

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 7/16/2014 **New!**



Firebraces of Selgaunt

Forgotten Realms

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.

Of old, a firebrace in Selgaunt meant just one thing: an ornate surround for a chimney intended to provide storage or display shelving or both. Firebraces were always built in a style (usually of sculpted stonework augmented with ornate wooden shelves and "brace" or bracket carvings) intended to look very impressive, and most of them dominate the rooms they are in. These rooms, by the way, need not have hearths or fireplaces; the chimney may merely be "passing through" from a room beneath on its way up to the roof. Most firebraces stretch from floor to ceiling, and flare outward, usually via sculpted features, as they near the ceiling.

Firebraces typically store little-used crockery and personal goods that won't be damaged by prolonged exposure to heat (conducted through the stonework of the chimney, when the chimney is in use). They usually display copper trays, revel masks, and various trophies accumulated during the owner's life (mementoes of adventures or important contracts or commissions, and awards).

Starting in the mid-1400s DR, however, as life in Selgaunt became more perilous and lodging more expensive, the owners of homes or large apartments took to taking in lodgers they trusted to help with rents or food costs and to help defend the household from brigands. These lodgers were sometimes referred to as "gentlefolk of the sword," regardless of their actual choice of weapon, if any (some made war with coins and contracts).



Gentlefolk of the sword typically had use of the common rooms of the home plus a private room (where they slept, and their valuables were kept, locked and guarded in ways of their personal choosing) that was often created by extending an existing firebrace into a partition wall that enclosed a corner of a large existing room, to create a smaller private one.

So it was that "firebrace" acquired a second meaning, referring to these little private rooms, and polite Sembian society began to speak of "firebrace guests" and to take pride in having a distinguished one—or even a roster of several. From the outset, it was understood that gentlefolk of the sword could equip their rooms with all manner of traps, as long as they didn't involve fire, and that any intruder—including, in many cases, the host or landlord who owned the building—entered such a room at their own risk.

Firebrace Traps

The penchant of gentlefolk of the sword to make use of clever and concealed but often very deadly traps has

caused problems when firebrace guests have perished and the owner of the building needs to reclaim the space. Several deaths, fires (despite the prohibition on fire traps!), and maimings have even led to the success of a self-proclaimed “firebrace reclamation expert” in Selgaunt, who can be hired to undertake the perils of getting into and taking back the room of a guest who won’t ever be returning alive (undead arrivals are an additional but thus far rare problem).

This self-styled expert, who has recently taken to calling himself “Lord Firebrace,” is a florid and jovial semi-retired adventurer named Avalvert Marlagustus. He’s a portly man with long, flowing blond hair and a mustache to match, who always wears a large and bejeweled eyepatch (though it’s whispered his eyes both function normally and look ordinary) and elbow-length leather gloves. Marlagustus travels about in a dapper black coach, and frequently tells bad jokes as he works (with the aid of dozens of often-replaced hirelings, who seem to be the desperate dregs of Selgaunt society, and who most often pay the price when a trap is inadvertently triggered). He dwells in a tall, narrow house in Pendrel Street, and is still alive and whole, which he modestly attributes to his “peerless skills.”

The most elegant firebrace traps involve bladders of gas that induce heavy and long-lasting slumber, but a high percentage of firebrace defenses make use of stabbing or scything concealed blades operated by powerful springs and “reloading” clockwork.

The popularity of such trap blades is undoubtedly due to the presence in Selgaunt of the rival trapmakers (and “automators,” their own term for those who manufacture contraptions for automatically opening and closing doors and hatches) of Ithkytheal and Sons of Mendahlvur Street, and Leskur Urmammon of Thrindurl Lane. Ithkytheal is a fussy, sleek raven-haired man who always wears capes and lace-trimmed tunics and likes to be sophisticated and mysterious (his sons prefer a more dignified terseness), and Urmammon is a haughty, big-boned “bold lion” of a man who acts like a scourge of womankind but finds fewer and fewer willingly smitten paramours as the years pass. Ithkytheal and Sons and Urmammon are considered the only places to deal with for blades, but Selgaunt is home to increasing numbers of competing automators (usually lone proprietorships who were formerly locksmiths, plain and simple) who install trap clockworks that offer other menaces to an intruder.

At least one bed firebrace trap has been reported, in which the canopy of the bed, when triggered, plummets on persons below thanks to weights. The trap was equipped with many fang-like daggers.

Firebrace traps are seldom triggered by entry into a firebrace room or usual movements within one. They are usually set off by trying to open something without first moving or opening and closing something else. (In other words, someone who knows the right “safe deed” to do can live in, and use, a firebrace room in perfect safety.)

Loot Under One’s Roof

Unsurprisingly, a strong motivation for reclaiming a firebrace room is to gain possession of a guest’s worldly wealth, even if it may just be everyday items, clothing, and a key or coded message to valuables hidden elsewhere.

The passage of time has brought about the inevitable demises of more than a few firebrace guests, and, as a result, some large, rich treasures have been acquired by various hosts and landlords.

The most famous cache was the dozen or so minor but useful magic items (and a handful more than 10,000 gold pieces) gained by Ommard Drael of Stormkeel Street after the death of his firebrace guest Ismur Tamrathdreir. “Ismur the Formidable” was a wizard from upland Turmish and a long resident in Selgaunt who made his living hiring himself out discreetly to cast spells to “benefit clients and harm their enemies.” His career came to an abrupt end when Tamrathdreir set to work against one such enemy who had hired another mercenary mage for protection. The protector was one Tasgult Darlsreth, a darkly handsome, faintly smiling man who has variously claimed to be a renegade Red Wizard, a Zhentarim agent, and a facilitator of sorts for the City of Thultanthar. He cast a “deboning” spell on Tamrathdreir that made his bones flexible, causing him to collapse into a helpless puddle of flesh—that Darlsreth then fried with a succession of fiery spells.

The magic items in Ismur’s firebrace cache included glowstones that went on and off and changed brightness upon command, a *ring of feather falling* and a gorget that enabled a wearer to use *blink* or *dimension door*, a mask that conferred darkvision and the ability to see magical auras, and a dagger that had an invisible blade until it drew blood.

Another oft-mentioned treasure belonged to one Gylhuldren Glothammar, and it consisted of a golden book (or

rather, a slab of gold sculpted into the likeness of an open book) that when properly commanded, could “call upon” spellbooks elsewhere in the Realms, copying single spells from their contents onto its two usually blank facing open pages. So far as is known, the original tomes were unharmed by these borrowings, but the possessor of the golden book gained random spells they could cast once each (the magic works just by reading the spell aloud while touching the book). When cast, any spell displayed on the *Golden Tome* vanishes in an instant and cannot be recalled; attempts to do so will bring other random spells onto the golden pages instead.

Hideholds

One additional use of firebrace rooms is to construct them so as to mask access to hiding-places or secret doors built at the same time that either allow passage from the firebrace room into a secret passage (often providing the firebrace guest with his or her own private entrance or exit to the house, so he or she can arrive or depart unseen and without disturbing other residents), or use the firebrace partition wall to conceal other hiding-places known only to the host or landlord. At least one homeowner constructed a hiding-place that allowed her to spy into the firebrace room without being seen by any occupants.

Many firebrace rooms are constructed with concealed wardrobes and closets for the use of the occupant (to maximize storage without cluttering the room with unnecessary furniture), and a few gentlefolk of the swords have made use of these to store automatons—and in one case, a full-fledged golem—they can mobilize to defend themselves against intruders.

All of the above made Sembian homes more formidable and impressive refuges that brigands and worse would think twice about assaulting. (If Elminster can be believed, “more than a handful” of Shadovar skulking through Selgaunt in the early days of Thultanthan operations in Sembia disappeared—largely thanks to falling afoul of firebrace traps. Some of them haven’t yet been found, and one of them seems to be gradually turning up in pieces—quite small pieces—in the sewers of Selgaunt.)

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.