

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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Outcast House

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.

uch has been made in lore and song of the pride and the stubborn nature of dwarves, and although this stereotype fails when applied to specific individuals as often as any other stereotype does, it is true that dwarves are in the main fiercely proud of their heritage. They cleave to and trust "beards" of their own clan before other dwarves. Yet in the darkest recent times of the race, when birthrates were low and the dwindling numbers of dwarves beset by many foes, and clan after clan faded to handfuls or into memory, more than one dwarf thought of founding new clans or even mixed-race families. Outcast dwarves or those just exasperated and out of touch with the thinking of their elders—particularly young urban-dwelling dwarves or traveling adventurers who saw how hollow or wrong or outdated the attitudes held by many older dwarves were—dreamed of living very different lives in what the dwarf adventurer Glandruth Kellori called "the bright Realms of today."

Kellori is one of these 'new' dwarf families, which is to say it's a family of intermarried dwarves, humans, gnomes, and halflings, dwelling in Waterdeep, Secomber, and Baldur's Gate and carrying on various shopkeeping, trade-work (mason-work, carpentry, roofing, and plumbing), and investment and reselling (mercantile "middleman") businesses. Some family members were on the road almost constantly, taking wagons between the three cities where the family dwelt, and making coins steadily by rushing whatever was in short supply in one city from what they could buy more cheaply in another city.

"Traditional" dwarves have tended to ignore such new families (in a political, if not personal, sense), because they could easily be deemed "non-dwarves" or "lost to the race." Clan chiefs and others of fierce opinions and set ways often dismiss dwarves taking part in such relationships as malcontents, outcasts, or "gone mad-minded" or "thaelwi" (an old, revived term that means "non-dwarf").

Inevitably an occasion arose when some of these ignored dwarves fell into conflict with long-established dwarf clans (the houses of Dunaxe and Longstone, as it happened) over mining under Secomber and northeast from there, reaching under the High Forest. Scorned and belittled, the ignored ones decided to force the other dwarves to accord them some respect, even if it came in the form of loathing or hatred. They met in secret and agreed to form a new clan, House Helmhorn (named for a merry rogue of a dwarf

adventurer, an outcast who called himself only "Helmhorn," who'd recently died fighting smugglers in Waterdeep), with six chiefs and a score or so of "elders" (most of whom were far younger than elders of the established clans).

The new clan tried to treat with the Dunaxes and the Longstones as equals. This, as no one who knows dwarves



will be surprised to hear, did not go over well.

All Thaelwi, Every One

At first, the Dunaxe and Longstone elders tried to ignore the Helmhorns, but as a daily tactic this was impossible unless they wanted to walk away from the richest lodes in the Secomber mines, which the Helmhorns were firmly in possession of and actively mining. Moreover, as surface-dwellers, the Helmhorns had well-established sales networks in the ports of nearby Waterdeep and in the markets of Scornubel, as well as their own handy smithies and foundries, and simply had no need of the involvement or approval of the Dunaxes and the Longstones.

At first, the elder clans resorted to violence, but the Helmhorns countered by hiring non-dwarf arcane spellcasters and mercenaries to bolster their own fighting strength, and they vanquished the Dunaxes and Longstones in skirmish after skirmish.

Although the infuriated Thalgoreth Dunaxe, clan chief of the Dunaxes, proclaimed the Helmhorns “all thaelwi, every one!” and the Longstones took to calling them the Outcast House, intimating that every Helmhorn was an outcast (and presumably a criminal or at least a seditious troublemaker, to have been cast out), the Helmhorns ignored such insults and continued mining, smelting, casting, and trading the results as if the Dunaxe and Longstone dwarves were mere “outland troublemakers” from afar trying to horn in on a clan mine not their own without any legitimacy—which, as some human sages have pointed out, was more or less true; the Dunaxes and the Longstones were far from home, and once the Helmhorns had proclaimed themselves a clan, the mine was a clan mine.

Nor could the Dunaxes and Longstones press claims that the Helmhorns weren't a “real” clan with much fervor or success, being as every last dwarven clan was founded in times faded and confused in memory, some of them claiming long-disputed or spurious divine blessings. Those that have firmer specifics of their beginnings are almost all founded by like-minded dwarves declaring themselves a clan. In most cases, these clans parted ways with clans they already belonged to. Sometimes they joined together because once-proud clans were reduced to a few individuals and in real danger of extinction if they didn't band together against the perils of the Underdark or burgeoning orcs contesting the same mountainous regions.

The Helmhorn Way

Dwarves tend to become close-mouthed or more often silent when asked to share their inner thoughts or their plans for the future with anyone beyond immediate family members. They also tend to react with anger when non-dwarves are so bold as to pry into their privacy in this manner. Adventuring comrades and business associates are exceptions, and even then, the dwarves expect such converse to be limited to legitimate matters, meaning the shared endeavors, not personal topics. At the same time, dwarves have world-views just as all other sentient beings do—that is, they see the world through a lens of their own interests, experience, and the opinions they've encountered that they agree with or value. And dwarves do plan for the future beyond, as halflings and some humans have repeatedly joked, “survival, endless axe-sharpening, and finding and deciding on favorite lumps of stone.”

House Helmhorn members share a philosophy that's articulated far more than the views of most dwarves. They foresee a future (far, far from now) when “the lodes will all be mined out” and dwarves will have to become “far more than miners,” and live as crafters who work more than metal and stone. Right now, mastering and advancing the techniques of making ever-finer wire, and learning to polish and grind glass and rock crystal into lenses that can reliably magnify without distortion, are endeavors the dwarves should pursue for success. So they are learning to live with humans and other races in surface cities, and to get along with everyone, from disgraced dwarves and half-dwarves to orcs. As prosperous adventurer Tathgurd Helmhorn said, “Befriend or fight the individual, not the race out of ancient habit. See the world for yourself and draw your own conclusions; the opinions of ancestors were bright in their day, but those days are not these days.” Helmhorns try new ways of doing business, new foods, and new furniture and fashions. As such, they undergo as many pratfalls as any experimenter, but their minds are always open to new ideas, and they often talk together over tankards of evenings about the future, what they can see of coming consequences, and what they anticipate of the doings of rulers, guilds, and other social groups (often human). As the sage Dathra of Waterdeep observed wryly, “Some Helmhorns even dance, often, when they haven't been drinking.”

A Few Prominent Helmhorns

Although House Helmhorn is both new and small in numbers, a handful of its fullblood dwarf members have acquired something of a public profile. These include the successful adventurers Tathgurd Helmhorn and Jaranna

“Jester” Helmhorn. Tathgurd is a tall, slender, handsome dwarf who explores old delvings and ruins in the Sword Coast North when he isn’t making daily coin on caravan escort duty up and down the Sword Coast and across the Heartlands to the Sea of Fallen Stars. Jaranna gained her name because she is a juggler, comedic singer, and “pratfall actor” of Waterdeep’s clubs and taverns who has made several forays into Undermountain that enriched her.

The clan’s most impressive elders are the gravel-voiced, long-bearded successful Waterdhavian merchants Gorlharr Helmhorn and Alastel Helmhorn. Gorlharr is a wagonmaker, ropemaker, and manygoods trader who makes and sells a wide variety of hooks, both tiny and larger folding affairs and fixed ones that can serve as small-craft anchors. Alastel deals in bound blank books, maps, scrolls, scroll-tubes, and “rainproofing” or wax-coating valuable parchments and papers.

It’s likely dwarf members of the clan who are not full-blooded dwarfs will become better known soon, because two beautiful female Helmhorns are rising fast in Waterdhavian mercantile circles due to their shrewd dealings. They have offered their services (more or less as factors or trading agents) to the city’s nobles for percentage fees of profits made, and they are beginning to get offers. They are Athla and Bardreira Helmhorn, and they are cousins and friendly rivals.

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.