

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 3/25/2014



Prunchaerl's Matchless Blade

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.

very year, new weapons with grandiose names appear for sale in the Realms—though true innovations are few, and most of them are familiar weapons (usually longswords, daggers, or sabers) augmented by some new wrinkle or other. Recent examples of these not-so-innovative improvements include a new "shiny forever" alloy coating to make swords gleam as glossily silver as modern real-world chrome or mirrors; hinged two-part hilts that swing down to encase all of a weapon-wielder's hand except the wrist in a solid curved metal shell or a complicated scrollwork basket; and sword blades or hilts that fold up so a weapon can be carried in concealment (strapped to a leg or forearm under clothing, for example).

At first glance, Prunchaerl's Matchless Blade is just one more such offering, and not a particularly eye-catching or original one at that. It's a rather nondescript longsword, of sturdy everyday construction, but with a thicker grip to its hilt than most. The pommel can be turned to unlatch it, and then removed, to reveal that the thick hilt is a hollow tube, permitting storage of small items within it. This is something that many previous competing blades have featured, yet for some inexplicable reason of shifting public taste, pricing, and availability, Prunchaerl's has caught on and suddenly become so wildly popular that they can't be made fast enough to meet the demand.

The Inevitabilities of Wild Success

This means, of course, many copies are now being made and sold by others. The Realms has no concept of copyright or patent, beyond the heraldic work of the Heralds and a deity's "ownership" of particular symbols and sayings, so there's literally nothing wrong with this. For his part, Aldemos Prunchaerl is too busy getting rich and working all the hours he can stay awake, hammering out endless hollow-hilt blades in his smithy not far upriver of Crimmor, to worry about such things. He can't quite believe how popular his swords have become, despite his raising the prices threefold, and is too old and cynical a man to believe it will last forever . . . but in the meantime, his fortune is made, and he doesn't really care if others get rich "on his cloaktails," too.

His competitors are many, and some of them have begun to spice up their blades to stand proud of the crowd and increase sales, often by including precious cargoes of items in the hilts as part of the initial purchase price. For example, Salros Mrendivur, who relocates his business (making and attaching hilts to blades he imports in bulk from forges in the Shining South) often around the uppermost outskirts of Baldur's Gate, offers "Genuine Original Prunchaerl's Old Trusty" blades pre-loaded with useful items: a fishhook, a needle, 3 gp, 2 sp, and 2 cp, a folded cloth suitable for writing messages around a pointed pitch-nub, around which is wrapped 3 feet of fishing line (suitable for making snares or garroting), and a black cloth facemask with precut eyeholes. Others have opted for more boringly practical rolled-up-small sacks or sheets, and at least one vendor (Lamaskarl's of Waterdeep) sells such blades to nobles, with gems added all over the pommel and hilt scrollwork, and the hollow hilts stuffed with lingerie ("for the wielder to wear or gallantly gift").

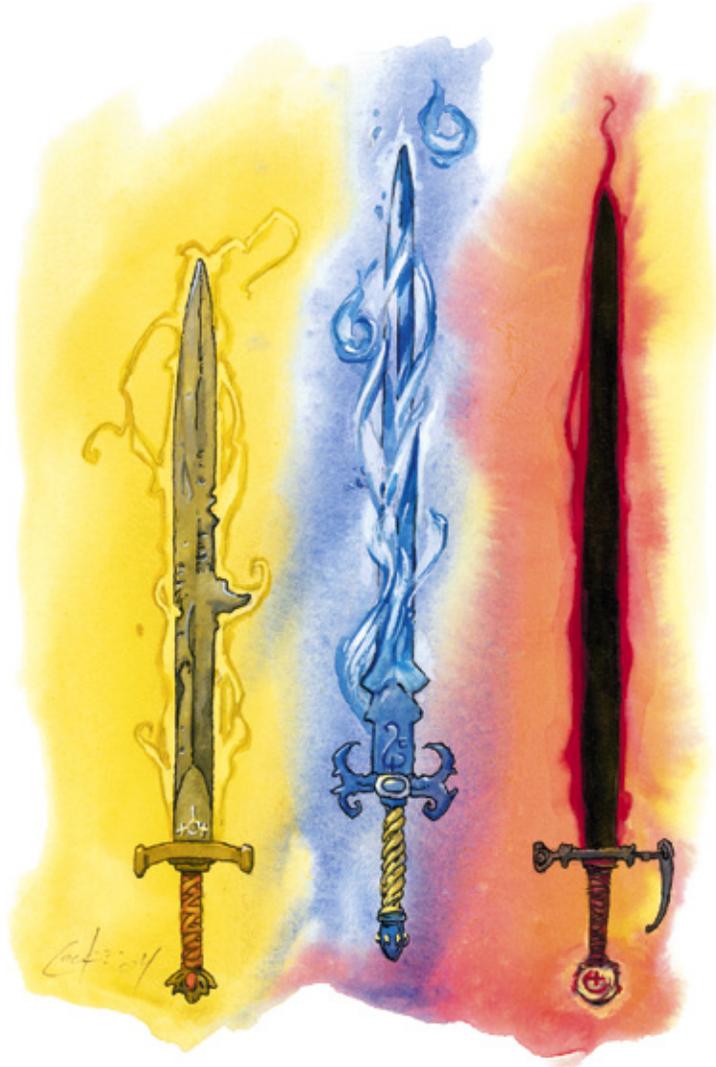
Shady and Other Uses

Many owners of Prunchaerl's blades use their hilts for smuggling gems or powders (or small vials of liquids) that command high prices (such as poisons and their antidotes, rare spices, and certain drugs), and temples have begun to make and sell holy charms or holy favors (tiny knotted cords affixed to tinier non-monetary coins) that can be carried in a hollow hilt to bear the favor of the god.

Spies and shady organizations of all sorts have begun to make use of such blades to carry messages, usually a single

word per sword, so the possibility of deciphering a message from captured fragments of it is small. Even short sentences found inside a Prunchaerl's blade are usually false messages—or only one particular word of them is valid, and all the rest misleading and to be ignored; sender and recipient agree beforehand to heed only the first word, or the last, or the second, or whatever.

All over the Heartlands, keys are being modified, or new versions cut, that are slim enough to be readily carried inside hollow-hilt blades. One maker, Setessaro's of Ormpur, has begun selling blades in which the hollow hilt is fitted with a welded-in, socket-like plug that is itself a key, so the sword is necessary to open the matching door. A rival, the Calishite exporter Jhavandran Elohlar, thinks fixed plugs are foolish, and removable ones (whose other ends can be needle-blades, or whistles, or tiny pulleys, or hooks, or any number of other useful things) are vastly preferable, so one sword can serve to carry multiple keys.



And then there are the magical uses. The one most spoken of in rumor is a human bone that has a word graven on it hidden in a Prunchaerl's hilt. When the word is spoken aloud, it transforms the bone into an entire human skeleton that can carry (items placed in its hands), fight (targets indicated by its activator), or defend (a doorway, chest, or item identified by its activator), but it seems no one has actually seen such a bone, or owned a sword augmented in this way; thus far, it seems, rumor is all.

Another rumor that may be true is a hollow hilt sword that contains a magically preserved piece of rust monster tongue or flesh, with its saliva or blood or "essence" sealed in a wax-sealed glass vial that has an outside clamp affixed to it. When clamped to the sword or a tool or even a branch and unstoppered, the vial's contents have the power to rust one metal weapon or object (a breastplate, for example) they are touched to, before being exhausted in efficacy. According to the stories, this expensive augmentation has been used in battle by clamping it to the tip of the hollow hilt sword that carried it; when the sword struck an opponent's blade in anger, the blade rusted and fell apart into whirling flakes,

allowing the suddenly unarmed wielder to be easily slain.

What Made Prunchaerl's Swords Famous

Although the following story may not be true, it raced the length of the Sword Coast recently and caused the first rush of demands for Prunchaerl's Matchless Blade; traveling caravan merchants were inundated with requests at every stop along the trade roads.

The tale runs as follows: Suliim Aradjak, a Calishite adventurer who had purchased a Prunchaerl's saber and hidden a wax-sealed glass vial of acid in its hilt, was working as a caravan guard when he was captured at a wayside inn by Tethyrian soldiers accompanying tax collectors of that land, who accused the caravan merchants of neglecting to pay certain taxes. The merchants disputed the claims, so they and all those working for them (caravan guards very much included) were imprisoned, and their goods and wagons held, to force them to pay up. For every day they refused, one ox or horse would be confiscated permanently as payment for their "board" while incarcerated.

Aradjak cared nothing about the dispute, but cared very much about being locked up. He'd had a few moments in which to work unseen as the arrests began, and he used them to take the acid vial out of his sword (which was seized when he was taken), and hide it in his long, unshorn hair and later in his mouth, as he was being searched. After he was jailed, during the long night of bored soldiers strolling along in front of too many cells of loud, angry prisoners to remain as alert as they should have been, Aradjak used the acid on the old hinges of his barred cell door, and the acid ate them entirely away—so he was able to shift the door wide enough to just slip out of incarceration and make his escape. Intending both to warn other caravans and to thoroughly shame the Tethyrians for what he viewed as extortion rather than a legitimate demand for unpaid taxes, Aradjak told the story of his escape scores of times. Gleeful or thoughtful travelers of all sorts retold it, over campfires and in taverns, and the demand for Prunchaerl's Matchless Blade took fire.

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.

About the Author
