

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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## Monster Breeding for Fun and Profit

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.*

The term "monster" makes many of us envisage dangerous predators civilized folk fear or hate, and either flee or offer violence to, on sight. Yet of course there are monsters that are bred or hunted as food, that serve as the source of organs and blood prized by alchemists for their bones or hide, and that can be tamed and used as beasts of burden and haulage.

The Savage North and the Moonsea North are two regions in the Realms where quite a few beast-rearing businesses operate, and "quite a few" rises to "nigh-countless" when you include one or two animals reared only for personal or family use, or counts wild boar captured young and raised in pens as farm hogs—or wild horses captured and broken for saddle use.

For campaign use, most DMs will want to know of sources of either very unusual creatures, or large operations that maintain standing herds and therefore can provide a reliable supply (of as many as a dozen or score of beasts to any one purchaser) at any time of year. Here follow a few operators flourishing in this line of work in the Realms right now.

**Bannaeras Thaelok of Port Llast**, a former Athkatlan who relocated to the small northerly port after some business dealings in Athkatla went awry (and then had rivals and creditors make his continued presence in the wealthiest city in Amn very uncomfortable), operates a tannery in a small bay just south of the main port. His work includes mainly rothé hides, but also oxen, cattle, and deer; the best cured hides are sold to agents of glovemakers in Waterdeep, but passing traders take all Thaelok can supply for general outergarment-making.

Thaelok's Fine Leathers is a ramshackle, untidy cluster of wooden buildings and rusting iron vats and pipes that pump hot water generated by boiling hides into the bay. This practice raises the local water temperature and formerly created a thick algae bloom, but for more than a decade squid galore—and in recent years, an increasing number of predatory cold-water octopi that feed on the squid—have come to the bay to devour the algae and all manner of sea creatures that feed on the algae, including each other.

The canny Thaelok took to drag-netting, penning, and farming the squid and eventually the octopi, selling them as fertilizer when he can't sell them for higher coin as food. Sometimes he can ask for higher coin still by selling them as live specimens to certain unsavory individuals (such as Niklor the Masked, of Waterdeep, and Ulbaerl Taraskus of Athkatla) interested in breeding and magically transforming wild creatures to serve as guardians.

Thaelok is a ruthless, calculating individual who's said to be very good at acting in various roles to dupe other merchants during negotiations. Wealth is what motivates him, but he has come to fear both trade rivals and brigands, and he is constantly strengthening venom-tainted traps, hired guards, and caged bestial guardians in and around his business (he lives in the upper floors of the larger buildings of his tannery).

**Ilken Hundrabrar of Harrowdale** is a tall, burly lifelong citizen of few words and many secrets. A gemcutter and jewelry-maker by trade, in youth, he was apprenticed to the legendary Hulgur Yhond, the "jewel-master" who was eventually eaten by a gray render under mysterious circumstances. Hundrabrar now makes his daily coin running a shop in town that remakes damaged and battered furniture and clothing into newer and more splendid versions, both for hire (restoring specific pieces for clients) and for general sale (dross and wreckage he buys for a song and combines and transforms into wares sold in his shop).

Hundrabrar also maintains a secret profession in his cellar (and in certain caverns and glades in the woods northwest of town). He breeds, rears, and sells toads by the thousands for alchemical and food use, feeding

them mainly with insects. He long ago learned that putting out rotting meat and fruit, then moving this muck into screened enclosures after feeding flies have laid their eggs in the rotten mess, generates swarms of flies and attracts all manner of other insects.

Hundrabar is a good, fair, and principled man—and one of the best cooks of toad-related dishes anywhere.

**Alathna Vailstone of Secomber** spends much of her time in a particular valley that she tended for decades on the edge of the High Forest, cutting trees and underbrush and encouraging berry-bushes, until the valley became treeless but densely covered in berries. Here she hunts foraging black bears with crossbows and sledges, her bolts tipped with a potent sleep-inducing herbal concoction of her own making. She uses the sledges to drag the bears out of the valley to the forest edge, where they can be efficiently slaughtered and the meat, hides, and organs transported to the Vailstone barn and cottage on the near edge of Secomber. Cubs orphaned by her hunting she takes in and rears in captivity for live sale to passing traders.

Vailstone also has a sideline business curing bear pelts and remaking them into robes for local clergy of Malar. She is a wary, experienced retired adventurer, and those who've crossed her say she has man-traps, cached healing potions, and escape routes and schemes at her farm, in the forest valley where she hunts, and at many points along the usual routes she takes between. One merchant of Secomber (Luruth Maldor, a maker and seller of vials and bottles who has recently disappeared) swore that Vailstone has access to some means of regeneration, because she was once severely wounded and left for dead by brigands, only to reappear hale and hearty as she hunted them down, one after another, and slew them.

### **Tamratha Daernark of Highhath Farm**

founded, lives on, and singlehandedly runs a large farm along the Hathlyn River (a small tributary of the slow and winding River Arren, east of Derlusk) on which she rears hippopotami and all manner of giant spiders (in quite separate areas). Nearby farmers mutter darkly that she feeds them on trespassers and anyone who camps too close by night.

They also say she sleeps among the spiders for warmth and protection, is immune to their venoms, and wields some sort of mental control over them. Some farmers even whisper that she mates with some of the smaller spiders in her herd, and subsequently gives birth to scores of their live young by vomiting them forth, but others say this is pure fancy, born of her habit of carrying the tiniest hatched spiders from place to place in her mouth in harsh weather, to protect them as she takes them to shelter (in cracks and crevices in the dry stone walls she's built all over her farm).

The Daernark hippopotami are quite aggressive, and Tamratha allows certain far-traveled traders she trusts to hunt and slay them with harpoons (at their own risk, of course), during annual visits. She maintains smokehouses on the farm, and properly smoked hippopotami meat is said to be wonderful (most roasted hippopotami is anything but).

Daernark is shunned by some, who deem her a murderess driven by her veneration of Loviatar and Lolth above all other gods, who secretly trades with drow. Reliable adventurers have reported all manner of strange beings, from half-orcs to flind and hobgoblins and out-and-out tentacled monsters visiting her farm by night. Some say such creatures camp on her land often, using it as a base for their unsavory dealings in the area. Neighbors warn that such undesirables are particularly likely to be encountered in or near several small (and very decrepit and overgrown) old stone ruins scattered along the verges of Highhath Farm.

**Noldur Amlarhand of Darromar** breeds tortoises the size of well-fed wolves on his ranch southwest of the city. They are slow but dogged diggers, can be used as draft beasts by those in no hurry to move items from one place to another, and serve as food (yielding "superior" meat that "keeps well if properly prepared," in the opinion of "Cook to the Wealthy" Loskur Malatharr of Athkatla).

Amlarhand tortoises are painted with Noldur's mark, two upright fishhooks back to back (real-world note: picture



a capital "J" on the left, reversed capital "J" backing on to it, to the right) to discourage poaching; they rarely stray from the broadleaf-curved valleys at the heart of his ranch.

This breeder rose to notoriety when it came to light that he'd performed skillful surgery on several of his tortoises to lift plates of their shells so small stolen magic items, royal regalia, and keys could be stored under the shells (the plates were replaced and skillfully fused so they looked undisturbed). The tortoises thus became living, slow-moving hiding-places for some decades; subtle variations in his painted mark told Amlarhand which tortoise concealed which valuable. This was done for clients who remained anonymous, and they bought ownership of their tortoises, so they could claim them (alive or butchered by them, on the spot) at any time. The slayer-of-wizards Emmara Velathland of Selgaunt stored several magic rings gained from her victims in this manner, and the notorious pirate Zeldros Dragonlarr hid very recognizable jewelry seized from Sembian nobles in Amlarhand "bonebacks" (as he likes to call his tortoises).

**Mathom Darnrel of Garados** (a forested hamlet northwest of Almraiven) inhabits Garados Rise, a crumbling old fortified mansion that was once the castle of a local robber baron. It overlies an extensive labyrinth of subterranean storage cellars (and dungeon cells), where Darnrel now rears many gricks. What they eat is a matter of dark speculation in Almraiven, where malcontents, criminals, and the restive often just . . . disappear.

The grick breeder sells scents and "physics" (medicines) in Garados and Almraiven, and some mutter that some of his physics are substances that paralyze or induce instant slumber, and that he quite likely uses these on drunks and other lone, unwary individuals he catches alone in Almraiven's alleys and carts home to his gricks. Darnrel formerly made a living constructing cages, chutes, and capture nets, and he presumably has an array of these that he can use to manipulate his gricks when he desires.

Darnrel has sold gricks to serve as untamed (let loose in a "killing ground" area) guardian monsters to several Amnian nobles for use in dry moats surrounding their country estates, and to at least two wizards who said nothing at all about what they intended to use them for. Darnrel has made it publicly clear on several occasions that he's eager to sell more gricks, no questions asked.

Elminster warns that someone posing as an aging human wizard but whom he suspects to be a shapechanged dragon appears to various beast-rearers from time to time and makes purchases, often of captured monsters of great ferocity. The pattern of acquisitions leads him to suspect that this individual is assembling a monster army rather than a menagerie, but where and for what purpose remain mysteries. For now.

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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.