

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 4/16/2014 **New!**



Ommurk's Sly Disaster

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.

Enterprising merchants of Faerûn have been responsible, wittingly or unwittingly, for some spectacular disasters over the years. Now, it seems, one more is upon us: a swiftly spreading problem that has thus far afflicted Silverymoon, Everlund, Secomber, Scornubel, Iriaebor, and smaller places between (with more recent, smaller outbreaks reported in eastern Tethyr, Amn, and the open lands south of Berdusk). Rumors abound in Waterdeep of various trade factors and covert agents of the city doing swift and brutal work (involving arson of barns and warehouses, herd slaughter, and even murder) to prevent this affliction reaching the City of Splendors.

This latest debacle involves a merchant of Sembian heritage who was most recently a resident in Baldur's Gate, and who operates from there up through the interior of the Sword Coast North. Elstagh Ommurk ("ELL-stag AW-murk") is a white-haired, burly man of some thirty-odd winters, who has green eyes, an expressionless mask of a face, and a history of swindles and sly dodges. This time, working with half a dozen taciturn human underlings (and probably his usual four or five half-orc enforcers lurking nearby, ready to be called upon if trouble erupts), he has been selling edible blackback eels to fishmongers and eatery owners. He promises that these creatures reproduce with astonishing rapidity and grow fat on food scraps of all sorts (from potatoes to raw fat trimmed from all manner of meats) even faster.

Astonishingly, both of these claims are true.

Blackback eels are freshwater river eels of the temperate to colder climes (that is, found in rivers, streams, and marshes throughout the Heartlands and the North, from the Sword Coast through Narfell and Sossal). They can grow to astonishing size, but they usually take decades to grow longer than the average adult human forearm. They have dark red, bitter flesh, and lots of bones, but the bones are easily located and removed, often coming free of the flesh in long intact sections if an eel is gutted along the line of its spine, and the exposed spine-bones pulled upon. If fried with the right onions and mushrooms, in the "oil" exuded by the eel flesh, blackback creates a nutty, almost licorice-like flavor beloved by many who try it. Captured blackbacks can live for more than a tenday in a bucket of unchanged, stagnant water without deteriorating—if the bucket is uncovered and air can get at it. If kept in the dark in cool or even chilly temperatures, they go torpid and can survive even longer. For these reasons, they are popular in eatery kitchens and with fishmongers.



Ommurk's stock of eels, delivered in open handbuckets, are remarkable because, as more than one buyer said, "They grow so fast you can stand and watch them get bigger!" However, reports of unfortunate happenings have caused

many folk to believe Ommurk's stock to be "dangerously enspelled" and to be shunned.

Unfortunate Happenings

Despite Ommurk's claims of swift reproduction, none of his eels have ever been seen to mate, and no elvers (young eels) have ever been seen in the buckets, sinks, and ponds they've been put into. Rather, it seems that where one of Ommurk's eels is put, shortly thereafter two or three are found—as if the new arrivals "appeared out of empty air." As it turns out, other mature eels are teleported, by some unknown means, from elsewhere into the company of Ommurk's eels.

This activity might be perfectly acceptable if these newcomers were edible, safe, normal eels.

The problem is that in more than a few cases, after eels have been multiplying in this manner for some time (the proclaimed "swift growth" most likely being the appearance of larger eels beside the smaller ones that were purchased), creatures that are decidedly not eels appear.

Some creatures that appear are full-sized lizardfolk, armed and angry and emerging from wherever the eels are stored to attack living creatures they come across (such as astonished and horrified human cooks). Far more rarely, these visitors are bone nagas or even cloaklers.

As can readily be imagined, the death and destruction these unforeseen arrivals has caused has been considerable and frightening, fear is spreading, and local rulers and mages alike are wondering what's behind this.

Magic, obviously, but cast by whom? And for what purpose? Is this mere maliciousness, or apparently random attacks undertaken to frighten the populace and distract them from either attacks on specific people (that will be "lost" among all the others), or divert attention from something else nefarious?

Theories and Investigations

Dembur Elclandor, Sage of Matters Magical of Secomber, is concerned that the attacks are intended to be a distraction to allow something else to proceed unchecked and largely unnoticed. At first he held the view that the random attacks were a "bladefeint" (the Faerûnian equivalent to our real-world term "smoke screen") masking targeted attacks on specific local lawkeepers, spies, and authorities, in preparation for either some sort of invasion or concerted raid, or even a coup intended to seize control of city and town governments. However, his careful notations as to where marauding monsters emerged from among Ommurk-sourced eels, and who was attacked or slain by them, utterly failed to yield any pattern of lawkeepers or governing officials being targeted. It seemed the targets truly were random—not erupting from every establishment that had purchased eels from Ommurk, nor exhibiting any sort of pattern that Elclandor could discern. For example, the monsters didn't appear in eateries or homes that belonged to wizards or members of a local watch or soldiery, or even within a certain close distance to such dwellings, or to guardposts. Three were close to places habitually guarded, such as town gates, but in all those cases the monsters did not seek out the guards in their attacks—the guards came running when alarms were raised, and joined battle then.

Elclandor has suggested that "mages of power" magically interrogate Elstagh Ommurk in attempts to learn more about the magic, but admits the possibility that the unsavory eel-dealer may have no useful knowledge of, or involvement in, the enchanting of the eels. However, in his firm opinion, "something must be done, and swiftly!"

That view is shared by the adventurer-wizard Syndarra Shalaethe of Scornubel, who is most widely known across the Heartlands for wearing an assortment of enchanted masks that can hover at her beck and call, and fly to her when she summons them. According to Shalaethe, who with various adventuring companions has fought some monsters that sprang from Ommurk's eels, she was being "magically watched from afar" as she battled the lizardfolk (whom she described as "maniacally enraged," almost certainly due to magic, because "they never flagged or faltered, never reacted to pain, and their breathing never altered in accordance with what they were doing"). This suggests to her that a sentience pursuing an intent is behind the monster appearances and is using them as entertainment or more likely an experiment, then definitely watching to see their effects. This behavior in turn suggests something more will follow in future.

Elminster's Take

The infamous Elminster of Shadowdale believes all the eel-related monster appearances thus far have been experiments and are being conducted by a small, hitherto-unknown cabal of wizards who are perfecting what he calls "spot teleports" into the adjacent vicinity of prepared creatures. In this case, the blackback eels are the prepared

creatures, and the preparation consists of small, simple spells created by the cabal that attach a teleport focus. Something inherent in the magic indicates when the immediate vicinity of the eels is empty or “clear” so that the magic can teleport arrivals to the eel the spell is cast upon.

El views these monster appearances as “harassing nuisances” that are preparing the way for more dangerous and complex future teleportation campaigns. He also thinks the cabal, which he believes to be in Calimshan, has chosen so public and dramatic a means of experimentation (rather than the far more prudent covert approach) as a means of establishing their reputation, plus gaining respect and influence, among the ranks of Calishite wizards. According to him, the name interested Faerûnians should watch out for is “the Maersaerath Mask.”

Though Elminster hasn’t yet volunteered anything more than this, several sages have pointed out that Maersaerath was the name of a kindly, widely respected wizard of rural southern Tethyr in the late 1200s DR, who tutored many wizards who later rose to prominence. (Maersaerath vanished in 1297 DR, and his disappearance was never explained—but his humble forest abode was pillaged of everything magical before visitors discovered him missing.)

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.