

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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Elkaskyn Horncastle

Adventurer Rescuer

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.*

Most of the time when I'm designing a corner of the Realms, I feel as if I'm in control, putting places, treasures, nonplayer characters, and so on where I want them. Then I alter a few details to craft an overall look or feel or set of features—before the “now that the characters have done that, *this* will perform happen, as X reacts to what they did.” These alterations will unfold endlessly after whatever I've designed gets caught up in actual play.

Yet sometimes, the Realms—particularly in the form of NPCs, for some reason—seems to take over, wrest control away from me, and blossom in ways it “wants” to unfold.

I've heard many writers (of fantasy, science fiction, and mystery) say the same thing about characters taking over a story, but this “coming alive and taking over” happens rarely to me, and usually not while creating fiction.

Usually it's when I'm designing some game aspect of the Realms where I get such surprises.

One of them happened in the spring of 1982, when I was happily puttering away on a “backstreets of Waterdeep” mini-campaign for a library program. Knowing that the PC adventurers were likely going to have to hastily search a particular dwarf-dominated gambling and drinking club (*The Leaning Dwarf* on Ship Street in Dock Ward—and no, it's not on any published maps of “the Deep” because it didn't survive for long) for a particular someone, I jotted down brief descriptions of a score or so patrons, so as not to be caught short if they decided to *really* search the place.

Well, of course, they did, and so aggressively that they roused the club into angry reaction. They decided to escape the situation by rushing into an upper back room of the club that was being repaired after a small fire. Snatching up planks stacked ready there, they used them as an impromptu bridge out the room's lone window and across the noisome upper air of a Dock Ward alley into the window of an adjacent building. Peering in, they could see five worried-looking men conferring around a dimly lamplit table and glancing up repeatedly at the closed door of their room, obviously anticipating someone's arrival.

The PCs' unexpected entry stole the show, of course, but I didn't want to create just one more running brawl when I could spice up that dish with some roleplaying. So the PCs came running in through the window and pelted across the table before the startled five could draw weapons and try to bar their way. When they rushed to fling open that door, though, I flung it open just before they could get there—and halted them with a smilingly formidable obstacle.

To wit, the expected arrival now stood in the doorway—and right in the PCs' way. He was a bearded, long-mustached, ruggedly handsome man. His impressive garb was dominated by a magnificently chased, snarling lion's head electrum breastplate that could generate a man-width and -tall *wall of force* whenever its wearer wanted it to (right then, for example). When the PCs came to a crashing halt, he inquired genially, “And who might you hasty folk be?”

In true young and overbold adventurer fashion, their reply was a snarled, “Who're you?”

And I found myself declaiming grandly (inventing on the fly, since I had every last detail of the five men in the room and this sixth one they were awaiting), “Gentlesalers, I am Elkaskyn Horncastle, Adventurer Rescuer!”

“What?” was the least profane thing the players (and therefore their characters) said right then, so the opportunistic Horncastle, smelling the prospect of some handsome fees, launched into an explanation of what an “adventurer rescuer” was.

Yes, it sometimes entailed getting hotly pursued clients “clean away” from pursuit. More often it involved commissions to seek and bring back whatever was left of adventurers who’d gone missing and fallen long silent on expeditions into haunted ruins, remote and infamous dungeons, or fell wizards’ tombs.

The PCs were babblingly eager to hire the man, as long as doing so would cause him to get the Nine Searing Hells *out* of the Mother Chauntea-lucking way! So they didn’t inquire all that closely, just then, as to how an adventurer rescuer could possibly support himself.

After all, how many people would pay to have such nuisances dragged back? Oh, next of kin might occasionally want proof of death so as to hasten inheritances and disentangle division-of-chattels disputes, but in-time rescues must be few indeed, and if someone’s been cooked to ashes by dragonfire or devoured down to bones and fingernails by something, who’s to say that the body retrieved really is Norlur Foescourge (also known as “darling little Norty”)? Won’t less scrupulous locals undercut the Adventurer Rescuer by just retrieving the badly decomposed remains of another body they, er, just happen to know the whereabouts of, and get back to the grieving relatives first, to claim any fees?

(And yes, I *know* “Rescuer of Adventurers” sounds grander and more medieval than “Adventurer Rescuer,” but I’m often as stumble-tongued as the next DM.)

The hired Horncastle did a splendid job of frustrating pursuit in a gallant rearguard action, and the PCs considered that the payments that had nigh-beggared them had been gold pieces well spent—but they prudently didn’t return to Dock Ward for several tendays, and so missed their best chance for enlightenment about a career that just might have suited some of them.

At least, it would have in the way the dashing Elkaskyn Horncastle performed it. His grumblingly empty stomach had swiftly pointed out to him the economic shortcomings (cash flow problems, we might have termed them) of the adventurer rescuer profession. So he’d swiftly amended his business plan to make the rescue and body retrieval missions a mere cover for what he was *really* doing, which was dashing about the Realms with a wagon bristling with weapons and crammed with hirelings. He made these trips armed with spells he could use to make random weapons carried by his band glow (to make them seem more formidable). If anyone took too close an interest in these weapons, and Horncastle thought them would-be thieves, he would warn everyone to stay well away from yon “cursed” weapons.

He was smuggling weapons, poisons, and occasional banned goods or exiled people—and being paid very handsomely to do so. He would make friends whenever possible with adventurers, and he could threaten to call them in whenever someone tried to cross, blackmail, or defraud him. He also built a reputation and maintained a well-armed appearance that made many folk think twice about trying to swindle him.

My Elkaskyn Horncastle was a cross between Professor Marvel in the Judy Garland *Wizard of Oz* movie, and Sir Giles in the Disney version of *The Reluctant Dragon*. I played him to the annoying hilt—through seven library mini-campaigns so far and now he is galloping on into the “home” Realms campaign.

My “home” players have become almost fond of him. Almost.

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.