

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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Lord Crakehall

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.*

They all love to hiss at arrogant, eccentric, flamboyant, and easy-to-hate nobles. They're juicy foes and targets for characters in the Realms, especially in Waterdeep, Cormyr, and Sembia.

Whether it's sneering at Lord Clarglustus Rowanmantle of Cormyr, with his habit of collecting nubile girls, talking blue parrots, pungent wheels of cheese from "the far Shaar," and kenku-carved hedgehogs and mushrooms from the seedier markets of Saerloon, or haughty Lady Faelra Umbrusk of Waterdeep, with her penchant for bathing in ostrich milk, her love of horsewhipping tardy servants, her fascination with gambling on the outcomes of bloody tavern brawls in Dock Ward, and her belief that the patterns of moonlight reflected through gems left on her dressing table are guidance from the gods as to which visiting envoy or merchant she should next seduce, it's easy to enjoy the overblown antics of nobility who act outrageously because they can. These are people so rich that the gods owe them money, or so seemingly insane that they are role models to raving lunatics.

Because Realms fiction and play so often show us the "bad" side of nobles, however, or the larger-than-life personae they present to the world, we often don't see the other sides of their lives—especially the activities that allow kings, commoners, and everyone else to tolerate their continued existence.

Take Lord Crakehall as an example.

This noble of Cormyr is the last of his line, and all Cormyr knows him as a "disagreeable old Dragon" (by "Dragon" they mean Purple Dragon, or soldier) who served militarily with distinction but was recently nudged into retirement for insubordination (he thought the younger nobles commanding him were arrogant idiots, said so, and disobeyed them—behavior most commoners view with favor, because they think all younger nobles are spoiled, arrogant idiots). Denevvur Crakehall is a longtime widower, sharp-tongued, and "walks alone" (meaning he doesn't surround himself with a bevy of attractive ladies or sycophantic toadies but daily "keeps to himself," walking the streets of Suzail to shop and take the air without servants trailing along, or riding in the countryside without a grand armed escort).

Those who've met the man personally often describe him as a sharp-eyed, bullying, surly, grasping miser. He doesn't haggle over prices but habitually asks the price of almost everything he sees, mentally logging the lowest prices for the day when he needs to buy something.

The outward face Lord Crakehall presents to the world is that of the unreformed Ebenezer Scrooge at the beginning of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (making him easy for any DM to roleplay).

A story many Cormyrean commoners tell and retell about him is his habit of spying on young couples so he can interrupt them at an embarrassing moment by trudging out of hiding, peering witheringly at them over his everpresent monocle, and loudly declaiming, "DIS-gusting."

That's the image of the man most know. He is easily and widely detested and dismissed. Like most nobles of Cormyr, however, there are other sides to the man.

He is bitter, sharp-tongued, and lonely, with little tolerance for fools. Yet he defines "fools" as those who waste the time of others with pranks and impudence, and waste their own lives by accomplishing nothing—particularly when this is deliberate idleness, not a "nothing" resulting from trying but failing to achieve. When Crakehall sees any young person courting disaster because they lack training or knowledge, he gruffly directs them to the best

teacher or wisest course of action, whether or not he knows or likes the individual; he regards this as his duty, his small way of helping guide Cormyr toward a brighter future without depriving folk of the freedom to pursue their own desires and take their own pratfalls.

He is a staunch believer in adherence to the law, and in continually refining the law to keep justice as fair as possible. Along with the concept of being fair, he believes justice should be minimal—too many rules and too much enforcement "stifles all." Crakehall is a staunch royalist who defends the Crown of Cormyr at every pass. He scrupulously avoids public rebuke and criticism of the Obarskyrs, and he is a swift and harsh critic of courtiers who keep secrets or slant information before passing it on.

Lord Crakehall believes nobles have a duty to the Dragon Throne, and that those who repudiate or shirk this duty lose all right to the titles, rights, and privileges of nobility. That duty is to keep the government—the throne—of Cormyr strong, so that whatever happens to the person currently sitting on it, no matter what follies that ruler pursues, the Forest Kingdom will not only survive but flourish, becoming ever greater. Moreover, Crakehall defines "greater" as "better living for everyone." The lowliest citizens must have enough to eat, education, true information about what their rulers are up to, and "a decent bed, someplace warm enough not to shiver when the winter winds howl."

Crakehall believes that every loyal citizen must be ready to fight for Cormyr, or soon there might be no Cormyr. On the other hand, he does not believe in every infant or tottering elder carrying a nasty, sharp weapon. Real war "should be left to warriors." The general populace contributes to a war effort by doing what they excel at for the good of the crown rather than the good of their pocketbook, be that baking bread or sewing cloaks or packing mules.

Above all, Crakehall wants Cormyreans to notice and understand things, as he does—to truly see what's going on around them daily. He sees the chief danger to Cormyr now as the same thing it's always been: stealthy infiltration by enemies of the realm. In the old days, it was Zhent agents. Nowadays, it is the spies of Sembia with the "dastards" of Westgate, the Red Wizards, exiled traitor nobles, and even Amn as background constants.

Crakehall reserves his greatest hatred for turncoats among the nobility—Cormyreans who work against the Throne for any reason. He distinguishes between "disputing with the Obarskyrs" and working against the realm, believing that the former is a duty of all nobles, and the latter is high treason. He boldly practices this, seeking private audiences with the ruler of Cormyr to chide over this or that diplomatic policy, royal decree, or kingly deed. Although his counsel was initially met with stiff, disapproving courtesy, over the years it has become increasingly treasured.

As King Foril once put it, "Give me twoscore Lord Crakehalls, and I will have forty honest men. Give me four hundred, and I will have the most able and worthy realm possible. Bless the old sharptongue."

As it happens, no less than three veteran adventuring companies and about twice that number of nobles regularly seek out Lord Crakehall in private, to seek advice.

It's hard to find a wise and observant honest man, but Old Sharptongue won't steer them false.

Lord Crakehall has often explained to adventurers the past histories that particular nobles share—the feuds, the family ties, the shared military service or interests. He believes that "true" nobles have no business deceiving either royalty or commoners. This philosophy of his has helped more than one adventuring band operating in Cormyr to avoid being manipulated by a noble patron into blundering into an ongoing feud, or being framed for the bad deeds of a noble's hirelings.

It was Lord Crakehall who steered the Company of the Claw away from accepting a mission from Lord Thalthallow to forcibly, in a night raid on Greatgaunt Castle, rescue his "kidnapped" daughter from the clutches of the younger Lord Greatgaunt, heir of the Greatgaunts—a good thing, since she had in fact married him (against her father's wishes, but with the blessing of her mother and the rest of her kin).

It was Lord Crakehall who warned Crown agents (so they could prevent the intended clash) that Thalver's Company and the Company of the Wandering Spear had been sent to attack the same "encamped outlaws who've stolen family treasures from us" (actually nobles out on a three-day hunt along the verges of the Hullack Forest) by two younger brothers of some of the hunting nobles, in hopes that in the fray their elder brothers would be killed, so they could become the heirs.

And it was Lord Crakehall who publicly berated the violent drunkard Lord Melver for the way he treated his wife and daughters when he was inebriated, and suggested that if he couldn't curb his swilling, the Crown should install bodyguards in his household to protect his kin from him—thereby shaming Lord Melver into "swearing off the goblet" henceforth.

Lord Crakehall believes that young, idle nobles are "all too apt to fall into mischief," and keeps an eye on them. He also has stated that "adventuring bands looking for work in Cormyr are like sharp knives left in a room of clumsy blindfolded men," and he keeps an eye on these groups, too. He delights in bringing these two sorts of potential troublemakers together in ways that will benefit Cormyr, often by pointing them toward mysteries unsolved and perilous border ruins and areas that need scouring for monsters—so the nobles can do something useful and take real pride if they accomplish something, and the adventurers can keep the nobles alive and themselves busy, thereby enhancing their reputations and winning possible future commissions. Which Lord Crakehall will happily arrange future commissions, too, by bringing nobles with problems together with adventurers who may be able to solve them—not for any fees he receives or other personal gain, but to make Cormyr better.

For what higher calling, reward, and satisfaction can a "true noble" have?

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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