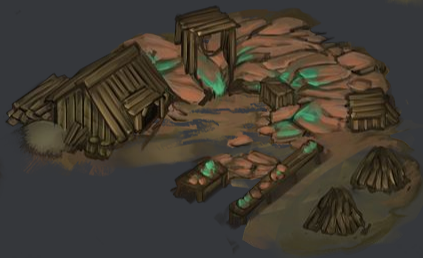
COMBAT MAP SETUP

1. Base Tiles
The base layer for the combat maps is made up of individual ground tiles, creating the visual backdrop for the following assets. Transitions between different tile types are eased by transition sprites for all six directions. These tiles also define the type of environment the combat takes place in, which often translated to gameplay effects such as restricted movement in swamps.
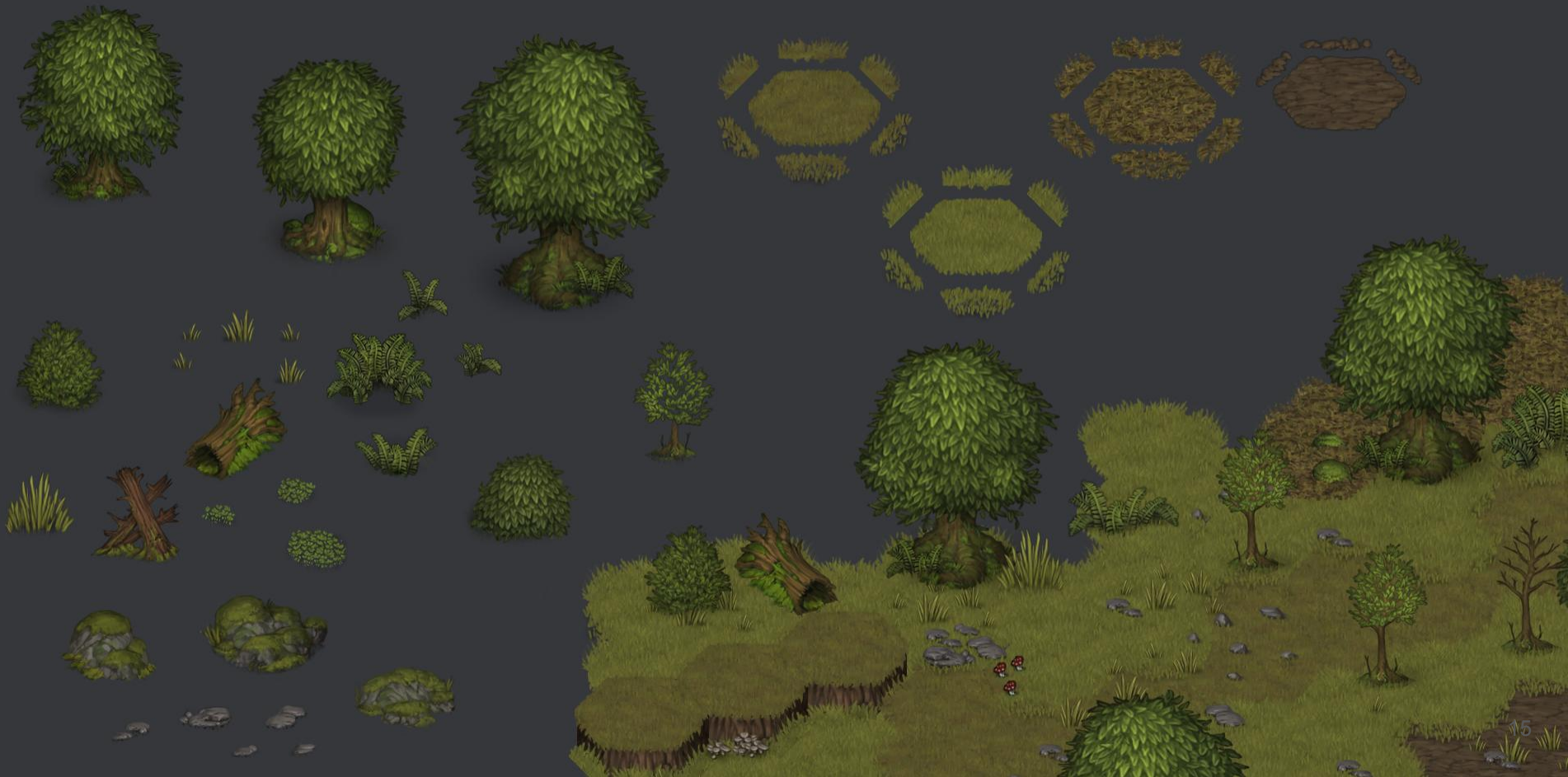
2. Height Levels
Height levels play an important role as tactical vantage points. The hexagonal look is not very organic, but as these levels have major gameplay impact it's important that the player has a clear visual read on them.

3. Combat Map Assets
The Assets create the final look of the environment. Some of them serve purely visual purposes, others also have gameplay effects like blocking line of sight and movement.

COMBAT MAP ASSETS

VILLAGE SCREEN SETUP

1. A flat background canvas showing the environment, serving as a backdrop for the actual village.
2. Town hall or stronghold, featuring different looks depending on the size and purpose of the settlement.
3. Civilian houses, also depending on the size of the settlement.
4. A ramp leading up to the town hall, allowing to show all interactive buildings at the same time.
5. Interactive buildings.
6. Foreground decoration.

THE ORCS

Introduction

As long as humans remember there have been tensions with the wild Orc tribes that roam the surrounding lands. Orcs live as nomads, constantly on the move to support themselves by hunting, gathering and raiding anyone weaker than their tribe. They do not possess knowledge of agriculture or mining, relying instead on taking what they need from 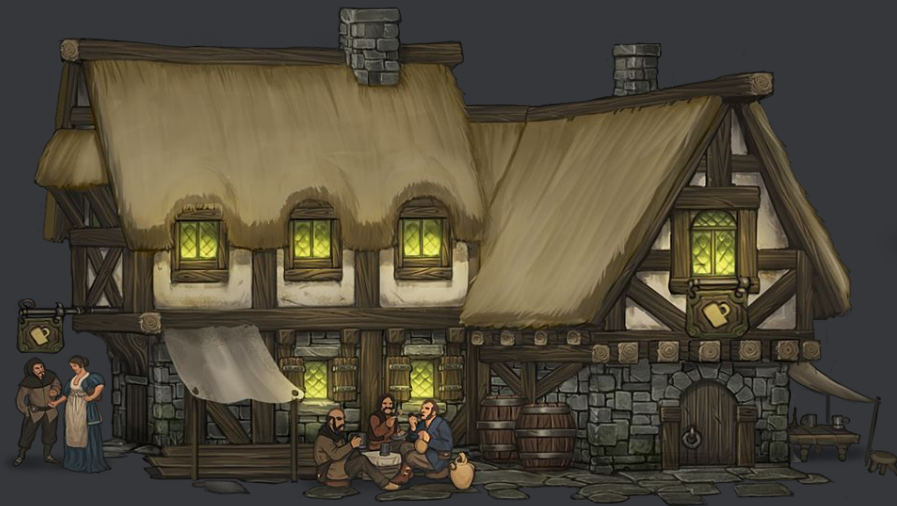others. Indeed, Orcs are quick to take up weapons, and in Orc culture, he who spends time gathering, crafting or building when it is easier and faster to just take these things away from others is considered simple-minded. Life for an Orc, then, is to a large part establishing dominance over others and taking things for him or herself.

Although there are many distinct Orc tribes out there, they have a lot in common. They usually are ruled by the most powerful Orc in the tribe, a Warlord, that ascends to leadership by brute force and has to defend his claim also by leading the tribe to greater spoils. Therefore, different Orc tribes are constantly feuding each other and any alliances are usually short-lived.

As human settlements began to spread out, confrontations with the Orcs started to escalate quickly from smaller skirmishes into a full-out Orc invasion and subsequent war. The war ended with a costly human victory which had the Orcs withdraw from the settled lands and back into the wild. There, it didn't take long for the Orc tribes to begin feuding each other again and lose sight of the human lands.

This is where they stayed until now, except for occasional raids on outlying farms and villages.

Yet, many a man and woman live in fear of the day that the Orc tribes unite again and start an invasion, leaving nothing but burning rubble in its wake.
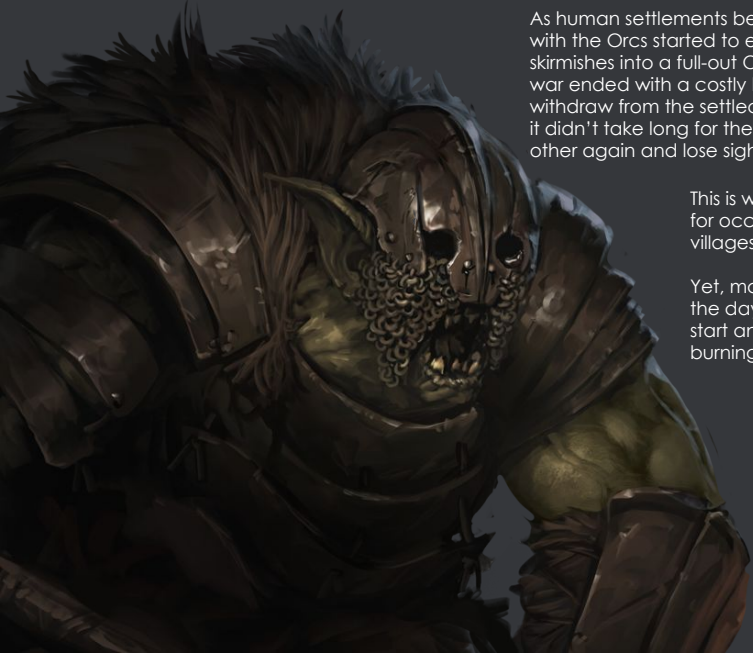
Orc Physique

In Battle Brothers, Orcs are physically stronger than humans. An adult orc towers a human and has the strength to use weaponry and wear armor with great effect that would quickly tire out any human. With their strength, they also gain a percentage damage bonus to every attack – less for young Orcs, and more so for adult ones. While Orcs are subject to fatigue and morale, just like your Battle Brothers are, they have plenty of both, and it takes a while for an orc to run out of steam or realize that a battle has turned against him.

For many Orcs, their physicality manifests itself in brutal Charges. With this skill, Orcs can crash into a Battle Brother over a short distance, hurling themselves against their target and stunning it for one turn. A Spearwall can repel charging Orcs and a Shieldwall can offer some protection against being stunned from the impact – but shields don't have a high life expectancy against Orcs, as they utilize massive hatchets to hack shields to pieces.

Orcs focus entirely on the offense, where they excel. They use their skills to crush the player's battle line with raw force and have it quickly dissolve into a chaotic frenzy where they generally have the upper hand. For this reason, meeting an Orc warband head-on in open battle is usually a bad idea and will leave you at a disadvantage. On the other hand, Orcs neglect defense. While some of them will carry shields, they seldom make active use of them, preferring instead to attack. Due to their reckless fighting style and physically being big targets, they're also easier to hit than other opponents. In prolonged engagements, or in up-hill battles, where defense matters more than offense, Orcs may suddenly see themselves at a disadvantage.

Orc Weaponry

Orcs have their own distinct weapons and armor, each matching their physique. While they do know how to craft metal, they are not particularly good at honing and refining their works. This is why Orc weapons are usually very heavy and lack balance – although the player can loot and use these weapons, they're clearly not made for use by humans and are unwieldy save for the strongest of Battle Brothers. Orcish armor, however, can not be used by the player. Simply speaking, it just wouldn't fit. Some mercenaries will playfully wear orc armor to make fun of their defeated foes, donning the enormous helms as though they'd placed buckets on their heads.

Young Orcs

Young Orcs make up the backbone of Orc society, as Orcs usually don't have a high life expectancy but are quite reproductive. Their youthfulness is easily spotted by their bright green skin. These orcs are ferocious fighters that make up for their lack of experience and skill with pure strength and recklessness.

Because orcs tend to gear themselves by and with the loot they've found and fought over, Young Orcs are not especially well armed foes. They tend to appear equipped with the best that they've acquired in their still young lives: tree branches, handaxes, light shields, and tribal armor made of animal parts or rusted metals they may have dug up. So eager to prove themselves, especially young orcs will even go to war with no protection at all.

"Not going to lie, they reminded me of my younger self. Stupid, brash, trying to prove everything to a world that had nothing to give. They were considerably unluckier than I, though. What a shame." – Mercenary after a victorious battle with young orcs.

Orc Berserkers

"The basaldi and yeshkun mushrooms offer disturbing results when digested: pupils widen until the whole eye is black and the eater is quickly overcome with violent urges. Some patients experienced uncomfortable sweating, leading them to disrobe and run about in the nude. It is believed that the more wild of the orcs, if such a distinction could be made, are frequent consumers of these mushrooms." – Mushrooms and Man, What to Eat, What to Avoid, and What to (Discretely) Enjoy

Berserkers put themselves in a wild rage by using mushrooms or hypnosis. And some are simply just crazy. Physically speaking, the berserker is like any other orc: large, strong, and fast, capable of closing distance by charging and swinging at an unexpecting foe. But these creatures are on the fringes of an already temperamental orc society. For this reason, berserkers are often found wandering the land looking for beasts to slay. They grind the bones of defeated foes and use the bonemeal to paint themselves with warring rites.

Armored in sheer insanity, berserkers make up for their nonexistent defense by wielding enormous chains or axes. With these weapons they can easily smash even the sturdiest of knights in a single blow. Feeding off the rage of a killing blow, berserkers will grow stronger and more dangerous, increasing their damage and gaining adrenaline to strike again. An unchecked berserker can easily roll up a backline, killing many men right in a row!

Lacking any regard for self-preservation, berserkers often attack solo. This may leave berserkers to fend for themselves at the flanks of a battle, just as they appear to hold a special position in Orc society outside of battle. This solitary nature and lack of armor makes them vulnerable and easy to deal with - so long as they're kept at a distance.

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Orc Warriors

If a Young Orc is strong and nasty enough to survive into adult age, he may eventually become an Orc Warrior. As evident from their darker skin color and collection of scars, these seasoned fighters combine the already dangerous physique of an orc with the combat skills of an experienced warrior.

Years of gathering spoils from battle have allowed them to loot all kinds of armor, break it apart, and assemble it into one huge abomination that actually fits their massive bodies. This armor is made up of various pieces of human equipment, like a helmet's facemask, a piece of chainmail, or a split kettle hat. It's as much protection in battle as it is a collection of trophies from their past victories. For the finishing touch, ears, fingers and sometimes whole heads are worn. Not wanting to be another upgrade to this attire, most men will smartly run from an Orc Warrior.

A creature strong enough to don all this heavy armor is, unsurprisingly, strong enough to muscle its way into enemy ranks. Orc Warriors love the fight, and they don't mind being surrounded to get a taste. They will smash their way through a shieldwall, knocking footmen back into archers like a fisherman might crack open a clam to get to the meat.

"What the hell, man." - Routed soldier after a fight with Orc Warriors.

Orc Warlord

"... brute strength can only win so many battles and when it fades there is nothing but a short spurt of chaos before another warlord comes and takes over. Thank the old gods that the orcs know not of diplomacy. It would require an abnormally powerful orc to unite all of the greenskins so I do not believe we, and we as in all us humans, are in any existential danger. Also, tell Goethe that my potatoes and rhubarb have not arrived and it has been three weeks now." – Scholar's message to a nobleman's inquiry on the role of 'leadership' in an orc tribe.

When every orc speaks the language of violence, the biggest, meanest one of the bunch is a shoe-in to lead the group. So it goes: orcs are big, orc warlords are the biggest. In the greenskins' dominance hierarchy, the warlord is the patriarch. Their growls and shouts break enemy morale while raising the spirits of their own fighters.

A bestial warlord tends to fashion armor out of its defeated foes, plating its already leathered hide with smashed helms, pierced chest pieces, and broken shields. Some even flaunt arrows and bolts sticking out of their sides, as though the lingering shots are a better display of toughness than mere scars. The warlord is one of the mightiest foes to defeat in battle.

ORC VISUAL DEVELOPMENT

First Iteration

These very first busts show four types of orcs. A wild orc, a skirmisher, a fighter and a leader. The look is rather cartoony and inspired by early fantasy board games like Hero Quest. At the time, this was fitting the overall tone of the game. The main issue was that these busts did not have individual layers for equipment and armor. This proved to be extremely limiting and necessitated reworks further down the road.

Second Iteration

With the second iteration we set up the new system of combining individual layers to create the character busts. Even though the base was in place, the corresponding assets had to be painted under a lot of pressure and time constraints, which resulted in a very poor overall quality. This made for an initially inconsistent look between these different Orc types.

Visual Rework

Since the second iteration Orc visuals were lacking in quality, they were completely redone from the ground up. The comparison shows how the final assets are much more detailed. In the world of Battle Brothers, the skin of Orcs gets darker the older they become, which is why Young Orcs have the fairest skin. However, in order to give all the Orcs a more coherent look, we adjusted their skin colors to be a bit closer together.

We also darkened the color palette slightly and tilted it more into an olive hue to better support their menacing look, especially with the Young Orcs who previously could turn out quite bright. The faces shown here are just some of several different ones made available for every type of unit. On top of that we added several armor variations, as well as helmets and warpaint, to create a large variety of looks for identical units. The design of weapons was similarly redone to create a coherent look across the whole Orc faction.

First iteration

THE ORC BANNERS

The first iteration of Orc banners were simple placeholders to get the basic principles in place. White, crude painting on a ragged flag looks like something the heavy handed orcs would be able to create by themselves. The depicted symbols represent important aspects of orc culture like weapons, skulls, flames and other aggressive or intimidating themes. Obviously, the low quality, lack of diversity and detail had to be improved on.

The second iteration of the banners are completely new graphics, but the basic principles laid in the first iteration still apply. The color range has been shifted more towards a simple range of brown, black and grey tones, giving the banners a dirty leather look as opposed to a cloth flag. The frame for the banners now reflects the depicted symbol to create a stronger identity and more unique look. The paintings look more detailed and have less of a cartoony look.

Final version

THE GOBLINS

Introduction

Goblins reside in small states far beyond the eyes and ears of human civilization. The stunty greenskins tend to congregate within a single, but heavily populated city. Although distant relatives to the Orcs, they don't have much in common beyond the skin color. The difference in size between the two species of greenskins has many wondering just what sort of creature they might have shared a common ancestry with.

A complex caste system helps govern Goblin city states. The very architecture and geography of the cities themselves provide the pathways to power: powerful political castes centralize the city, living and operating out of large towers right in the middle of the city. Enervating from this opulent core, the castes sprawl outward, gradually losing power and status, and with it fanciful architectures and lifestyles, until you get to the lower caste, a group which lives out of huts and tents that dwell beneath the shadows of more towering, and tower-living, entities. From profligate peaks to destitute dales, the goblin city is a proverbial mountain of acutely obvious social statuses.

Naturally, these statuses affect how the Goblins operate. Because Goblins are so numerous, the political caste is not governed by a single, powerful goblin, but instead by a council of the brightest or most shrewd. This council debates, decides, and delineates tasks as it sees fit – usually whatever helps further their own pompous existence. When an order of attack is given, for example, it is delegated to a Goblin Overseer who takes the command and visits the lower castes. He conscripts as many from these lower castes as he sees fit and then leads the troop out to do the bidding of the council.

Thankfully, much of the plotting and deceiving that goes on is largely between the greenskins themselves. A Goblin Overseer is just as likely to follow an order as he is to turn his newly-recruited army around and use it to kill off his rivals. For this reason, large scale military plans are almost always voted down until virtually every military endeavor is slowly whittled into mere raids and patrols. Despite having the overwhelming numbers to threaten much of the land, these constant squabbles and backstabbing keeps the greenskins in check.

"Don't underestimate the Goblin. It lives its whole life looking up and it's used to fighting from that position, too, with all the cheating and bullshit that comes with such a permanent position of disadvantage." – Commander's note dispersed to his army after a third and surprisingly deadly run-in with goblin raiders.

"After much study, it is the belief of the school that Orcs and Goblins do not share a language or any other sense of unity. They will use one another for their own gain and, failing that, will war one another just as well. We shouldn't have much to worry about in regards to some supposed 'greenskin invasion.'" - Ethics in Greenskin Study, as written and argued by the 'Young Scholars' organization.

From a game design perspective, we wanted to introduce a faction that felt very different from our existing factions. Instead of directly engaging the player in line battles, Goblins have a heavy focus on ranged combat and lowering the effectiveness of Battle Brothers by applying various status effects. With their ranged weapons, they often prefer a defensive tactic and let the player come to them to press the attack, challenging the very stationary approach that dominated many a player's playstyle at the time.

Ultimately, we wanted there to be no one superior tactic that was best against all enemies, but instead force the player to always adjust their tactics based on the enemy they're facing. This makes for a much more interesting and diverse combat experience in the long run, and Goblins were a great step in this direction. Despite early difficulties, players eventually found consistent ways to beat Goblins which helped demonstrate that we had a strong and flexible combat system working for us.

Goblin Physique

In Battle Brothers, Goblins are physically weaker than humans and about the size of a large child. Due to their small stature, they're unable to wear heavy armor or wield heavy weaponry, and they can't take a lot of physical punishment before going down. As the bulk of their forces are conscripted from a lower and impoverished caste, most goblin fighters have poor stamina and will rarely stick around if a battle starts going south.

On the other hand, Goblins are dexterous little creatures. They use their small weapons with astounding accuracy, precisely aiming for weak spots in their opponent's armor. Because of their size and general skittishness, the little greenskins are inherently harder to hit. Goblins are also quite cunning and intelligent. They rely on their numbers and wits to make up for physical deficiencies. No matter the size of the fight, ambushes and dirty tricks are part and parcel to any goblin fighting troop. The core of their tactics revolve around keeping opponents at range, holding stronger foes in place while the more durable and deadly Wolfriders flank around the sides.
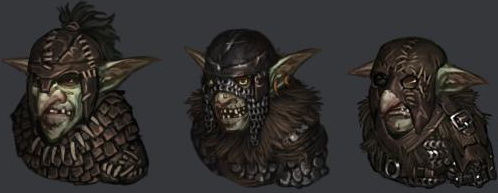
Goblin Weapons & Armor

Being quite crafty and intelligent creatures, it's no surprise that Goblins have developed a whole arsenal of deadly tools. While neither their armor or weapons are particularly heavy, they're well made, balanced, and suited to specifically to fighting taller and stronger opponents. Their equipment emphasizes their preference for both offensive mobility and defensive ranged combat to wear enemies down. For protection, they wear leather, mail, and scale armor. Unlike orcish monstrosities, goblin weapons are easily handled by humans, though they are not the most damaging choice of gear. Unless you've an army of children, wearing goblin armor is a no go.

Anyone fighting a Goblin should be aware of the greenskins' trickier tools. A popular weapon with Goblin infantry is the 'Spiked Bola' – small iron balls with metal spikes bound together with rope, to be hurled from a distance. Another specialized tool is the 'Throwing Net' – tossed over opponents, immobilizing them and leaving them open to future attacks. Even their frontlines prefer distance as Goblins utilize the 'Jagged Pike' to push foes away and inflict terrible bleeding wounds.

Goblin Skirmisher

Goblin Skirmishers make for the bulk of the faction's infantry. They are armed with a melee weapon of Goblin design – pikes, spears, falchions, long knives – and usually a shield for defense. They also tend to carry bolas and nets to stifle incoming enemies. Skirmishers are not natural attackers, but are very competent in delaying an enemy charge and holding the line for Goblin Ambushers to pick the enemy off one by one. Being skirmishers, this fighting force won't stick around for long if bogged down in a hard-hitting, close-quarters slog.

Goblin Wolfrider

Goblins breed and train large wolves to use as mounts for their feared Wolfrider regiments. Wolfriders are faster than any infantry on the battlefield and can easily pass through difficult terrain. This makes them them ideal flankers and a large threat to archers and other lightly armed troops with from the rear. Both the wolf and the rider will attack a target, making the goblin cavalry an especially deadly enemy.

On hitting a Wolfrider unit, either the rider or the wolf may be hit, and they may be killed independently from each other. Slaying just the wolf will leave a Goblin Skirmisher to continue fighting on foot, while killing the rider will have you face a frenzied wolf as dangerous as any wild animal.

Goblin Ambusher

Goblin Ambushers are dedicated ranged troops armed with bows of and wearing light camouflage armor that offers little protection but makes them hard to spot from a distance. Presumably because of their experience in fighting heavily armored Orcs, they're trained to target weak spots in their opponent's armor for increased direct damage. Their arrow tips are coated in poison that blurs vision and makes coordinated movement a monumental effort. The effect of poison slowly diminishes with each turn after getting hit.

Goblin Overseer

Goblin Overseers are veterans and members of a higher caste mandated by a Goblin council to lead and oversee a regiment of Goblins in performing a task. They're easily identified by their ornate armor and helmet. Each Overseer uses a whip with which they can 'encourage' the common Goblin to perform better or to flog fleeing Goblins until they return to the fight.

Because Goblins are drafted into service, the Overseer plays an important part in keeping everything together. Should he fall, Goblins are much more likely to rout and flee the battlefield instead of soldiering on. For these reasons, they should be prioritized as high value targets.

Goblin Shaman

Goblin Shamans are members of a small and secretive caste who seemingly possess otherworldly powers. This magick is no less mysterious and inexplicable to the average Goblin than they are to a human witnessing them, and the nature of their power is a jealously guarded secret. In Goblin society, Shamans are often consulted as oracles, healers, and experts on poison. Although not part of the political caste, they hold tremendous power and influence.

In battle, Goblin Shamans support their troops by commanding nature itself. They have been witnessed spurring vile roots grow from the ground in an instant to hold people in place and sending swarms of black flies onto their opponents. Up close and personal, however, they are but frail old Goblins with no real weapon to protect themselves.

GOBLIN VISUAL DEVELOPMENT

First Iteration
The first iteration of the Goblin busts already shows some elements recurring in later versions, like the scale armor and facial expression. Similar to the Orcs these busts were inspired by board games like Hero Quest and old school RPGs. Although the style was okay to start out, it wasn't unique in any way and didn't add anything new to the Goblin faction.

Visual Rework
Creating the final assets was predominantly a task of polishing and adding detail, as the second iteration was already very close to our vision. Apart from that it was important to create better visual variety by adding a range of different faces for the most numerous classes: Ambushers and Skirmishers. In the same vein, we added three different types of armor and helmets for these classes, thereby creating a large visual variance when facing Goblins.

Second Iteration
The first step of the second iteration was defining the Goblin faction archetypes. Based on these archetypes we then started designing the new visuals, aiming for a more realistic and gritty look to create a menacing impression. Due to their more iconic look, the different classes of Goblin combatants are now easily recognizable. Although going in the right direction, the Goblin assets were still missing detail and variety.

First iteration

THE GOBLIN BANNERS

In their first iteration, the Goblin banners were set up the same way all other banners worked: a wooden frame with a cloth canvas to display white on dark symbols. By sharing the same basic setup, however, it's hard to create a clear visual identity establishing Goblins as a faction of their own.

The goal for the second iteration was to create a unique visual style, clearly setting the Goblins apart from Orcs and other factions. This was achieved by avoiding white on dark symbols and by breaking up the classic 'banner' shape. The metal banner poles were inspired by Goblin lore, where parallels to Roman city-states can be found. The symbols themselves represent different goblin states and often use themes of power in Goblin culture like night skies, spiders, skulls and ancient, shamanistic runes.

Second iteration

THE BEASTS

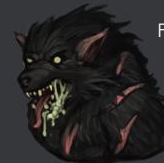First iteration

Final version
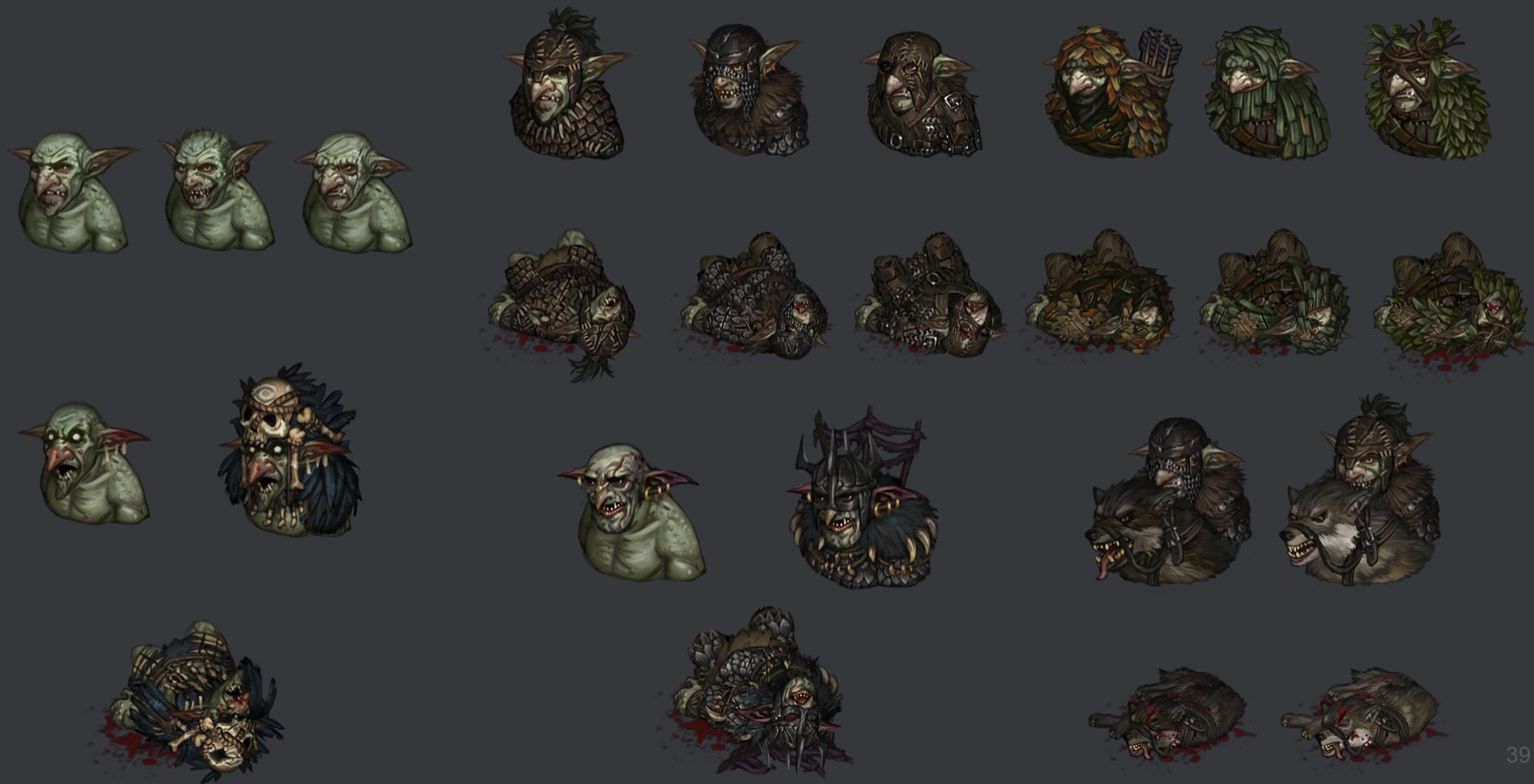
Nachzehrers

The origin of Nachzehrers is unknown, but a popular story amongst peasantry is that they are manifestations of sinful suicides. Punished by the old gods for giving up the gift of life, someone who commits suicide is brought back to exist as a ghoulish monstrosity. Their garish and ugly appearance serves to further remind the Nachzehrer of the beauty of life, the beauty which they sinfully forfeited by killing themselves. Many believe that this is why they not only seek to end life, but also to consume it, engorging themselves on the recently slain. Then again, others believe that there is nothing supernatural about them at all and that they are but wild beasts.

Whatever their origin, the Nachzehrer should be taken seriously as a threatening presence on the battlefield. They carry large claws capable of slashing through leather armor with ease and their musculature makes for hardy strikes that can batter even the sturdiest of soldiers. But the most notable feature of the creature is its head. With faces shaped like shovels, these monsters consume any corpses they come across, piling the gore into their mouths with grisly glee. Having eaten their fill, the Nachzehrer will both heal and grow larger. In its biggest state, the Nachzehrer can eat a man whole! If said man is not rescued, he will be digested within the monster's stomach.

Fighting Nachzehrers comes with a particularly unique tactical consideration: making sure that you are not leaving dead bodies within reach of the creatures. A Spearwall might work for a time, but if the beasts crash through and eat their fallen brethren, you will have a row of mighty and large Nachzehrers on your hands. Similarly, while their lack of armor makes them easy to kill from a distance, the beasts are not adverse to cannibalism and will gladly eat these corpses just as well. Once fully grown, the monster is not only extremely dangerous in melee combat, but it will devour men while it fights. Stepping on corpses to cut off potential meals and heals is a great way to fight these foul creatures.

"Behold that suicide is not the end, behold that for such sin there is no end!" – Friar standing over the corpses of two Nachzehrers slain after killing a noble. Given an odd ring-like indention on one of the beast's fingers, they were believed to be the bodies of a Lady Garrett and Sir Theo who had been caught trying to elope a week prior. The distraught couple threw themselves into the river which ran beside the hamlet.

Direwolves

"If a lumberjack has sensitivities about shitting or pissing in front of his peers, he should not be in the forest. Any lumberjack who wanders away from the group is likely to never be seen again and we will not go looking for you." – The World's Longest Guide to Cutting Trees, found in the first paragraph of the one-page pamphlet.

Direwolves in the world

Foul, feral, ferocious. The direwolf is an extremely dangerous animal and should never be approached. Direwolves do not mindlessly roam the forests so much as meticulously stalk them, displaying a rather scary intelligence to avoid fights they might lose. It is for this reason that a direwolf itself is impossible to study in the wild. Instead, corpses are brought to scholars for analysis.

A direwolf's physiology is oddly man-like. While they share the inverted shins of a wolf or bear, direwolves are often reported attacking upright, standing on both legs to better angle their assault. Survivors state that direwolves attack with blinding speed and lethality. Speaking of attacks, direwolves are known to bite, swipe, and claw-kick their victims. One report states that a lumberjack was killed in this manner: a direwolf jumped on him and bit into his skull and, using that as upper leverage, dropkicked the lower end of his body to effectively split him in twain.
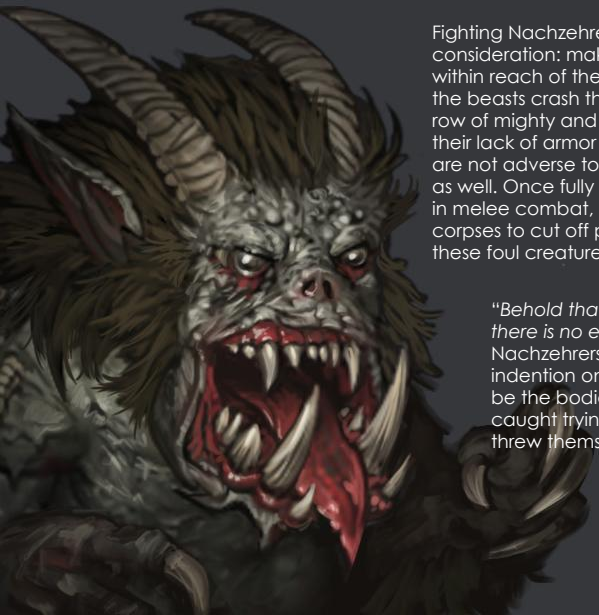
THE ANCIENT DEAD

Introduction

"Shemb'akh, yusarra le ferrer del ustibembi. The Fashle-keng vast mordier." – An inscription found on an ancient shield. Unable to decipher what it meant, and much to the horror of the scholars, the shield was melted down for its precious metal.

Petty nobles, destitute villages, roaming monsters. This is not how the world has always been. Long ago, in a different era, perhaps with a different kind of man, a great empire spanned the known world. Provincial lands saw sound governance whether they were in the blistering sands of the south or the harsh frozen tundra of the north. Even with dozens of peoples and cultures, this empire ruled through solidarity and unity. Commerce was strong and a sense of purpose even stronger: that the Empire must last forever, an idea purposed into respected and adored Legions. These soldiers, through overwhelming power, protected the Empire not only from outsiders, but from internal strife.

It is not known how this Empire fell apart. A common belief is that dozens of peoples could never be peaceful beneath one banner, that the sense of tradition and culture would inevitably pull them away from the core rule, like wiry seams unwound from a banner of many colors. However, some scholars believe that the Empire was rotted from within not by politics, but by religion. Cultists, doomsayers, and shamans of all sorts withered the core tenets and ultimately pitched the Empire into total chaos.

But does it matter what brought it down? What is known now is that these ancient dead are rising again, not alive and not yet dead, either. Legions that never tire, legionnaires that know no fear, a cold machine that ever marches forward, to claim again what was once theirs.

The Ancient Legions

"How would I design the perfect army? I'd start with the perfect warrior: a cold, calculating man who has no fear, does not tire, and will always go where I tell him. Give me a thousand such men and I will conquer the whole world." – Nobleman in response to a scholar's question.

The Ancient Undead armies are spearheaded by their Ancient Legions. This fighting force once swept over the known world, dominating new lands and keeping old ones stable. In the afterlife, they still serve to fulfill both purposes – but now they are mindless and without human frailties. Nothing more than bones, they constantly test the resolve of the men who fight against them.

Legions fight in tight formations two ranks deep. Tall shields bolster the front while long polearms do damage from the rear row. A formation like this does not mindlessly charge, but slowly advances to make better use of its shields and weapons. With no ranged support, the legion prefers to walk down its enemies slowly and carefully. So it follows that anything which can disrupt their formation – such as abilities, hills, or forests – also disrupts the fighting effectiveness of the legion.

Ancient Auxiliary

The bulk of the Ancient Undead's fighting forces is made up of the auxiliaries, recruits once conscripted by local vassals. These enemies carry spears, short swords, or a falx. They're lightly armored and wear cloaks sporting the pattern of their ancient clans. Because Battle Brothers focuses on a pseudo-Germanic region of the world, the equipment is based on the look of ancient Germanic and Celtic warriors.

Time has taken a toll on both weapons and armor, and so you may find them attacking with broken swords seemingly unaware of it. Much of their gear is unsalvageable, but their helmets, rusted and worn down they may be, are still heavy and thick enough to give some protection.

Ancient Legionary

Ancient legionnaires make up the medium infantry. Once professional soldiers, legionnaires enlisted for several years to be trained and used in the Empire's campaigns. In exchange, they received land they could settle at and call their own. Legionnaires are well-armed with metal armor, sword and shield, or pike.

The legion existed across every age of the empire so you'll find legionnaires that died a hundred years apart, all with different armor, helmet and shield design, yet still marching together. Different were their eras, but singular their purpose.

Ancient Honor Guards

The highest honor a common legionary could hope to achieve, joining the honor guard involved a symbolic death to shed the weakness and frailty of man, and being transformed into a tool of the emperor. No longer a man, but the manifestation of the emperor's will, the honor guard was encased entirely in armor that did not show any flesh, becoming essentially a living, moving and fighting statue. The process and ceremony behind this transformation is lost.

Honor guards make use of heavy weaponry such as the warscythe, the rhomphaia, and a two-handed cleaver. They were once among the finest and most dedicated warriors of their time, and although now but bones in rusty armor, their skills still echo through their every swing of the sword.

Necrosavants

As the Empire conquered most of the known world, once foreign and remote lands turned into provinces. What was local custom or cult once, hidden away and not spoken of elsewhere, suddenly found itself a part of a large empire where roads and couriers carried commerce and culture further than ever. Using the Empire's own road system, a secretive cult blossomed out of the blistering deserts of the south. While the Empire's gods promoted strength, humility, compassion, fertility, and health, the cultists worshipped and proselytized death itself.

"When you have nothing but misery, it's easy to let go, to welcome the warm embrace of the gods that sets you free from all earthly burden and hardships. But it's those that have everything on this earth, power and wealth, that cling to it at the end of their life, that clutch to it in desperation, that bargain, that curse, that would pay any price to stay. And it is those who would embrace not the gods, for their touch is not salvation for them, but whose touch would tear them away and apart from the earthly things they prize above all, the things that they have chosen to become. It is those who would forsake the gods and turn to the cult of death instead, that would die over and over again, and yet never leave this earth, forever bound to it, forever paying the price." - Strange script found in an ancient crypt.

Whether an ardent cultist once, or a decadent noble seeking eternal life, they have long since become a being that measures time no longer in years but in lifetimes: a Necrosavant. It will wither away and die in time, again and again, but never leave this world as long as it is rejuvenated with the blood of the living.

The less hit points a Necrosavant has, the more it will visually wither away, and the more hit points it gains by savouring a victim's blood, the more it will rejuvenate until its appearance is almost that of a healthy human. The Necrosavant has the unique ability to turn into a flock of bats to quickly position itself on the battlefield, making it perhaps the most mobile opponent in Battle Brothers. However, it doesn't wear any armor or carry a shield, leaving it vulnerable to damage and immobilization.

Ancient Priests

The Empire had countless religions and cults, and each had priests spreading the word of their gods. Keeping the layman faithful, these powerful clerics performed rites and proclaimed miracles. The ancient priest was one such individual once. Now brought back to a sort of unlife, his very existence is making a mockery out of the very faith he once held dear. His work is turned into a perversion of what he once devoted his life to: he no longer gives blessings or comfort, but brings foulness and rot, and horrible visions of worlds well beyond our own.

The Ancient Priest fills a support role. While of little danger all by himself, he quickly becomes a decisive piece in any battle when protected by ranks of ancient legionnaires. If one can manage to cut through the frontlines, they'll often still find the ancient priest protected by the ever deadly and armor-encased Honor Guard.

The ancient priest's first skill is to summon Miasma, a thick mist of rot that is rather incompatible with life. Miasma is created in an area of 7 tiles and sticks to these tiles for several rounds. Any living being ending its turn on a tile affected by miasma will lose hit points – it's only a few each round, but armor does not protect against breathing in the foul fog, and choking on the deadly smog does eventually add up if you don't move out of it.

Horror is the Ancient Priest's other skill and, as the name implies, it brings horrific visions to its unfortunate victims. It's an area-of-effect spell, like 'Miasma', but targeted at people and not tiles. Anyone affected will have to make a morale check – the higher the resolve, the higher the chance that they won't be affected at all. If a character fails the morale check, their morale will drop by one level. Additionally, if the character critically fails a roll, they'll be affected by the 'Horrified' status effect for one turn and be unable to act.

While Horror can be quite powerful against a company of the weak-willed, it can be countered by investing into the Resolve attribute, picking certain perks, staying close to the company Sergeant, and making use of the 'Rally the Troops' skill.
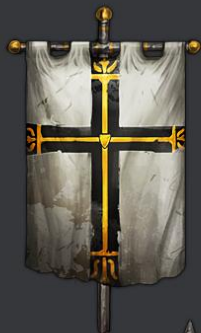
First iteration

PLAYER BANNERS

The earlier player banners were composed of various heraldic patterns roughly following historical rules. The original idea was to create a huge variety of banners by randomly combining shapes, patterns and emblems. As it turned out, these banners were completely lacking personality and looked uninspired.

For the second iteration the banners had been individually painted. They are using a broad variety of different shapes with applications and details supporting their visual identity. The featured emblems are unique and inspire the viewer to think about the banner's actual backstory, and they are notably distinct from other human banners in their exaggerated style.

A big bunch of the design ideas were submitted by the community, including company names and backstories about the banners' origins. This information facilitated designing believable mercenary banners with a sense of purpose.

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NOBLE HOUSE BANNERS

Like any other faction, the noble houses needed to have banners of their own. Based on medieval heraldry, the coat of arms had to feel authentic and believable, but we still took a bit of artistic licence to make them easier to read and more catchy looking.

We decided to have ten different banners randomly assigned to the three noble houses that appear in each campaign. Every banner comes with its own colored shields and surcoats, as well as knight crests. This additional workload limited the number of banners we could provide, but added a lot of visual identity to the different noble houses. To tell them apart from mercenary banners, the noble house banners would stick strictly to heraldic rules and symbols resulting in a more historical and noble look.

The top left image shows the first phase of iteration with 60 different banners. The next image shows the final candidates determined by internal voting and discussions. It was important to have ten distinct and unique banners which did not just copy historical references.

"It's not just a color. It's about the honor. And the prestige. And how much money they pay me." - Soldier on his liege's banner.

BRIGAND BANNERS

The first iteration of Brigand banners was very similar to the Orc and Goblin banners. Sporting white emblems on dark canvas, they had nothing unique or characteristic to them.

The approach for the second iteration was different. The question was, how would real life brigands create their banners in a medieval world?

Firstly, they would take the insignia of local authority and turn them into symbols of ridicule and disrespect boasting about their freedom and outlaw status. Secondly, they would use materials available in the wild to create intimidating banner poles, such as heads and furs of ferocious animals. The horse's head specifically is inspired by the Nithing Pole, a Germanic pagan ritual to curse an enemy.

"I wish to drink from the noble's chalice with his blood still on the cup and his woman between my knees.." - Gustav the Raider