

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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Tharamralar "Blood of Beholders"

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.*

own the centuries, many lurid (and usually grisly) local legends all over Faerûn tell of human families who served beholders (or were eye tyrant slaves), who worshiped beholders in various backcountry or urban "upper room" cults, and who even bred with beholders who could shapechange.

Most folk in the Realms scoff at—but secretly fear—the idea that some eye tyrants really can shapechange and dwell among humans undetected. Sages almost universally reject the idea that beholders and humans in whatever forms could have offspring; they believe most such tales began as incorrect explanations for humans being made to look like beholders, or vice versa, through the use of magical illusions.

Word is now spreading of a handsome, charismatic, and wholly ruthless individual who may be living proof that at least one beholder has shapechanged and successfully bred with a human.

The Beholder Man

Tharamralar claims to have no surname, but he has been known to spread his nickname when he arrives in a city, and then trade on the fear or respect this engenders. Even skeptics have observed two abilities that might bear out the belief that he is of the "Blood of Beholders." He radiates a continuous, invisible, short-range antimagic field (akin to the powers of most eye tyrants' central eyes), and he has eyes that can open in the palms of both of his hands. Each emits magical beams when he wills them to. He normally keeps his hands closed; they have overlapping, lashless lids, and are difficult to see among the deep lines of his calloused-by-work palms. Tales vary widely on just what magical effects these eye beams have, but every account agrees they are narrow, straight beams that don't go far (perhaps seventy or eighty feet, at most) and that Tharamralar must wield them carefully or miss targets. He's not thought to be great at aiming and is most effective with his eye beams at immobile targets or foes within forty feet.

Some reports say Tharamralar also has two retractable eyestalks in either armpit, and they thrust forth to send eye beams at his enemies (telekinesis and slow effects are most often described), but most accounts make no mention of these.

Everyone who claims to know Tharamralar at all closely, and who has survived to write or speak of it, mentions some additional attributes: The "beholder man" is resistant to most poisons, regenerates very quickly (and so has been nearly slain several times, but survived and shows little sign of former injuries), and shuns intimacy, taking no lovers.

Some witnesses (including the veteran thief Yarathra "Swifthand" of Athkatla, infamous for dancing along taut wires from rooftop to rooftop to celebrate her successful thefts; and the seemingly ageless, wizened old caravan merchant Tharagul Mrosk of Scornubel, thought to be one of the most successful makers and sellers of "physics" [bottled liquid medicines] in Faerûn today) say Tharamralar needs very little sleep, and he often dozes for brief periods by day, in the saddle or wagon or seated at a desk. So, throughout most nights, he is wake and alert, usually scheming, though he may upon occasion feign sleep to lull would-be attackers into revealing their intentions.

Tharamralar is known to be skilled at throwing knives and to tip the blades of his weapons with various poisons and venoms, preferring those that cause paralysis.

A Villainous Career

In recent years, Tharamralar has traveled the Realms from city to city, posing as a caravan merchant. Upon reaching a city he hasn't scoured before, he hires on to do menial shop work (loading, unloading, delivering, taking orders, or message-bearing; tasks that allow him to move about a city often, and observe) and unhurriedly finds out which local individuals have a lot of portable wealth (often guildmasters, local crime bosses, or nobility).

Tharamralar learns what he easily can of their routines, interests, and usual whereabouts, then sets to work considering how best to kill them and seize their wealth. Often this involves tricking his intended victims with imaginary crises to get them to liquidate their riches, move treasure caches from place to place, or at least strengthen guardianship over their wealth, so as to reveal its location.

If a noble or guild is already quietly doing business with a crime lord, Tharamralar may assassinate and impersonate that lord, or set himself up as a rival and try to frighten the crime lord into doing something rash, or wealthy clients into making moves. As a result, he has briefly ended up as a local crime boss on several occasions. He seems to have acquired a dislike for such look-over-your-shoulder-constantly careers, and now he prefers to set up a dupe or puppet as the crime lord, seize what he's after, and slip away, leaving them to face repercussions or any war among rival criminal cabals.

Tharamralar is driven to accumulate coin (when he has excesses of it, he uses it to buy city properties that can derive rental income) and to learn all he can of powerful "old coin" families and the interconnections of blood and power around all rulers of the Faerûnian North.

Those who've paid the most attention to him see him as preferring to be the power behind a throne rather than a publicly known ruler himself—but they do see him as pursuing power to end up controlling a large and important city-state (nothing smaller than, say, Iriaebor or Scornubel) or an entire realm.

Tactics

Tharamralar often befriends and works with half-orcs, other half-breeds, "tainted ones" (such as humans who have scales and webbed feet, and so are thought to have merfolk or lizardfolk blood in their ancestry), the disfigured, and ugly or shunned outcasts who look different from other citizens, whenever he finds them (the back alleys, sewers, and slums of many Faerûnian cities are home to such folk).

Yet he also knows well that to carry off certain deceptions or negotiate effectively, he'll need handsome individuals of the right sort (such as a member of the watch or guard of a city, or a young and romantically unattached noble), and he recruits them, too.

He takes care to inspire loyalty in his underlings by finding out what they desire (and how best they personally can be motivated) and trying to make sure they—slowly, and bit by bit, because such spread-out achievement keeps them working with him for as long as possible—achieve their desires. On the other hand, he makes brutal examples of those who swindle or betray him—and he will unhesitatingly sacrifice someone if it protects him or advances something he's trying to achieve.

Tharamralar is said to have a poor memory but he wants to accumulate blackmail facts and other useful lore about individuals and groups who interest him (names, addresses, meeting places and favorite taverns and clubs, scandals, and relationships with others—feuds and hatreds as well as friendships, romantic entanglements, and business ties), so he jots what he learns down in a seemingly endless series of identical belt-pouch-sized "little books," as he calls them. He carries one such book, and ink, and a quill in a "crushguard" case, at all times, and he keeps his collection well hidden. He's not above selling information to rivals, but he prefers that most folk don't ever learn that he takes and accumulates notes. He once tore apart—alive, and in front of his other servitors—an underling who dared to steal one of his little books.

Heritage

Tharamralar doesn't discuss his origins. When answering questions about where he's from, he tends to answer Athkatla (unless he's in Amn at the time, whereupon he'll say Saerloon) or give a city he's been in more than a decade ago, that he thinks the questioner won't be personally familiar with.

Several former underlings have written short, sensational chapbooks about their time in his service (penned and published before their various "disappearing acts") in which they mention a mysterious younger sister, named Anthra, of Tharamralar that he seems to fear. These underlings were servitors left behind in a city Tharamralar has departed from, who have themselves since moved elsewhere, changed their names and appearances, and think themselves relatively safe from his vengeance.

Anthra is dark-haired, shorter than Tharamralar, slender, and of rather nondescript appearance. She covertly follows him to a city from time to time, or is a resident of a city he arrives in. After she has identified one of his

underlings, she stops the person privately to ask if Tharamralar is "Ready to see his Anthra yet?" She then slips away, not arranging for any subsequent meetings. Invariably, Tharamralar is perturbed upon hearing of her and typically sends underlings to hunt for her and "bring her back to me—now!" Their searches are always fruitless. All she will reveal is that she's his sister and longs to see him.

One—and only one—report, from the bard Skulkyn Bittersar of Baldur's Gate, describes Anthra as having "four to six" beholderkin (that is, miniature flying beholders) that fly up out of her bosom or hiding places in her clothing, and then fly away at her bidding, presumably to spy for her, and that she talks to them.

The caravan merchant Berin "Old Toad" (so nicknamed for his warty grayish skin and bulging eyes) Awmglath of Delzimmer says he saw Tharamralar traveling with local caravans for years before he ventured north and west into the Sword Coast and lands about the Sea of Fallen Stars, which suggests he may have been born somewhere in the "East of South." He did once tell Awmglath his mother was dead, but said nothing at all of his father.

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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