

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 9/26/2013

## A Handful of Hauntings

By Ed Greenwood

*How and where and when did the **Forgotten Realms** start? What's at the heart of Ed Greenwood's creation, and how does the Grand Master of the Realms use his own world when he runs **D&D** adventures for the players in his campaign? "Forging the Forgotten Realms" is a weekly feature wherein Ed answers all those questions and more.*

The Forgotten Realms has always been rife with both active undead and "ghostly" activity. Here are some hauntings of recent note.

### The Sighing Lady

Talk has recently arisen among caravan merchants about a haunting that travels the trade routes, though no one knows just which person, wagon, or cargo it is clinging to. This matter is something the traders won't speak about with anyone who doesn't make a living traveling with cargo overland (that is, no sailors, merchants they deal with in various waystops, or the general public), because they don't want to hurt trade.

Fear is spreading among the caravan traders about "the Sighing Lady," a drifting, insubstantial, elongated and sweeping wraith-like form that can pass through tiny holes and seams. It—or she—wears long sweeping gowns and has arms with impossibly long fingers and tresses of hair even longer, but no face at all (only empty darkness where her face should be). She says nothing, but she can see and respond to the living, though she can't be touched—and swords, spears, and cudgels all pass harmlessly through her, as if (as the cliché has it) through empty air. She invariably sighs when she encounters or passes through the living.

Anyone she passes through feels a terrible ("heart-stopping," one victim described it) chill, that robs them of vitality (a small number of hit points) but also makes one of their limbs (almost always an arm) fade away for some days—it just isn't there, and it can't be touched or felt. It can't be harmed (and will reappear just before they awaken, approximately a tenday later), but they can't use it while it is "gone." If they were carrying or holding anything in or with it when the Sighing Lady passed through them, that item disappears, reappearing at a random location anywhere in the Realms.

This eerie affliction has rendered horses, oxen, and mules temporarily unable to pull carts or wagons by robbing them of a leg, which can be disastrous to a peddler or a single-wagon merchant. (The horse, ox, or mule doesn't seem all that enthused, either.)

### The Claw

This flying, disembodied skeletal hand has black bones, and four long, sharp-nailed digits—three fingers above and a thicker "thumb" below. It swoops, fingers foremost, around corners and out of doorways or the darkness ahead, right at someone's face—but although it has caused many to fall or be injured as they took evasive action or just fled, it seldom touches anyone, and it has never been known to strangle anyone.



What it does often do is pluck and snatch at maps, daggers, vials, and other small objects, trying to take them away from the living. If struck with a blade, the Claw will try to poke at its attacker's eyeballs with its talons, or upset something that can fall on them.

A certain castle castellan in upland Tethyr swears that three knights impaled and killed when a portcullis accidentally fell are victims of the Claw, who undid not one but two safety ropes holding the portcullis up—from fastenings located in a locked, empty-of-persons room that had view ports in its walls that the Claw—but no human—could slip through.

The origins of the Claw have been described in many gory, vivid—and wildly different—ways down the centuries, but all that can be said for certain is that it is very old, it flies great distances, and it seldom "haunts" the same place for long (although it does return to seemingly favorite dungeons, ruins, and disused buildings). If confined in a chest, room without cracks, or other "secure prison," it fades away . . . only to reappear elsewhere.

Most of the old tales about the Claw say it is the severed hand/paw of a monstrous creature that was under an enchantment at the time of the severing (which is usually said to have been done by adventurers or royal heroes, in a battle with the beast), and that it will not rest until every blood descendant of everyone who has ever injured it is dead. Many legends believe the Claw hunts such folk and can "smell" them, regardless of any disguise they may be using, whenever it gets close to them.

### **The Haunted Door**

A door sometimes temporarily appears in the place of another door that's "always been there" in a castle or palace, and it's usually the door to a room, or sometimes a door dividing a back passage from more private areas. This haunted door radiates a faint cold, and (rarely) a very faint white glow. Anyone stepping through it is transported (in an unerring, safe teleport) to a random destination—usually a doorway or archway in a dungeon or stone ruin. The haunted door may or may not vanish instantly, stranding the being who passed through it in a new location, or it may tarry for a few hours or even (very rarely) half a day.

This door has recently been encountered in many places all over Faerûn, after not being seen for some centuries.

In the olden days, it was known to transport those passing through it to another doorway in the same castle or palace—one that opened into an area where a murder had most recently been committed. In troubled times, that often meant to a murder scene immediately after the murder had occurred, when the murder was still present and "red-handed."

### **The Whisperer**

A confiding voice speaks out of thin air very close to a living person's ear, warning them of perils that aren't there. The voice comes from an intangible source that moves with the living person it's chosen; they and only they can hear it (not people with them, even if touching them ear-to-ear), and it's so close that a chill waft of breath enters the ear along with the words.

The speaker won't name itself, other than to say "It's me," and it is never threatening. Rather, it always sounds, by both tone and choice of words, apprehensive for the safety of the person being spoken to.

Here are some typical whispers:

- "Careful, this is the corner where they like to lurk."
- "They? The tentacled things, of course."
- "They're watching you now."
- "It's getting closer."
- "Keep an eye on that shadow."
- "Did you hear that?"
- "Over there!"
- "They say he's gone mad, you know."
- "There's a curse on him."
- "Something's been moved."
- "Something's missing."
- "One of these was moving, when we were back there."
- "Careful! This is how it usually begins."

### **The Skull in the Helm**

This silent apparition is usually sighted hovering motionless in midair above a corpse or hidden treasure, trap or hidden entrance. It takes the form of a battered, rusty metal warrior's helm, either open-faced or with the visor jammed in the "up" position or dangling, ruined, below the bottom edge of the helm, to reveal the face of the

wearer—which is a bloodless, fleshless skull.

The eerie bones have no lights within the empty eye sockets, and the jaw (which is present) never moves, but helm and skull do turn as if the skeletal head is watching movements and creatures around it.

This haunting has been seen to both jump (teleport) from one place to another (usually locations in the same room or cavern), and to fly about, always drifting along slowly with the skull-face to the fore.

The Skull in the Helm seems curious, and it takes an interest in the doings of adventurers or anyone who intrudes into the ruins, dungeons, or other buildings (or areas, such as graveyards) in which it is found. It follows such individuals and peers over their shoulders, moves to where it can get a better view, and accompanies them. Its only reaction to being attacked is to steadily look at the source of each attack; the helm can readily be struck and even dented by physical attacks, but it protects the skull within even from terrific crushing force (such as the weight of a falling castle tower) and hard, direct blows (like the solid swing of a battleaxe or large club). No matter what is done, the skull isn't cracked or otherwise damaged. Persistent attacks or pursuit and attempts to damage or capture this haunting will cause it to "wink" (teleport) away, only to reappear behind the attackers.

Spells hurled at the Skull in the Helm get absorbed by it and do no damage; some sages have speculated that their energy is twisted by the magic animating the helm and skull into a means of repairing and further animating the haunting.

No two tales agree on the origins of the Skull in the Helm. The Church of Tempus refers to it as "the Watcher of the Wargod" and claim it is all that remains of a great archpriest who fell in battle. They further claim that it has been allowed to remain on duty by Tempus, watching those who go armed and what they do, for "the rest of eternity."

Some other faiths believe the Skull is a spy for Asmodeus, or a guardian left behind by a mighty archlich, that waits for a particular set of conditions to do something or join with something as a new servitor creature to fulfill a now-forgotten purpose. One tale even describes a row of newer human skulls seen floating along behind a purposefully flying Skull in the Helm on a night of a full moon, headed for some fell but unknown destination.

These old, small, somehow intimate hauntings are known to more common folk in the Realms—and scare most of them more deeply—than the great ghosts, liches, and marching skeletons and lurching zombies of yore.

Yet as far too many in the Realms have learned to their cost, the scariest hauntings in the Realms are the ones that happen to you.



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## About the Author

**Ed Greenwood** is the man who unleashed the *Forgotten Realms* setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, and he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.