

Living Constructs of the Realms

When the *Eberron Campaign Setting* was released, players were introduced to some interesting new character races. Of these races, the shifters and the changelings are perhaps the most easily modified for use in non-Eberron campaigns. Both races have racial backstories that can be used in any campaign with very little modification, if any at all. The new race that is perhaps Eberron's most iconic, the warforged, is not as readily ported to other campaign settings. The warforged racial origin is more deeply tied into Eberron's history, and their iconic nature also strongly ties them to the setting.

In this article, an alternative type of living construct is presented. Elfbane golems, like livegolems, were inspired by Eberron's warforged and by the soulmechs of the Dragonstar setting. They were later heavily revised, changing their Spelljammer backstory to one purely Realms-based, and getting away from the soulmech angle. Elfbane golems are presented in very small numbers; it would not be appropriate to the setting to introduce them in larger numbers, and few DMs would be interested in such an approach, anyway.

This article is edition-neutral. The existing rules for warforged, whether 3.x or 4.0, are suitable for use with livegolems, elfbane golems, and eidelar. Due to their small numbers and backstory, however, many warforged feats and components would not be appropriate – only in the Eberron setting are living constructs numerous enough to justify the use of alternative construction techniques or magical items created specifically for constructs.

Elfbane Golems

The Fall of Myth Drannor was a great tragedy for Faerûn. The Realms lost a city renowned for its beauty and spirit of cooperation, and countless individuals of many races died. In the years following the Weeping War, Myth Drannor and its environs continued to claim lives, mostly from those seeking treasure and magic from the ruins. Even the Reclamation of the city failed to eliminate all of the dangerous creatures and magics lingering in the city's ruins and the surrounding forest.

A fallen ship from beyond the skies hosts one of the greatest threats to the renewed City of Song: Dretchroyaster, the self-proclaimed Monarch Reborn. A newer, related threat comes from the constructs known as elfbane golems. Had Captain Oncith Ilbenalu known of the dangers that would emerge from the wreckage of his ship, his participation in the Weeping War would have undoubtedly changed, and the history of the area would have surely taken a different course.

During the Weeping War, a number of battles took place throughout Cormanthyr. More than four score major battles happened, with an untold number of smaller skirmishes. Three of the more unusual battles were later dubbed the Three Greenwing Wars. These battles were noteworthy for the participation of the *Monarch Mordent*, a butterfly-shaped

vessel from between the stars. The flying ship, captained by Oncith Ilbenalu, provided an enormous amount of support to the defending elves, and its fall during the Third Greenwing War was a terrible loss.

The *Monarch Mordent's* crash site later came to be known as Monarch's Fall Glade. Despite the ship's destruction, the organic wings of the ship continued to grow, forming a tangled web of crystalline plant life. In the Year of the Dragon (1352 DR), the Cult of the Dragon persuaded the green dracolich Dretchroyaster to relocate his lair to this naturally mazelike growth. Amongst the overgrown wreckage, Dretch found a spellbook containing the spell *train vegetation*, a closely guarded spell of the ship's elven creators. The dracolich has made extensive use of this spell, using it not only to reshape his lair, but also to graft pieces of the glade's crystalline growth onto his own body. This spell also figured heavily into the plans of the mysterious orc Tolmakh, the creator of the elfbane golems.

Tolmakh specifically sought out the Monarch Reborn, for his dark plans required the dracolich's cooperation. Intrigued by the strangely articulate orc and flattered by his supplications, Dretch consented to listen to Tolmakh's plans. The orc described the living constructs he intended to create, and some of the many ways such intelligent and loyal servitors could aid the dracolich in achieving his own desires. Tolmakh's elfbane golems could be used as agents of the dracolich, killing, capturing, or sabotaging the efforts of anyone the dracolich considered a threat. An elfbane golem could operate unseen in an area where a dragon would be immediately sighted, or could be kept closer to home to manipulate objects too small for a dragon's talons. Dretch, already considering the potential uses of such constructs, readily agreed to aid Tolmakh in the production of his fell creations.

Mustering his own magical resources, Tolmakh began gathering the necessary materials. His first step was collecting the wood that would form the body of the golems. Tolmakh's plans called for the use of weirwood, a wood known for its resilience, durability, and its immunity to fire. Using weirwood would give Tolmakh's constructs a rugged strength, while perverting one of the strongest aspects of the elven forests.

Using Dretch's *train vegetation* spell, Tolmakh spent months shaping bodies from the stolen weirwood. Each golem was given a hulking, muscular build, with slightly elongated limbs. Crystalline plant growth from Dretch's lair was magically strengthened and fused to the frames, encasing the golems in a green and amber armor. As a finishing touch, Tolmakh gave his constructs elven features, with exaggerated, leering expressions.

After the bodies were ready, Tolmakh once more stalked the woods of Cormanthyr. This time, he sought a specific prey: allies of the elves, whose spirits would be stolen to animate his golems. Several dryads and a hamadryad fell victim to Tolmakh, wailing in agony as his magics ripped their essences from their bonded trees and deposited them in specially prepared iron hearts. The strange orc slew three treants, tearing their spirits away from their bodies and leaving crumbling, rotted trees in his wake. Even a pair of pixies found themselves trapped in Tolmakh's magical prisons.

Tolmakh had the spirits to animate his golems, but they were not yet ready. His next step was the preparation of a special alchemical bath. He mixed together unholy water, fiendish ichor, and the blood of a slain gold elf priestess of Corellon. The iron hearts were submerged into this dire mixture, and left to steep for a year and a day. At least once a month, Tolmakh ritually refreshed the foul concoction by adding in the blood of a slain forest creature. More frequently, the orc had Dretch bathe the hearts with his noxious breathe.

After the iron hearts had soaked in this vile brew for the proper length of time, Tolmakh cast a final spell, causing the hearts to absorb the remaining liquid. Once highly polished and smooth, the iron hearts were now dark and heavily pitted, with flecks of rust and strange corrosions mottling their surfaces. Tolmakh placed the hearts on the chests of his motionless golems, incanting another spell that caused the hearts to meld with the constructs.

The elfbane golems arose. Their animating spirits, once peaceful inhabitants of the woodlands and friends of the elves, were now full of fury and malice towards their former allies. Their taloned hands twitched, ready to rend elven flesh. Tolmakh's creations were complete.

The Monarch Reborn knows that the elfbane golems are under his control. The contribution of his magic and his breathe weapon have given him an innate bond with the golems, one that not even Tolmakh can override. The golems instantly leap to meet his every command, and the dracolich is satisfied that he holds their ultimate loyalty.

Dretchroyaster is wrong. Tolmakh is the sole commander of the golems; the dracolich was only involved to provide some much-needed magic. It suits Tolmakh's purposes, however, to work with the Monarch Reborn. The two have been using the golems to harass elves dwelling in Cormanthyr. Under the orc's guidance, the living constructs have been specifically targeting members of the Eldreth Veluuthra. By slaying small groups of the xenophobic elves and leaving clues pointing to Sembian involvement, Tolmakh intends to start a war between the elves and the humans – one that will surely have disastrous consequences for the elves and their forest home.

Of the dozen elfbane golems Tolmakh crafted, he usually has about half of them performing various missions. Two are always kept close at hand, ready for anything that may occur. Similarly, Dretch always keeps a pair available, to act as additional guardians. Two more are constantly scouring Dretch's lair and the surrounding area, trying to find the *spelljamming helm* that once powered the *Monarch Mordent*.

Though Dretch remains unaware, Tolmakh has given the latter two golems alternate orders: if they find the *helm*, Dretch will not be told until Tolmakh has secured it for himself. Additionally, the golems are carefully studying the dracolich's lair as they search it, noting all of its strengths and weaknesses. Tolmakh knows the time will come when his service to Dretch will end, and he wishes to be fully prepared. Ironically, the

dracolich is secretly wary of his strange ally, and is considering ways to use the elfbane golems against Tolmakh if the orc betrays him.

A fact that worries Tolmakh greatly is that one of the golems appears to have escaped his control. He is unsure of which sylvan spirit is animating the rogue golem, but it is readily apparent that his subjugation of the entity was not as absolute as he thought. The location and aims of the rebel golem are unknown, and Tolmakh fears it may be plotting revenge. If he could locate this elfbane golem, he would readily order its destruction. He would even, if possible, use adventurers to destroy this threat. The orc has carefully concealed this information from his partner, fearing the effects of the revelation upon his alliance with the dracolich.

DMs wishing to use elfbane golems in their campaign can use them as random encounters, or as mysterious and intelligent foes. The elfbane golems will usually be found acting against elves in some way, but their goals won't always be apparent. Tolmakh is crafty and subtle, and his golems are intelligent enough to improvise and adapt to changing situations. Tolmakh is also more than willing to manipulate anyone around him, with the ultimate goal of destroying the reborn Myth Drannor.

Tolmakh himself could be a half-orc or some type of fiendish orc. For DMs using Spelljammer material, Tolmakh is a scro priest of Dukagsh, one who also possesses notable arcane spellcasting abilities. In a Spelljammer campaign, the scro and his creations could be found anywhere – one potential adventure hook would be stopping Tolmakh before he can reach the scro High Command with knowledge of how to create these fearsome warriors.

Ripper, the Forest's Vengeance

Tolmakh gave his elfbane golems simple, violent names, to reflect both their origin and their nature. His creations bear names like Slicer, Mangler, Cutter, Ripper, Thrasher, and Reaper. Beyond naming them, Tolmakh took little care in distinguishing his dozen constructs from each other. Though he valued his creations and had plans for them, he considered them interchangeable, as indistinguishable from each other as common daggers.

That changed when one of them disappeared. Four elfbane golems were sent on a routine mission to investigate some ruins, but only three returned. None of the remaining golems had noticed anything amiss; the fourth was with them when they left the ruins, and his disappearance from the rear of the group went unnoticed. Tolmakh himself led the golems back along their trail, but they were unable to determine where or why the fourth construct became separated.

It was only a few weeks later before Ripper, the missing elfbane golem, revealed himself. A pair of golems had been sent to destroy an elven hunting party. Before the golems could attack, they were themselves ambushed by Ripper. The sounds of combat roused

the elven hunters; Ripper disappeared into the underbrush as soon as the alarm was raised. Rather than reveal themselves to a forewarned enemy, the golems retreated.

Though this was only a minor setback for Tolmakh, hardly more than an inconvenience, it set the pattern for things to come. Several of his plans have gone awry due to Ripper's interference. The rogue golem has indirectly warned Tolmakh's intended victims, has led groups of elves and adventurers to sites of interest to Tolmakh, and has even tried to destroy his fellow constructs.

Ripper, now calling himself the Forest's Vengeance, has not limited himself to opposing Tolmakh. A self-appointed guardian of the woods, Ripper has also acted against others who would despoil the land. His tactics are not the benign or subtle tactics of other sylvan guardians, though. Ripper will stalk a pack of orcs, picking off stragglers and scouts, leaving their remains for their companions to find. At night, he'll attack the already-spooked orcs by dropping into their midst from a tree, slaying two or three, and then disappearing into the night. Woodsmen have been ruthlessly slaughtered, their dying screams ringing in the ears of their terrified partners as they flee the lurking shadows of the trees. The survivors' tales of "forest demons" have begun to spread, and already the shrouded depths of the forest are being regarded with dread.

Ripper's actions are of great concern to Tolmakh. The orc doesn't know how much of his plans are known to Ripper, and he fears that Ripper's activities will become known to Dretchroyaster. Even more, Tolmakh secretly wonders what caused Ripper to go rogue, and if it could happen again. The rogue elfbane golem may become the biggest threat to Tolmakh's plans.