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Forging the Realms Archive | 7/23/2014 **New!**



The Spellwurm's Search

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.

Just like humans striving for immortality or at least a longer lifespan, dragons seek and try many means for increased longevity. From the long-ago legendary (and probably apocryphal) king of a short-lived Border Kingdoms realm who heard that spiders live for centuries and promptly began eating handfuls of them every day to the ancient lichs all over Faerûn who decay in various fascinating ways, the hunger to live forever makes sentient beings do—or try. Many such attempted deeds turn out to be impossible or even fatal.

One wurm who has thought and experimented more with longevity than many seekers after immortality is the adult male blue dragon Helgaldegar, who lived in the mountains around Raurin (moving from one lair to another in those peaks as he defeated other wyrms and took their homes) for his early centuries. He soon demonstrated two unusual traits for a blue dragon: he didn't seem to mind cold and damp climates, and he had a natural aptitude for the Art (arcane magic) rivaling that of powerful human wizards.

Helgaldegar the Spellwurm used his wizardry with care, seeking to master dozens of spying spells, and he used these spells to covertly watch over many other dragons. He paid close attention to their lairs, traps, and usual battle strategies, of course, but instead of exploiting this to successfully attack and slay these wyrms and seize their lairs and treasure, he watched them from hiding for years to see if a notion that had struck him was true.

He now believes that it is. Helgaldegar holds that every dragon has its own nature (we might use the phrase "a unique body chemistry"), so what it eats (and when, how, and how much) can affect its longevity, vitality, aptitude for wielding magic or other specific activities, and so on. In other words, although a dragon can eat just about anything, and specific foods are craved and favored by specific types of dragons, particular unique diets benefit each individual dragon. For a time, Helgaldegar ate only wizards in an attempt to increase his magical mastery, but later concluded this was a simplistic misunderstanding of the relationship between his body and his diet. Yet his underlying belief seems sound, and Helgaldegar hopes to live for centuries more than most dragons, through a proper unique diet. His own favorite food happens to be a particular sort of whale (when beached, but before rotting), but Helgaldegar not only realizes this may not be the most beneficial thing he can eat—he is beginning to think all dragons prefer foods that actually shorten their lifespans and sap their vitality, eventually nudging them into lives of torpor and sleeping for longer and longer periods.



Helgaldegar and the Cult of the Dragon

Fiercely independent (and paranoid), like many other long-lived dragons, Helgaldegar is a loner who will never agree to work with the Cult of the Dragon. Rather, he lurks and spies on cult activities, thwarting or hampering them whenever he can do so without revealing his presence, name, and nature—because he mistrusts the cult and wants no such dragon-related organization to get too powerful. After all, in his opinion: "In the end, the cult professes to serve dragons, but really acts to control dragons, just as the worst sort of human rulers

control their subjects, even if they profess otherwise. Toril is better off without the cult."

Over the years, Helgaldegar has learned the hard way that a winning strategy for effectively fighting the cult without showing himself is to manipulate or even (through intermediaries) employ adventurers to pretend to be brigands or mercenary guards under hire, and deploy them to "accidentally" crash through cult operations. Although Helgaldegar's obsession with mastering magic and living longer makes him less addicted to amassing a hoard of treasure than many dragons, that hunger for gold and gems is strong enough to make him direct his intermediaries to demand attacks against cult paymasters, wealthy cult members, and cult members guarding cult wealth.

Yet Helgaldegar is cunning enough to avoid obvious "here's the loot" cult traps, and he even lets the cult be for long periods. Concealing his existence or true nature trumps scoring victories over the organization, which is a minor irritant or a favorite entertaining foe rather than something that should ever distract him from his long game of achieving immortality or great longevity.

Helgaldegar's Hands

Long ago, the Spellwyrms crafted a spell that let him control a golem with precision. He hid three golems in his hoard, buried under treasure, and still uses them as guardians to this day to guard against theft and as a last-ditch line of bodyguards against any foe who penetrates to the depths of his lair.

That said, Helgaldegar experimented with modifications to his golem spell until he had a magic that worked on the minds of willing human thralls. Then he practiced tirelessly, putting himself through great mental strain, until he could comfortably and for long periods keep three such spells active at once.

As a result, he now commands three able human agents at any given time. He can see and hear through the senses of these Hands, as he calls them, and unleash spells through them. He can also mentally speak back and forth with them over considerable distances (reportedly, his range now extends to not quite a day's ride of distance), and, at close range, he can coerce them into obeying his will even when they resist. So, a Hand desiring to flee can be forced not just to stand and fight, but to perform precise actions of the Spellwyrms's choosing, as he sees the unfolding situation through the Hand's eyes.

Helgaldegar prefers not to force his Hands to do anything, but they all know he can—because he has experimented with doing so on all of them. They and he both prefer willing obedience and working together over the dragon's raw power revealing itself to compel them.

On a daily basis, the Spellwyrms uses two of his Hands as personal lair guardians, and usually deploys only one of them at a time as agents, sending that agent out hunting for food or treasure or to reconnoiter—or having the agent accompany him to serve him literally as hands in opening, digging, turning over, or picking up and carrying things a dragon finds difficult, or when doing so will expose the dragon to danger.

Operational casualties and one betrayal have caused the roster of Hands to change over time, but the Spellwyrms is careful of the welfare of his Hands, even feeding their aspirations, promising them retirement (though as Helgaldegar himself admits, "Promises are more glibly made than staunchly kept"), and giving them vacations, personal triumphs and indulgences, and other rewards.

So for some years now, these three individuals have been the Spellwyrms's Hands, growing more experienced, capable, and loyal in their service (as their trust in the dragon grows, and they work more often and more successfully together).

Aranruth Vroadal: A traveling merchant of a successful mercantile family based in Tharsult and active up and down the Sword Coast, Vroadal is an expert appraiser, can tell a lot about wine or gems from a swift examination, and is deft with his hands. A sometime rogue with a knack for picking locks and counterfeiting both documents and gems, he got himself increasingly into trouble and welcomed the "escape" into Helgaldegar's service. He is slender, agile, and possesses slowly decaying good looks; in his youth, he was devastatingly handsome, but now in his mid-thirties, he's looking a little more weathered, and he is acquiring a paunch. He is a devastating mimic and often lapses into sarcastic cynicism.

Faurdarl Drammuth: A tall, ugly man with an overly large head, squashed nose the size of a large man's fist, and a ragged moustache that droops down over the uppermost of his three chins, this unlovely, burly bull of a man has large hands with many-times-broken fingers, a sizeable paunch, and a ponderous lurching walk. He can absorb large amounts of pain and is an inexorable, patient pursuer and foe, more cunning than he looks (he seldom fails to spot even cleverly concealed traps awaiting him). He speaks seldom and in short bursts,

as if words are precious, but can be quite eloquent if he wants to be. He usually prefers to play the large "strong and silent" menacing man.

Lorvran Thelnur: A capable warrior and observant, diligent guard, Thelnur is a balding middle-aged man of utterly nondescript looks; he's the sort of forgettable person (with thinning, pale brown hair, washed-out blue eyes, and average height) that eludes the memory of most witnesses—and he finds this very useful, and likes things this way. He has a slightly husky voice, a slow temper, and a weakness for wine and women that he can save up for months before satisfying on a wild night. He never forgets a name or face, and he is a patient foe who can track opponents for years, slowly accumulating evidence and taking great care not to let slip his own name or purpose. He knows thieves' dens and useful vendors of odd items and substances up and down the Sword Coast.

These three Hands serve as Helgaldegar's intermediaries, hiring or manipulating or steering mercenaries and adventurers into confrontations with Cult of the Dragon members or other targets of the Spellwyrms (traveling wizards who may possess interesting spells, for example). They are well aware of the capabilities and violent tendencies of adventurers, and they often have armed aides lurking nearby, or prearranged escape plans, for use if negotiations go awry.

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.