

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 3/4/2014



Hulther's Mimics

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.

he shapechanging creatures known as mimics are usually regarded as dangerous or as nuisance monsters, to be destroyed on sight. Down the centuries, though, many beings of Faerûn have tried to harness their abilities.

One of those people was Amanlas Hulther, and this is the story of what he wrought.

Hulther's Work

Beginning in 1146 DR, in what was then a very small monastery dedicated to Oghma in the deep forest southwest of what later became Starmantle (a building that was destroyed in the late 1300s DR, and all trace of which has vanished since), a priest of middling rank and accomplishments named Amanlas Hulther experimented with some small specimens of the creatures known as mimics, which had been discovered in an ancient and dried-out well behind the monastery. Rather than killing them, Hulther prayed for guidance on how to handle them. What the god told him, if anything, he kept to himself, but over the next two decades Hulther successfully controlled several mimics by means of food rewards and painful deterrent punishment, and eventually he bred them. Heartened by this, he shared his goals regarding the little "disguising ones" with his superiors, and they supported him. So for two decades more he bred mimics for the traits he desired, and in 1187 DR, as an elderly and failing monk, Hulther presented his achievement to the highest-ranking priests of Oghma he could send word to: a "book guardian" mimic that by habit or preference or instinct entirely encloses a small written tome, preserving it against damp and defending it against intrusion.

The Book Mimic

A book mimic envelops a book entirely within its own body, which resembles a thick, textured (sometimes even scaly) oiled and cured leather binding. This mimic opens a lone humanlike eyeball in one surface of the book to survey whoever's handling it. That handler must then either utter the correct password or show a particular symbol, rune, sigil, or gesture to the eye for it to open—or they must fight it to gain entrance.

In a fray, most book mimics try to bite, slap their bodies across the faces of unauthorized handlers to temporarily blind them, then spring away to escape, scuttling to slip down known nearby cracks or chutes to keep the book safe from being captured.

A book mimic can feed on nutrients if tossed in a pond or down a privy. If it's around a book at the time, it protects the book completely against all moist substances, no matter how long immersed. It also bites anyone handling it to drink blood from them. Sometimes, this isn't a painful lamprey-fanged attack, but a delicate drain of just a little blood in an authorized manner from those perusing guarded books, under an agreement established when the mimic's guardianship began.

Just how intelligent book mimics are is a matter of ongoing debate. Elminster thinks that they vary in intelligence from individual to individual, just like humans, and most of them are as smart as a "slightly simple, untutored human."

Anyone who swings a sword or axe, hurls a dart or arrow at a mimic-protected book, or menaces such a volume with fire, can discover two things. Even when book mimics aren't showing visible eyes, they are always on the watch, and they can gather themselves (like a human, squatting down) to spring upward or sideways, enveloped book and all, with more than fair accuracy and do so up to a dozen horizontal feet in one such jump.

As Elminster put it, "If a book mimic's enclosed tome can fit through an open window pane, opening, or chute, don't count on the mimic missing that target."

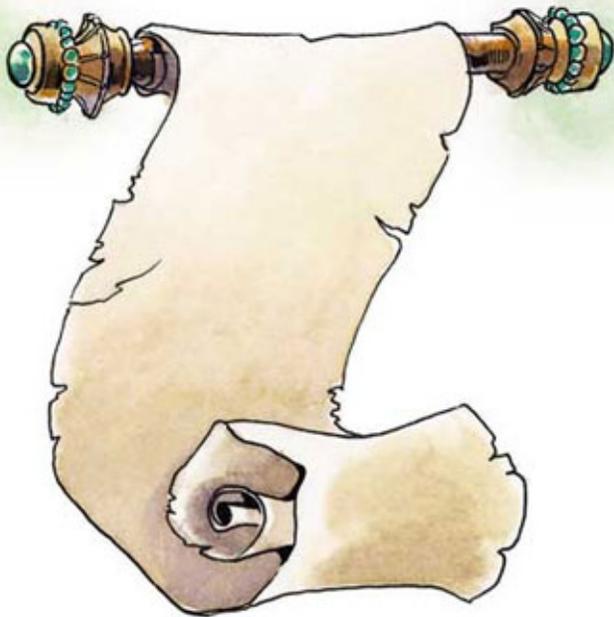
Secret Guardians

Hulther died of a winter chill in the hard winter of 1202 DR. For a long time thereafter, the very existence of book mimics, and their presence and use to guard books in libraries dedicated to Oghma, was a secret of the faith, known only to a score or so of the highest-ranking priests.

"Secrets will out," as the Faerûnian saying goes, and during the 1360s DR, rumors of tome defenders started to leak out into circulation in the Heartlands. Such talk didn't flare up or travel fast, because the notion of a book guardian is something many hearers simply accepted with a "well, of course the priests of the Binder would have something like that" attitude, rather than something juicier.

Sages and book collectors, not to mention clergy of other faiths, were interested when they heard such talk. Some of them resolved that if such a creature existed—as opposed to some sort of amalgam of temple spells acting as an apparently intelligent guardian—they wanted these guardians for themselves.

No one knows when or how the first book mimics got out into the wild, or rather, escaped the control of the clergy of Oghma—because most such mimics seem to have inherited a driving urge (or innate instinct) to wrap themselves around books and hide among large numbers of books. They are found in libraries, not in wilderness areas, though long-abandoned ruins may still have libraries; bound books in almost any condition satisfy book mimics, and they devour burrowing worms, mice, and other creatures that damage books.



At least two book mimics (and possibly as many as six more) found ways into the fabled fortress of Candlekeep before 1400 DR, or were brought there by unknown hands in a manner that escaped the official notice of the monks until the 1440s. A journal kept by the monk Telestel Rorbiturr, who died of natural causes in 1432 DR, recorded his discovery of the two mimics, about a tenday apart, in the early days of 1400 DR. Why he kept his discovery to himself, and why the superiors he reported it to told no one and did nothing, remain mysteries. Rorbiturr's superiors are themselves dead, and their very bodies have vanished. (Hints of why their remains can't be identified or recovered are in the Sundering novel *The Herald*, for those who consider a scene of certain submerged-in-noisome-circumstances discoveries therein.)

In the mid-1440s, a tome was offered to Candlekeep in the usual bid for entry, and a book mimic protected it, which suggests that by then book mimics were out and about in circulation throughout Faerûn, in however paltry numbers, beyond the control of the clergy of Oghma. Certain records suggest that the priests of the Binder never shared the secret of book mimics with the clergy of Deneir, and that this caused ill feeling among the latter when awareness of book mimics spread in the 1450s.

Other writings (notably the private diaries of a variety of Sword Coast merchants and adventurers) suggest that

some book mimics had begun to evolve or mutate into more versatile forms. Some of them took the shape of sheaths and scabbards for bladed weapons without suffering harm from the sharp weapons they were enfolding, and others entered into partnerships (communicating telepathically) with maimed humans and halflings who'd lost limbs, fashioning themselves into functional (but weak) semblances of the missing arms or legs.

The writings of some wizards during the 1450s, discovered only more than a decade later, suggest that book mimics who enveloped books bearing enchantments were themselves rapidly changed by exposure to the magic they were in contact with, gaining abilities akin to some minor magical effects. One scholar notes that what so astonished one mage may in fact have been the result of spells cast on a book mimic by an earlier owner of a particular spell tome, rather than rapid mutation of the mimic itself.

Elminster's comment on this was: "Be cautious when handling magic, not when speculating what magic may have achieved. The Weave is powerful, strange, and wondrous, beyond what most of us can imagine—and more of us can believe." He added that certain wizards may have forced or bound rivals, apprentices, or foes into the shape of book mimics, in the same way that some cruel mages of an earlier time trapped those they disliked in the form of the curious creatures known as "wingless wonders." So not all book mimics may really be book mimics.

The Old Mage's final comment on book mimics is that he can report from his own observations that they are intelligent enough to know what sharp-bladed, pointed, or even poisonous items are dangerous to humans, and can hide, reveal, or manipulate such things to protect humans they like, and to menace those they dislike—so (as with so many other unexpected small details of Faerûn) beware.

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.

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