

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 10/12/2012



## Only My...

By Ed Greenwood

### ...Shoehorn of Puissant Castleblasting Can Save Us Now!...

es, the title of this column was once uttered by a player in a Realms convention adventure, in a moment of roleplaying excitement that wasn't entirely tongue-in-cheek.

As in, there really was a *shoehorn of puissant castleblasting* in his character's hand.

Or so the Sembian merchant who had sold him this "almost certainly magical" shoehorn (a fairly safe claim, given the pulsing blue glow the thing was giving off) had grandiosely described it.

It was, yes, a shoehorn, almost two feet long and three finger-widths wide at its flared end, narrowing to one finger-width at its curled-over narrow end. It was constructed of some smooth, hard-to-identify alloy that didn't appear to corrode, with ornate, curlicue runes all over it. They happened to be non-magical, meaningless decorations intended (successfully) to make the thing look more impressive and expensive.

It also had the offensive powers of a *horn of blasting* (to be precise, the properties such items had back in the 2nd Edition days), except that it couldn't be blown to unleash its sonic fury, but had to be used to, yes, aid a tight shoe, slipper, or boot onto the wielder's foot, while the desired target was viewed and concentrated upon.

It had some minor side powers and properties, too:

- The horn gave off a dim blue light when it was at rest. It could *detect poison* (that is, substances poisonous to whoever was holding it at the time) upon touch or immersion, by turning its blue glow to purple, and would do this automatically and continuously, without prompting or "activation." The brightness and vividness of the purple hue denoted the relative strength or danger of the poison. (A faint purple flashing at both ends but a whitish middle indicated that it was in contact with two or more substances that in combination would be poisonous to its bearer, but if kept separate weren't dangerous.) It could *neutralize poison* if it were touched to or immersed in a poison and also touched to a *potion of healing* or other one-use or charged magic item. It would obligingly drain that item's magic (potions entirely, or its random choice of 1d12 charges) in order to render the poison forever "safe" and inert. (The altered substance could neutralize other poisons it was mixed with, too, for a number of days equal to the number of charges the shoehorn had drained.)
- It could ignite kindling or flammable oil or other incendiaries (even dry parchment or clothing), by touch and the murmuring of a secret command word (which was graven, in very tiny letters in Thorass, the alphabet of the common tongue, inside the curl-hook of its narrow end). It didn't create a flame or a spark, but magically ignited just what it was touched to, if the wielder wanted that object or location to burn.
- If commanded to do so (by utterance of another command word, graven on its larger end, as its wielder positioned it and then let go of it), it could hover in midair, immobile despite a roaring gale, lashing waves, or the like (even magical disturbances), until another living creature touched it—whereupon it would fall, and could be readily snatched up by someone else, who would become its new wielder. This property made possible its use as a lantern (of sorts; it didn't stop glowing or pulsing).
- If touched to any stone wall and held against the stone while being simultaneously tapped on both sides, it would silently cast a *passwall* effect on that wall, corresponding to the maximum a 22nd-level magic user could manage. (Not quite "castleblasting," but then, the merchant was trying to sell the thing.)
- If struck against the bared blade of a nonmagical sword or dagger, it would emit the loud, echoing sound of twenty such blades being drawn, singing out of their scabbards. (It couldn't repeat this effect for several minutes thereafter, though.)
- If grasped and licked continuously, for up to 1 round, it would "record" all sounds around it that the licker could hear at the time (such as music, background noise, and conversations), for later playback (once only, when activated by the touch of the same person's tongue). It could store only one such "remember echo" at a time; trying to record a second one would be successful, but would wipe out the entire first "recording," even if it was much longer than the second one.

Silly enough powers—with a format and activation methods just as frivolous.

So why create something like this? Heck, why create *hundreds* of such "weird" items, and stuff them plentifully into the Realms?

Why not just have no-nonsense *swords +1*, and magic items straight out of the rulebooks? Why *earrings of lordly might* or *ale casks of the blinding strike*?

Well, because it's more fun, that's why.

Or, to put it more directly, monkeying with the appearance and properties of magic items leads to better roleplaying.

It was easy to memorize useful bits of the rulebooks in the early days of the **D&D** game, and not rare at all to have tournament convention players (that is, strangers to a DM) rattle off details of what some mace or rod "must" be capable of the moment it was found lying in a dungeon.

Those memorizers would search their minds—or the rulebooks right at their elbows—in vain for a "*shoehorn of puissant castleblasting*." And all the side powers of the item will certainly keep them guessing about what it can (or might, if they're not careful) do. Which keeps them thinking "in game" rather than stepping back into metagame thinking (using what they know from reading the rules or published adventures). It also made magic items that PCs gained more special, more worth having and keeping, so that winning them in the first place mattered more.

Moreover, remembering one of those weird side powers years later and using it in an ingenious manner to defeat a foe or get out of a tight spot is highly satisfying to players—or at least it sure has been for mine. They beam. They chortle. And of course I let them succeed when they use one of those side powers for something it wasn't really intended for. What better reward in a game of spurred imagination, than a payoff for . . . using one's imagination?

As a DM, I could add "hitherto unknown" powers to magic items whenever I wanted to, as warnings or atmosphere-establishers or to support or foreshadow a new plot—and it wouldn't seem jarring or unbelievable to my players, because they'd been uncovering weird little side powers in their items for so long that one more was just . . . one more. (It also made them view every spellcaster as more than a little crazy, and even caused the players of spellcasting PCs to ask me seriously if there was a mental cost to enchanting magic items, or just achieving mastery of powerful magics. Well, *of course* there is, but worry not; as that sort of craziness creeps up on you, it makes you unable to notice your own wavering sanity. Your helpful fellow adventurers will probably point it out, cordially or otherwise.)

So gonzo items (not overpowered, notice!) have added endless fun to my Realmsplay. One of the PCs in my home Realms campaign has owned a *backscratcher of wyverndoom* for over thirty years, without even knowing it. Woe betide him if he ever gets it too close to a live wyvern—but don't tell him, will you? I want to enjoy the moment. . . .

---

## 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.