

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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## I Gloat in Your General Direction!

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.*

No, no, wait! This isn't about comical taunting, I promise. (Most of us have been culturally enriched by *Monty Python*, or, if we're older, by the *Goon Show*, and can manage such indulgences spontaneously, more or less like breathing.) This is about those awkward plot moments where a villain pauses just before achieving victory or killing the heroes to gloat about his or her success thus far, or explain their diabolical plan.

Sometimes this sort of thing is necessary so the reader (or player in a **D&D** game) knows what the heck is going on, but it's really necessary to buy more time for the heroes, so they can escape—and, armed with the handily provided complete and utter knowledge of the villain's utter evil, foil said diabolical plan in the proverbial nick of time.

### Why Be So Stupid?

So why do villains feel the need to explain everything and to indulge in gloating? Why not kill the heroes or at least break all their joints and confine them in antimagic wards first, to make their miraculous escape impossible?

Why—no, never mind. I could delve into the deep psychological needs of villains to humiliate opponents and revel in their efforts paying off, but in the end, such explanations really come down to a different mix of justifications for each and every villain.

What I see as more useful to a Dungeon Master—well, to this particular DM, at least—is a somewhat tenable in-the-Realms reason for a villain to gloat.

First, if revenge (or avenging a fallen friend, ally, or loved one) is a primary motivation, the villain has a need to tell the heroes that they deserve what they're getting, and why. The villain will want to tell them that the old man's curse they sneered at, as they slew that old man so long ago, has come for them after all. In short, the villain needs to feel a sense of justice (and if this villain has spent years in the hunt or preparation, perhaps because his name is Inigo Montoya, he feels the need to justify having spent so much of their own time to getting to this situation). This wraps up all of those varying psychological needs of villains into one factor.

Second, such gloating may be done to motivate the heroes—if they do somehow win free, or if the villain is deliberately sparing one survivor to deliver a warning message—or other onlookers to do something that will unwittingly further the villain's aims, thanks to what the villain mockingly tells them. Perhaps the villain wants an entire family eradicated, or another foe they can't find or reach hunted down and slain, or war between this kingdom and that one, so he or she Tells All (or even spew out a pack of lies) to spur surviving listeners to act in particular ways. Then these motivated others could potentially further the villainy even after the villain is disabled, imprisoned, rendered powerless, or dead. This is a factor many **D&D** DMs and players overlook, because they think of villains as always self-centered or overridingly ambitious, rather than dedicated to causes greater than themselves.

For example, the villain's actions have all been a decoy to draw the heroes and other defenders of a realm to one locale, while a powerful threat invades the kingdom elsewhere. The villain not only wants to gloat about that, he or she wants to misdirect anyone who gets away into rushing to defend the kingdom at a spot where it isn't threatened, while the real threat attacks elsewhere. Castle garrisons hastily arming up to repel dragonback riders diving down out of the skies may not notice even major hostile forays coming up through their own sewers and dungeons.

Third, perhaps the willing or unwilling villain is a controlled puppet or mouthpiece at such moments, controlled from afar by a god, powerful priest, mighty wizard, or wielder of a puissant magic item (a crown that dominates thoughts, for instance). Much fun can be had by portraying any such villains as being at war with their bodies on such occasions, with their bodies spasming and twitching as they fight to deliver slaying strokes to heroes or others. (This factor includes those situations where the villain may want to eliminate the trapped or defeated heroes, but the villain's deity or superior wants them spared for later use.)

Fourth, insanity. This one is a too-often-portrayed aspect of villainy, wherein the bad guy goes off the giggling deep end at seeing triumph at hand, and ignores potential danger, or dismisses obvious perils or the capabilities of heroes—or gives in to delight at sparring with the heroes and accepts conflict with the heroes as an ongoing game. For whatever capering reason, these villains babble and gloat rather than taking measures to eliminate the heroes. Such unhinged states may be portrayed in the most heavy-handed sense by having the villain behead lesser foes and cavort about while crooning explanations to the severed heads of such foes, or indulge in other horrific displays (such as "I've always wanted to shake your hand, so I'll chop it off and carry it around so I can shake hands with it whenever I want!").



### As Seen in the Realms

But enough of reasons for villainous gloating, and of generalities, too. Let us turn to the Realms and enjoy two very different infamous moments of gloating that most sages of Realmslore have thus far overlooked.

Picture a late, sultry summer night in 1271 DR, at a revel in the city mansion of the Artemel noble family of Waterdeep, where three noblemen (Neldror Artemel, Larondras Brokengulf, and Elglor Eagleshield; "old uncles" all, not patriarchs or heirs of their houses) sat helpless around a table on an interior gallery of a high hall, their muscles frozen by a paralytic slipped into their drinks by a serving maid. She venomously informed them that she was the scorned Reldra Wyntersar, formerly a rising-in-Waterdhavian-society beauty. She'd trapped them at last for how they'd treated her. All three had separately promised her marriage and the noble wealth and status that went with it, but after enjoying her charms had reneged, harrying her from their presence with servants employing whips and bludgeons, and telling the Watch she was a thief who'd stolen from them—leaving her wounded, heartbroken, humiliated, cast out of polite society, and vowing revenge.

She then tipped each helpless man over the gallery rail, chair and all, to crash to the floor far below. Artemel and Eagleshield were killed, and Brokengulf was maimed and lived out the rest of his shortened days in limping, aching agony.

She then produced a sword and a dagger out of hiding, and furiously fought the guards, servants, and nobles who sought to capture her, dying on their blades after wounding many and slaying a handful—all the while bitterly entreating them to "Marry me! Marry me!"

This was all hushed up, of course, but not before it became a tenday-wonder from one end of Waterdeep to the other. It is still remembered among the nobles of the city as a hard lesson in the consequences of mistreating those not highborn; among the high houses of Waterdeep and even meetings of the Masked Lords, the words "Marry me!" can be heard uttered as a grim or cynical warning to this day.

Visit a dank, mildewed, water-dripping cellar in Marsember on a chilly, fogbound spring morning in 1344 DR, where three War Wizards have cornered a local citizen, Mahloun Vaercraw, whom they have long watched as a smuggler, kidnapper for slavers, and drug-runner operating between Westgate and Marsember.

They grimly tell Vaercraw his career is over and cast spells to trammel his limbs and invade his mind to learn all he's up to—only to be stricken by mightier magic, and learn the hard way that Vaercraw is a shapechanged-to-seem-human illithid whose mastery of arcane magic is mighty indeed, perhaps superior to that of Vangerdahast himself. The illithid kills one Wizard of War; mind-reams another to learn all he knows and leaves him a forever mindlessly drooling ruin; and maims the third but spares him to take "fair warning" to Vangerdahast, after gloating at eloquent verbal length.

Luckily for the Forest Kingdom, Vangerdahast proceeded cautiously in acting on Vaercraw's triumphant words, suspecting deceit. The illithid was long gone, and if its allegations were true, seven very powerful noble families were in league against the Crown. Only one family contained a handful of traitors; the rest were guilty merely of indignant disagreement with particular royal decrees. Yet even though the Royal Magician's caution avoided potential civil war, much War Wizard effort was devoted to investigating where nothing was to be found, for more than a few seasons. During these investigations, Vaercraw (it was much later learned) very profitably indulged in criminality elsewhere in the realm and established two very solid and credible other identities that escaped all suspicion for decades.

These are two small instances of gloating that survivors learned from, and they stand out because so often lessons aren't learned, or there are no survivors.

Villains, let your fresh scheming commence.

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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.

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