

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 11/30/2012



So What Do Ye Do for a Living?

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.*

he independent (non-guilded) traveling traders and craftworker-merchants of the Realms are a numerous and varied lot, and over the years I've found them to be a great way of adding color and interest to unfolding Realmsplay. Most of them do some spying, delivery of messages and small precious items, and even active "secret agent" work (vandalism, theft, intimidation, and sometimes arson and killing) on the side. They are seldom unarmed, never foolish or unprepared, and always know more than they appear to concerning where things are locally and how to hide or get aid. Most are consummate actors. As a result, they are excellent lures for bringing PCs into unintended or unforeseen adventures, as well as great recurring foes for the characters. Their hidden depths readily suggest all sorts of little traps and ploys they can use on adventurers who pursue them or try to spy on them.

They arrive at inns or taverns where the PCs happen to be, lurking among a group of caravan merchants and guards who might get mobbed by local folk hungry for some news, and who are quite willing to trade some of that news for a tankard of ale. The PCs of my home Realms campaign soon learned not to ignore these very useful folks. Even if the characters were too busy to follow up any adventure hooks these usually garrulous wayfarers let drop, a few coins offered to one of them could pry loose the names and addresses of useful contacts. ("The best locksmith in Priapuri? That'd be old Thadras, on . . . where else? Lock Lane! It's the alley behind the temple of Waukeen, at the east end of Raunwyvern Street.")

Here are a few of these interesting travelers who might be met just about anywhere in the Heartlands, Sword Coast, or Inner Sea regions of the Realms in the 1340s and 1350s DR:

- The kenku Zherend Arjhoool of Narubel is a dealer in various species of live or pickled slugs. The pickled ones are exotic foods, and the live ones act as filters when turning pulped fruit into juices, mash into beer, or must (or even dregs left at the bottom of flagons) into wine. They are usually sold by the handkeg, varying in price from 8 gp for pickled slugs up to 50 gp for the rarest, largest, highest-capacity slugs.
- The infamous Glarasteer Rhauligan, in his day job, is a dealer in turret tops and spires who usually keeps to Cormyr, Sembia, and the Dales. He designs the tops of mansion or castle towers, transports the components (cut stone, tile, and waterproofed wooden framing pieces known as ribs), and hoists each tower into place by means of a site-assembled crane. He's never done a temple spire; when Rhauligan says "spires," he means conical castle-tower roofs, usually capped by flagpoles or weathervanes that are grounded to serve as lightning rods, and made either of metal cladding or tiles over a waterproofed wooden frame. A turret can also be topped with much a flatter "weathercap," usually of copper over wooden ribs, or by a reinforced flat platform, often with cradles for ballistae and invariably surrounded by crenelated battlements. Rhauligan does these platforms complete with trapdoors, signal poles, and sometimes "great gongs" (huge round shield-shaped bells hung on chains from a frame and struck with a club). Prices vary widely by size and appointments (ladders, cladding, and architectural detailing), starting at about 900 gp for the smallest and crudest, and going up through 25,000 gp for the largest and grandest. Open turret tops start at 1,200 gp for the smallest and simplest, average about 3,000 gp, and can be ten times that for the largest and strongest (with reinforcing enough "to let pairs of dragons bill and coo atop your tower without doing damage!"). Rhauligan's "quieter job" is as an unofficial agent of the Crown of Cormyr, reporting to Queen Filfaeril (and after the Steel Regency began, to the Dowager Queen Filfaeril and the Steel Regent, Alusair Nacacia Obarskyr).
- Ilast Sendru, a haughty and effete half-elf from Tharsult, sells coins that have been hinged and hollowed out to be tiny storage places for poison powders or short written messages. He also deals in politically dangerous information. Officially, he's a buyer and seller of fine exotic fabrics, such as gold-thread diaphanous silks; flat-weave, supple "copperbright," which is linked copper "cloth" that's really very fine plate armor, the copper discs each being the size of a small adult human thumbnail; and "bluebeast," a blue-dyed fabric made of the softest furs sewn together back to back to provide two soft sides. Sendru always decries the latest fashions but enthusiastically sells them, as well as the older ones he decried so loudly one to six seasons ago. He has a real talent for making fat clients of both genders look good, and thin ones look stunning.
- Orviir Kalgalast of Heldapan travels the Realms selling expensive but very realistic, enchanted (to keep them from melting, cracking, or weathering swiftly in sunlight or frigid temperatures) rubber-covered, multi-jointed, wooden-and-

metal false limbs for humans, elves, half-elves, and halflings (fingernail styles and skin hues done to order). Many of the most expensive models of these incorporate hiding-cavities or retractable weapons. Such features typically triple the price—but even the base prices are steep: A replacement "under-piece" (such as part of a joint, or a forearm) starts at 600 gp, while an entire jointed limb with full strapping but without its rubber sleeve is no less than 2,200 gp. A large person wanting the best limb that doesn't incorporate a hiding place or a weapon can expect to pay 4,000 gp. There are tales—true, Elminster attests—of clients who didn't pay fully for their limbs later experiencing great suffering or death when their limbs suddenly exploded, suggesting that Kalgast has access to magic.

- Jalathra "Jalath" Bravren of Scornubel is a beautiful brunette woman who usually wears a grotesque wooden mask to conceal her face while trading and traveling. The mask is rumored to be magical, because she seems able to withstand poison (including gases), to use something like a *dimension door* effect to get out of a locked room or cell, and to call upon *fly* or *feather fall* for short periods after leaping out a window or off a balcony or a roof in what should have been a fatal fall. (Yet it's possible she's simply a spellcaster, or wears magic items that give her these abilities, and the mask bears only spells against mold, fire, and desiccation.) Jalath, as she prefers to be known, is a dealer in locks, timers, small mills (grinders, for nuts and beans), measuring pourers, and other "sidetable-top" devices with simple clockwork mechanisms—not Lantanna wonderworks, but items any smith can readily understand (though he or she might lack the means to properly temper the coiled springs). In other words, the sort of device that one cranks up before releasing a catch to let the stored-up energy be used by the device as it performs a pour out of a spout, or grinds, or rotates a number of locks behind a keyhole, or does whatever else it's designed for. It's suspected that Jalath's person is protected by spring-loaded darts and concealed weapons, and that the "under armor" she wears incorporates lockpicks, saws, vials of acid for eating away iron bars, and the like. She is known to sell thieving tools, skeleton keys, and "false locks" (ones that the ignorant need a key to open, but those "in the know" can open by simply manipulating them in secret ways with a finger). She is widely believed to be a messenger, a spy, and an information collector for sinister cabals—but no one knows just which ones.

These characters are just a first handful. So the next time PCs in a taproom see glib-tongued, weather-beaten traders, some sporting eye patches or impressive scars, seize the moment and spice up an adventure!

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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