

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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The Eyes of the Dragon, Part 1

Forgotten Realms

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.

There's a saying among members of the Cult of the Dragon that "The Cause Never Dies." That Cause is formally referred to as "the Unfailing Way of We Who Serve the Wyrms Undying."

This saying seems apt, because the Cult never fails. It suffers defeats in plenty, but it never vanishes—though it has often gone into hiding after reverses, or when other evils (such as the arcanists of Thultanthar) rise to dominance in Faerûn. Yet, from the later 1300s on, the Cult of the Dragon has proven far more flexible than many religious cults, secret societies, and power groups of Faerûn, constantly adapting in a swift and pragmatic way rather than resisting change and defending existing habits and bases of power. It appears both the most dominant dracoliches and cultists who serve them have adopted a "whatever it takes" attitude, seeking new opportunities to gain power, and new ways of doing things.

One of these new ways is to recruit spies—not active, fighting members of the Cult, but local eyes and ears who take part in no overt Cult missions or activities, but merely watch (and report to active Cult agents who contact them regularly and covertly) in many settlements across Faerûn.

Here follow details of some of these spies currently serving the cult in the Sword Coast North. The reader is warned that this is by no means a comprehensive list, and any roster is of necessity a snapshot of matters at one moment in time, quickly rendered obsolete by violent events, changing needs, and the current fluid adaptability of the Cult of the Dragon.

Baldur's Gate

Home to at least two current Cult of the Dragon spies.

Hanthan Marbrent is a horse dealer (who also deals in mules and oxen) in the Upper City. Sarcastic, sharp-

tongued, respected, and well established, he's known to be adept at horse doctoring and at throwing knives—thanks to a youth that is even wilder than he lets on. He's still a violent, calm-in-crisis, dangerous man, who is able and willing to do dirty work if the Cult desires. Marbrent is burly, has tattoos of galloping horses on his forearms, is balding, and has straw-yellow bushy eyebrows and a tiny chin-tuft of a beard. His eyebrows and very dark blue eyes give him the appearance of continually glaring or staring hard.

He is usually at his large stables and paddock, known as Margates. Margates has a tall, rather ramshackle guarded wooden entry gate, which can be reinforced with slid-into-sockets inner crossbeams and a portcullis if trouble is expected.

Anthaela Grimmund is a young, pudgy, stooped-over woman of nondescript looks (dirty brown hair worn long; hazel eyes) and dress. She is a trusted and longtime worker in Tannaertho's Handyworks, a crammed and dingy but popular shop that sells tools and knives on a narrow, crowded cross street (that is, east-west or parallel to the river, not descending north-south to the Chionthar). She's diligent and polite, knows where in the chaos of the shop a particular type, size, and finish (hue of handle or hilt) of item can be found, and is far more observant than she seems to be in person.

Anthaela has a frighteningly superb memory and good hearing, but her eyesight is starting to become close-focused (nearsighted) due to her work. Her weaknesses are chocolate and romantic gallantry.

Beregost

Irestros Aglanthar is a roofer and carpenter, employed by various locals on an as-needed basis. He is also on staff as a general handyman (and janitor who handles spills of vomit, blood, and the like) at the large, recently built, landmark inn on the main Trade Way called Warm Haven. Tall and thin, with a scarred face and even more heavily scarred hands, Aglanthar is taciturn, calm, unflappable, and usually unshaven, his face covered with stubble. He has bright green eyes and jet-black hair that curls at his temples, and he's usually dressed in homespun and leather breeches, all hung about with tool pouches on their own leather baldrics. These accouterments have earned him the local nickname Manybuckles. At all times when dressed and out of bed, he carries a large assortment of tools (including various chisels and knives), some wire (including a garrote he's skilled in using), and several small coils of fine cord and rope—and when he is abed, his tool pouches are always near.

Aglanthar is a diligent, unhurried worker in all things. Unmarried, he has a few lovers and no other close friends, but is friendly with many locals. His Cult contacts trust him, which is rare indeed in the organization today.

Everlund

Bruskarl Hammerthar is a plumber who is kept quite busy these days. Everlund is expanding its piped water network and its dung-flushing "shaws," which are fields southeast of the expanding built-up area where wastes are spread on a rotating sequence of fields, as fertilizer. He is also a well-known local ditcher (skilled digger and tender of drainage ditches, swales, and slopes to keep farm fields properly watered and drained). When tending ditches, a ditcher plants and gardens the right grasses and weeds to prevent open mud appearing and erosion occurring. Bruskarl is a craggy-faced, rough-voiced, good-natured man given to merry comments and trading jests. He's usually dirty and smelly—and cares not. He's going bald, and he covers his

ever-larger pate with a filthy, battered old leather wide-brimmed hat, not out of vanity, but out of simple practicality to prevent sunstroke.

In all things, Hammerthar is a practical man. He's also a heavy drinker (but can hold his ale, functioning well; it takes a huge amount to make him slur his words and get unsteady) and a bed-friend to dozens of married middle-aged and less than beautiful women of Everlund, for whom he fetches small necessities and gifts with flowers, wild fruit, and vegetables gleaned during his work.

Hammerthar travels Everlund and its environs a lot during most days, and so he is in a position to see much without appearing to stop and watch much of anything. He owns (and daily uses) a team of draft horses, a cart, and several plows and augers.

Iriaebor

Near the southern edge of the city stands a decade-old tavern that is more of an eatery and meeting place than a place for hard-drinking folk that families and the elderly should keep clear of. This popular establishment is the Three Ravens, and its owner and "Master" is **Hammat Ulsker**, a fat and easy-going middle-aged man who hums constantly, cooks and bakes and brews tirelessly, and maintains a welcoming house with staff that treat patrons with the same friendliness he does. His staffers are expected to privately report any little troubles and suspicious things to him, but none of them know he serves as eyes for the Cult of the Dragon—or anyone else.

Ulsker trusts his staff well enough to leave them in charge when he's off-shift, so he does not hover about keeping an eye on things. When he's off-shift, Ulsker enjoys life in Iriaebor, goes shopping, visits friends, and reports to Cult of the Dragon contacts. He knows to find these contacts on any given day because they stopped in at the Three Ravens earlier that day for a drink and a bite, and made sure he saw them (he knows where they take rooms, at inns that serve drinks, so he goes there to do his drinking and "just ends up chatting with fellow drinkers there," as he'd say.

Ulsker has a great memory for names and faces, is a skilled actor, and has no interest in doing violence—but he won't hesitate to lie to provide cult members with alibis, store and hide items for them (or even hide injured cult members or those who need a place for the night or just to disappear for a time), and send or take word to particular persons on their behalf.

Ulsker is doing well with the Three Ravens, and he is investing his takings in various rundown shops and rooming houses, planning to raze blocks of them he's slowly and quietly assembling so that he can replace them with grand inns and larger rooming houses.

Neverwinter

A city that's home to at least two Cult of the Dragon spies.

Broegran Waethlunter is a hardy, weather-beaten, gray-haired, and grizzled man who works as a woodcutter, making frequent forays to within sight of Luskan (though he never enters that troubled port). He runs a crew of cutters he's trained, and they "garden" (as they put it) the woods diligently, gleaning firewood and wood for carpentry without taking overmuch (and so thinning out the woods). As a result, he has a valid pretext for ranging so far afield on runs (with wagons, or sledges in winter) that last for days at a time. His cutters are aware that he often meets persons in the forest, sometimes accepting items for transport back to Neverwinter

that he covers over with wood. Waethlunter pays for their silence and he has told them just enough that they think he's mixed up in smuggling, not in anything to do with cults, draconic or otherwise. Waethlunter enjoys feeling important and useful as he makes and receives reports; in the twilight of his days, he wants to be part of big things if he can do so without a lot of danger. That said, he's always well armed and won't back down from a fight. He's pretty good with a crossbow, often downing edible forest creatures for the stewpots on the trail and back home. His cutters trust him and like him because he's fair, kindly, never loses his temper, and knows the woods well.

Daerruth Orvalan is a shopkeeper in Neverwinter who seldom roves farther afield than the end of the street where he lives (above his shop) and works. The shop rises three floors above the street, but is narrow, each level being one room that's three paces in width. Orvalan (who is unmarried and lives alone) occupies the topmost floor, and the shop takes up the two floors beneath.

Orvalan's Olornagatherum sells curios—that is, all sorts of furnishings and small objects that are beautiful but also have a practical daily use (from lamps and doorstops to cutlery and carrying cases). Much of the second floor is given over to paintings of a wide variety of styles and ages. The shop's name is derived from a previous owner's similar business: the now-dead Olorna ran what she called a "gatherum" (a junkier sundries shop, often largely full of secondhand wares) in the same premises.

Daerruth is a fussy, prissy, nervous man restless with energy. He has eyes as keen as a hawk's, an instinct for what will be popular, and a fierce love for Neverwinter "with all its warts," as he states. He delights in secretly being part of something strong and active and formidable, and he is fascinated with dragons, so if dragons are rendered greater in undeath, as he believes (a notion the Cult of the Dragon, of course, embraces), he wants to know about them, aid them, and even serve them. And he absolutely loves secrecy and deception that has a larger impact rather than just petty personal dealings or for fun. So he's the diligent heart-of-Neverwinter eyes, ears, and helping hand of the Cult of the Dragon, taking in reports from Waethlunter—though he's beginning to (correctly) believe the woodcutter despises him.

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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