

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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## Sedition and Eskryn's Hot Bestseller

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.*

lenty of lands in the Forgotten Realms and other settings have wealth, large numbers of literate citizens, and at least a handful of residents who fervently desire the current ruler—or even entire governing system—to be gone, soon and forever.

One might even say that such conditions are ideal settings for adventurers (even if not so much fun to live in). So Dungeon Masters may want to have no shortage of them in their own Realms campaigns.

Take Cormyr, for example. (Or, as more than one senior Zhent has been known to say, over the last few centuries, "Take Cormyr! By year's end!")

Cormyr has always had rebel movements among its outlying conquered cities of Arabel and Marsember, and it is also home to various treasonous sentiments among its fractious nobles. Many of these nobles disagree with various details of the rule of the Dragon Throne, and some of them believe the Obarskysrs have no legitimate claim to be sitting on it. Further, these nobles assert the Obarskysrs have no authority to give noble Cormyreans orders or levy taxes upon them, and they should confine their "kinging it" to the baseborn and outland visitors.

Grumbling privately about such things seldom shakes any throne, unless the gods (or if one prefers, capricious mischance) hands opportunistic nobles a chance to take down a ruler or capture an heir. If, however, like-minded nobles are afforded the means of communicating with each other often, quickly, and with relative ease, grumbling can very quickly become scheming, and scheming in turn rapidly becomes coup attempts and even successful usurpations.

That's one of the reasons the Dragon Throne has almost always been propped up by a guiding wizard, usually assisted by the infamous Wizards of War ("War Wizards" in daily speech, even among member mages). Their magical prying makes it extremely difficult for nobles to freely discuss possible treason or Crown policies in a way that could result in formal factions developing on more than one issue. Additionally, the laws of the land mandate that house wizards live in every noble household. These house wizards either spy for the War Wizards, or the wizards are so thoroughly spied upon by the War Wizards that they become walking arcane eyes in their households.

Nobles can try going out on hunts to "get alone together" to talk. They can depart Cormyr on shopping or trade or monster-hunting or seek-exotic-things-for-my-collection expeditions to try to evade the magical reach of the War Wizards. They can hire independent mages in outland cities to change their faces and bodies to try to shake off scrutiny. They can even feign affairs or romantic involvements to get into bed together so as to whisper sedition privately. All of these things have been tried over the centuries, some of them many times . . . but all too often without success.

Additionally, various rebel cabals have tried many ways of sending messages, from message-etched broken-off knife-points slipped through the skins of melons or other large fruits or vegetables, to well-paid (or even unwitting) messengers, such as servants gifted with new clothing for journeys. This clothing is removed and laundered as they sleep over as guests at their destination, and a hidden, sewn-in message is changed out for another for the return trip. Most often and most successful are simple signal codes (if the coach is black, it means this; if it's green, it means that), but the nobles lack the facility of sending complex and subtle messages.

More rarely, nobles have used bolder and more open means, but the War Wizards long since grew wise to the practice of sprinkling broadsheets and chapbooks with coded messages among the advertisements and even

stories.

That doesn't, however, stop each new generation of schemers and traitors from trying to get past the watchful eyes of the Wizards of War, the Highknights, and other Crown agents. Recently, Cormyr saw the latest such attempt: the rise of the bestselling "epic romance," a four-chapbook serialized fictional saga of swordplay, gallantry, and misunderstandings among imaginary nobles in a realm that very closely resembled the real Forest Kingdom.

Called *The Roaring Red Blade* and penned by one Yevender Eskryn (a pen name for an unknown writer strongly suspected of being a courtier of high rank employed in the Royal Palace of Suzail), this work contained chapter head paragraphs easily distinguished from the rest of the narrative by the "drop capitals," which are large initial letters beginning the first word in each of them. The first sentence of each was meaningful to the fictional story and not to the plotters, who were scattered across Cormyr and who purchased each chapbook and read it. The rest of the paragraph, though, always "put into the mouths of" fictional rebels and traitors in the story, had characters discussing their various plots and also served as clear communication to the real-life schemers against the Dragon Throne. So, the drop capital served as a marker for those seeking to gain information about seditious doings.

*The Roaring Red Blade* recently became a swift bestseller, popular from one end of Cormyr to the other, in part because of its lurid scenes of romance and lovemaking, in part because of its bawdy pratfall humor and salty language, and in part because of its blunt and even rude observations on matters Cormyrean made by various of its characters. "The Roaring Red Blade" himself was a bearded, gravel-voiced swashbuckling swordsman with a red eye patch, who in the last of the four chapbooks was revealed to be a gang. That is, the real bearded man missing one eye was lying abed sorely wounded after the climactic fight that ended the first of the four parts of the story, and three different female accomplices disguised themselves as him, in turn, for each of the three later chapbooks. When at last the forces of good track down the Red Blade, he has recovered enough to make his escape as his three impostors ply their blades in a rearguard action that stymies the authorities, and then follow him.

Readers saw hints that the Red Blade was known in the realm by another name earlier in his life, and that he'll return to "claim what is rightfully his." Soon.

Sequels are now eagerly awaited by the reading public—and by various Crown agents who are now puzzling out the meanings of the passages printed in the four chapbooks. A bound and "augmented" collection of the chapbooks has been announced, and the Dragon Throne is going to make very sure those Crown agents take close note of every last word and detail of the augmentations, too.

Stay tuned, as they say.

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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.

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