



## Blood Runs in the Family

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At long last, the fifth volume of the award-adjacent webcomic The Order of the Stick is here! Reunited and back doing that whole "saving the world" thing, Roy leads the team to the distant Western Continent, a desert land filled with scheming warlords, creepy death priests, dim-witted bounty hunters, and more—including some ~~heavy-handed coincidences~~ shocking surprises for Haley and Elan! Can Vaarsuvius deal with What Went Down in the last book? Can Belkar pretend to be a contributing member of society? And what about Durkon? He's in this, too, right? All this and more in the mega-ultra-really-shoulda-planned-better-sized continuation of the OOTS story, Blood Runs in the Family! Here's what the book contains:

All of the comics from #673 to #946—our biggest book ever!

11 all-new bonus comics scattered throughout the story.

Quoth the Familiar, an all-new five-page illustrated poem showing the first meeting between Vaarsuvius and Blackwing.

Durkon Turned Undead, the "lost" OOTS strip produced in 2003 as the third OOTS ever but hidden until now.

A three-page recap of events to-date by Haley Starshine (with help from a little black bird).

Ten pages of author commentary for you to flip past.

Updated lettering on every strip with the swanky new dialogue font!

A foreward by John Rogers, big-time Hollywood producer and writer of the official Dungeons & Dragons comic by IDW.

## **Blood Runs in the Family Details**

Date : Published December 2014 by Giant in the Playground Games

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Author : Rich Burlew

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# From Reader Review Blood Runs in the Family for online ebook

## Joe Reddington says

Order of the Stick remains staggeringly good: a stick figure comic that can make me cry, laugh, and really illustrate how well you can make things grow if you keep them running. Always amazing.

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## Lissibith says

I wonder sometimes if it's possible for me to recommend this series too much. I don't think it is. But sometimes I worry I'm turning into \*that person\* who won't shut up about something long after everyone around them is sick of hearing about it.

After the party is reunited at the end of the last book, this one starts with them heading off to the next gate. Haley has an ulterior motive to be happy about where they're going - this is the area her father was imprisoned in and she hopes to ransom him. But things get complicated when they find out that the power behind the throne in the Kingdom of Blood is none other than Tarquin, Elan and Nale's father (dun dun DUUNNNNNNN). This master of genre savviness at first seems to be a loving man who regrets being estranged from Elan - at least TO Elan - but everyone knows the man who raised Nale is probably not totally honest. Luckily, he IS awesome.

While Haley and Elan are dealing with that, Roy and Belkar get arrested for failing to have the proper papers to be in the city and are added to the ranks of the kingdom's gladiators. Durkon makes friends with fellow cleric Malak, a priest of Nergal. And V attempts to reconcile himself\* with the atrocities he committed during the last book.

I love the way this book actually brings about pretty substantial character change for basically everyone, not least of which is Belkar. He's been faking character development for a while now, but in this book, it seems that seeing true self-sacrifice might actually have gotten through his sociopathic shell. V thinks he understands what he did in the last book and has started to make ammends, but his reaction to finding out how deep he actually made that rabbit hole is way more of a personal change. Haley faces her father and some of how his way of raising her did more harm than good. Elan... well, it's obvious isn't it? Even Roy gets in on the act, having to truly come to terms with the hardest part of being a leader.

Most of the strips in this book are available for free online, but this book is SO worth the buy. Not only is it a high-quality book, but there are a few extra strips in there and the commentary from Rich, the author, are really fun to read even if a lot of the time it's stuff you might already know.

So in short - Order of the Stick is awesome.

\* I know V's gender is unconfirmed. However, for the ease of discussion, I'm using the pronouns I see V as. Please feel free to substitute "she" or any gender-nonspecific term you prefer.

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## **Erekíbeon Barbagrís says**

El libraco más gordo de The Order hasta la fecha, y disfrutable como siempre. Lo malo es que te dan ganas de ponerte a leer las tiras cómicas desde donde lo dejó el libro, en lugar de esperar a que saquen el siguiente... si es que lo sacan.

Me encanta el personaje de Tarquin, obsesionado con los clichés de las narraciones fantástico-heroicas hasta el punto de que sus planes se basan en aprovechar dichos clichés para su propio beneficio. Magistral.

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## **Figmentlady says**

The latest edition to the Order of the Stick graphic novels takes the party into the city of Bloodletting, where the bard, Elan, finds his missing father has become the ruling tyrant. As Elan is attempting to deal with the information that his father has an evil alignment, his twin brother returns to once more attempt to kill Elan. During all of this, Roy is still trying to lead the adventuring party into the desert where they must try to stop the Snarl from breaking loose from its prison and destroying the world. When the party's cleric is turned into a vampire and the wizard disappears into an angst-ridden imposed solitude after learning that she may have accidentally killed off a large population of the world with a Familicide spell, the leader begins to feel the quest is hopeless. In a twist, the chaotic evil raging halfling actually pulls the party together when it's at its weakest and they strive on toward their final goal. Anyone who has played and loved Dungeons and Dragons would enjoy this humorous graphic novel series.

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## **Shadowdenizen says**

4.5 stars.

This was an enjoyable read, though I confess that "OOTS Fatigue" did set in by the end of the volume.

Of course, I did re-read all 5 volumes in one LONG sitting, so that might explain it.

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## **David(LA,CA) says**

Not a great sign when what should be the next step of an ongoing quest feels like a side mission.

It was during the run that this book collects that I stopped reading the webcomic. Having finished the book, I can't really point at any one thing that drove me away. Maybe it was the three month period where the creator was recuperating from an unexpected injury. Maybe it was a slight shift in tone towards being more serious in parts. Maybe it was the reason I gave at the top of this review. You sometimes hear about DMs that railroad their players to keep them on task for the adventure. This sometimes felt like the players were being railroaded into meeting some interesting new npcs the DM had come up with.

Still, when I got past the section I had previously read (which was larger than I thought it was going to be), there were some jokes that got me to laugh out loud. I don't know if I'll go back and get caught up on the strips that have come out between the end of this book and now, but I'll probably keep an eye out for the next collection.

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### **Shannon Appelcline says**

After a many, many, many year wait, it's great to see *The Order of the Stick* back ... and to see that Burlew still has it. Volume 4 was fun, but as is often the case with getting-the-band-back-together arcs, it wasn't good as what surrounds it. This, instead, is another epic. There are a great new setting, great new characters, shocking reveals, and surprising action. Burlew does a terrific job of simultaneously expanding his world, torturing his characters, and continuing his ongoing plot.

Another dense, thick, and extremely readable volume. I hope I won't have to wait several years for the next one!

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### **Harold Smithson (Suicide punishable by Death) says**

I won't lie: This was disappointing. The Order of the Stick was never an extraordinary series but it had a habit of improving with every arc, however incrementally. This is the first time the series got worse, and I'm unhappy to report that the decline is not only constant but also sudden and drastic. The sixth arc has just started but the comic's self-referential jokes and fourth wall breaking have become even more prevalent and irritating.

Making a villain who wishes to become a legend through manipulating a character into following a specific story structure is a cute idea, yes, but it's a far cry from the serious drama that produced the webcomic's most interesting bits and it's not so rich in potential that it can sustain itself over the course of the strip's longest arc to date. At the beginning of the story he's involved in an interesting plot twist but by the end he's become an unfunny parody of himself who not only can't be taken seriously but is also just boring.

There are a few interesting moments, but they're small parts of a bland whole. Even the jokes have become less funny. There was never a point in time when The Order of the Stick was hilarious, but I still laughed now and then. Not so with the fifth arc's second half. It was too self-referential and the fourth wall was broken far too often. Imagine a Calvin and Hobbes strip written like this:

*Hobbes: Hey Calvin, do you ever wonder why all our philosophical explorations take place in the woods?*

*Calvin: I think it's because the woods represent exploration, a part of the world that remains unfamiliar and sparsely populated, where the two of us can just be ourselves.*

*Hobbes: Huh, I never thought of it like that.*

*Calvin: It does take a genius to think of these things.*

*Hobbes: You realize that gag has been milked dry, right? You're not going to get any more mileage out of it.*

*Calvin: Alternatively, the writer and illustrator could just be lazy, choosing to recycle old jokes and backdrops rather than trying something new.*

That's what reading this arc felt like. Mocking clichés and flaws within itself without doing anything to resolve the issue that, hey, this is a bit clichéd and flawed, isn't it? I'm not about to mark the webcomic down for hypocrisy, but I much prefer someone who distinguishes him or herself from the dull, clichéd writers than someone who simply mocks them, regardless of how clichéd their own works are.

Not that I would know anything about being an unusual author. My pieces are usually clichéd and dull, perhaps more so than the works I criticize. It doesn't help that I'm a hipster, giving relatively poor ratings to a very popular webcomic series that won't be affected by this review either way. Maybe I should work on my own writing before I criticize someone else. Hell, what right have I to discuss pacing when I added a paragraph in which I mock myself to a review that didn't require it?

I think you see what I'm getting at.

Getting back to the matter at hand, the fifth arc also suffers from the pacing problems that hounded the first two arcs. Namely, it just feels like a lead-in to the later arcs with very few plot threads wrapped up and even more opened. I would have liked some kind of closure, but Burlew has his plans. Nobody can say he doesn't.

Unfortunately they're a bit slow to play out and his sense of humor doesn't appeal to me.

Still, I did have some fun with this webcomic. I'll stick around and see what happens.

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### **Andre says**

I've been following the webcomic for years and it's done an amazing job of taking a metagaming funny webcomic (drawn using stick figures...) and making a "serious" work of it while keeping its funny tone. I look forward to every new comic and reading them in the book format, with the comment and a better flow as I do not have days (weeks) between panels, makes me appreciate them anew.

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### **Joshua says**

It's hard to believe that a comic book with stick figures as the characters can be superlatively amazing. But it's true nevertheless. *Blood Runs in the Family* is one of the better tales I've ever read. The "simplistic" art style masks a complex, fascinating story with three-dimensional characters, plentiful action, one of the best antagonists ever written, and the power of hope, love, and trust. The Order of the Stick has always been wonderful in the past, but in its fifth volume, it gains scope, depth, and gravitas, until it rivals some of the classics in its glory.

*Blood Runs in the Family* takes the noble Order to the desert in search of one of the gates holding back the monstrous Snarl. Soon, however, they are embroiled in the affairs of the Empire of Blood, your typical oppressive dictatorship run by a very atypical villain. This villain is General Tarquin, who seems to see the scope of the story he is in, relies on tropes to keep his power, and just happens to have a personal connection to one of the Order. Soon, a frantic race occurs as the Order battles several factions to secure the gate before

anyone else can get their hands on it.

I've written that character development has been a focus of previous Order of the Stick volumes. Well, it certainly continues here. But more importantly, the character development that characters have received previously pays off big time. Characters benefit from their past experiences or are penalized by them. One particularly epic twist stems directly from the development that one of the Order received in the previous book. It's welcome to have such continuity of character, and to have characters that actually evolve.

Action is also extremely plentiful here, and both heroes and villains get a chance to shine. One of the more interesting things about the Order is just how effective the heroes can be. These are powerful people in terms of their physical might. Even Elan, the wacky bard, can be a prodigious swordsman at times. Most of the time, villains outshine heroes in terms of sheer skill, and it's nice to see that the heroes can go against the villains evenly.

Twists and turns are also quite plentiful. From the revelation of Tarquin's true identity to the two stunning ending twists (one of which was freaking TERRIFYING), Burlew imbues his plot with a complexity and scope rarely seen. But he also makes sure never to let the plot get too heavy handed or serious, sprinkling the story with jokes. In the hands of a lesser writer, this would be awkward, but Burlew is certainly no lesser author.

Blood Runs in the Family is a tale that can only be described as glorious. It is beyond the capabilities of all but the best writers, and truly shows how the medium of the webcomic can be one of the best mediums ever.

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### **Ines says**

There was a bit of an arc fatigue settling in, but then all hell broke loose.

That devastating twist with Durkon aside, I'm now legitimately scared of Redcloak. Xykon may be more powerful and while he's not stupid, he's not exactly the sharpest tool in the drawer, either (and he's just way too funny to take completely seriously unless he's pissed off). Redcloak, though ... This is how a ruthless villain should be - he won't waste resources, he won't take stupid risks and he'll never, ever stop until he's either dead or achieves his goal. That part with the Azure City resistance and then Tsukiko was epic. Brutal, but efficient. And *smart*.

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### **Miss Ryoko says**

Holy moly it took me forever to read this book!!! I love the Order of the Stick... but the books keep getting bigger and bigger, and they take me much longer to read.

Sigh... I was hoping this would be the last book but alas, tis not and who knows when book 6 will be out. I fear by then, I will not remember any of the story and have to re-read the whole series again :p Not that that is a bad thing, it'll just take me a whole year ;- ) LOL - so perhaps I will have to be done with OotS until all books are out and the series is over. I'll look forward to re-reading it all then!

In the meantime, a coworker of mine has the two prequels and said I could borrow them since the library

does not have them! Huzzah!

(I realize this review had nothing to do with the book, but I don't have much to say since it took me two months to read it :-p )

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### **Karen says**

An entertaining read, but sad about Durkon.

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### **Patrick says**

It's kinda ridiculous how excited I was to see this book show up at my house.

Yes, I'm a fan of OOTS. I read it faithfully online. I like it enough that I wrote an introduction to the third book: War and XP.

But here's something you might not know. I think I've read my physical copies of this comic more than any other comic. Ever.

If I was forced to guess, I'd say I'd read the first three books in the series, 30 times? 40 times? More?

It's not like a carry copies around with me like Linus and his security blanket. But if I'm about to eat and don't have book handy, I'll happily grab one of the OOTS books. I'll read them before I go to sleep at night to settle my head after a busy day. What's more, I'll frequently end up staying later than I'd planned, despite the fact that I've already read them many, many times.

I don't know why I'm so fond of it. It's fun. Funny. Witty. Clever. Geeky. But so are many other things I read and enjoy. I can't tell you why this one seems to be my go-to-story over these last couple years.

But it is. It very is.

So yeah. Highly recommended. But start at the beginning of the story. Seriously.

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### **Mary Catelli says**

The Order of the Stick #5. My how things have changed. In particular, I must warn there are spoilers ahead for the earlier volumes, even though this started a gag-a-day strip.

It opens with landing on the Western Continent to warn Girard Draketooth of the danger to his Gate. After a few little incidents -- with a reminder that Haley wants this continent because she received a random note for her father telling her he was prisoner there -- they reach the location and start to search, knowing illusions are a peril.



They find something. Bad news. Girard, it seems, really hated Soon and assumed he would be there in violation of his oath when they mentioned him. He left a message telling him it was the wrong location, and that he thinks Soon should have died in their final battle. And explodes. They deduce from the evidence that Xykon has the real location -- the liche wizard knows where he is but the heroes don't.

And we have an arc describing Xykon and the rest of Team Evil in the erstwhile Azure City, and what plans are being made.

Haley, Elan, and Vaarsavius are captured by bounty hunters, and the others come after. This leads, as the title might indicate, to finding long lost relatives. It also entails a deep political intrigue, some truly nasty spells unleashed on the Azure City resistance, dead bodies, a woman whose baby vanished along with the baby's father, illusions, gladiator games, Belkar meeting up with a dinosaur, the return of the Linear Guild, and much more.

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