

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 4/23/2014 **New!**



The Thralls of Xaerogleth

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.

eholders are what humans consider geniuses—and most of them are, in the opinions of the relatively few humans who've ever come to have more than a nodding (or more often, a screaming and running) acquaintance with a beholder's personality, twisted geniuses.

Proud, self-centered, paranoid, willful, and cynical by nature, eye tyrants take precautions against what every other creature in the world might do to them or to thwart their aims and desires. Most eye tyrants are also bored, and they soon either lash out because of that boredom or begin to pursue elaborate plans to lift themselves out of their ennui. These schemes are often brilliant and are almost always both complex and many-layered, and what most humans would deem odd.

For example, one beholder might delight in tricking humans into making, enjoying, and consuming vast quantities of fish wine, deriving great amusement from the fact that humans are imbibing something both foul to their palates and harmful to many of them due to toxins that were in the particular sorts of unpalatable types of fish chosen for use in the winemaking. The beholder does this purely because the humans have been fooled (thanks to the beholder's manipulations of trendsetting individual humans) into thinking this wine is "superior" and "the thing to be enjoying." Another beholder may toy with the noble families and the rulers of a realm, like a living chess game, to see who they can topple or advance—purely for their own entertainment. Yet another will seek to breed monsters to derive new creatures of stable, fertile nature . . . and so on.



One beholder of relatively puny size and young age, resident in the southeastern mountain wilderlands of Amn in the early 1300s DR, pursued aims that saved its life, but also trapped it—aims that are still affecting adventurers all over the Heartlands to this day.

This is the tale of the thralls of Xaerogleth.

Xaerogleth of the Many Lashes

The parentage of the eye tyrant that calls itself Xaerogleth is unknown, but it was reared by a beholder that may have been one of its parents, to be that beholder's replacement as the guardian of an ancient white dragon's lair. The gigantic and usually asleep wyrm, one Althiunthlaurmm, was unknown to most humans and dragonkind alike because it seldom stirred from its remote, well-hidden high mountain cavern, where it had amassed a hoard of gold coins and raw gems largely seized from Calishite sources (including lesser dragons it had slain) in the remote past.

There the beholder Xiccaldaurr dwelt as the Guardian of the Hoard, commanding no less than a dozen helmed horrors who waited, hidden under treasure, to attack and slay all intruders at Xiccaldaurr's behest. Occasionally, Xiccaldaurr stole forth from the lair to raid or spy upon other residents of eastern Amn. Yet it apparently tired of this existence after a time. Acquiring (or more likely producing by mating; Elminster knows no details or truths of this, such as which beholder it might have mated with) a very young beholder it named Xaerogleth, it trained the young beholder in the duties of guarding Althiunthlaurmm's hoard—and then vanished, likely departing the area forever to pursue a

different life elsewhere.

Xaerogleth soon tired of guardianship and sought to alleviate its boredom through extensive expeditions to spy upon Amn and the independent towns and cities east of Amn along the trade-trails, and through collecting monsters it then trained to serve it. Its favorite such creatures were flying snakes that became known as "the Lashes" thanks to their battle tactics of lashing opponents across the face, neck, or other vulnerable areas as they attacked in swarms. For years, the Lashes were all some victims of Xaerogleth ever saw in an encounter, striking down or immobilizing foes (by entwining their limbs) before the beholder showed itself. Its cruel raids and killings made the lands east of Amn perilous indeed to humans throughout the early 1300s DR.

Yet these same depredations took a toll of the Lashes, and Xaerogleth found it increasingly difficult to find, capture, and train replacements; wild flying snakes in or near eastern Amn were few and largely unbidable, often fighting to the death rather than submitting to slavery.

Retaining its small handful of surviving snakes as a personal bodyguard, Xaerogleth decided to upgrade to a better, more versatile slave.

The Scheme

In its pride, Xaerogleth decided it could make, through breeding, a much more suitable slave creature than it could obtain through capturing and training. It chose humans as its base stock, because they were agile, adaptable and versatile—and very, very abundant. From its point of view, they were also "mentally weak."

Xaerogleth happened to be one of those beholders that has a natural aptitude for the Art, just as some humans have an innate talent for arcane magic. For decades it worked to perfect spells that would give it mental dominance within a tiny radius of an organic focal item. It hit upon the idea of using human bones as its foci—small bones from the parents of humans it had bred in captivity, surgically implanted in their offspring. In this way, the beholder gained effortless entry into, and control of, the brains of multiple humans at once. In this way, the humans became Xaerogleth's thralls, mind-controlled slaves that could fetch and carry for it, do dangerous things for it, guard and fight for it, and so on. Through tireless practice—for it cared not if it drove the bodies of its slaves into exhaustion and beyond, into collapse—it became adept at deftly controlling multiple humans in smoothly cooperating teams.

Xaerogleth then set to work crafting new and better spells that eventually enabled its own sentience to "leap into the heads of" these thralls, moving effortlessly from one thrall to another if the thralls were sufficiently close to each other.

Near Disaster

In the late summer of 1352 DR, with Xaerogleth still resident in Althiunthlahlurmm's lair but planning to soon depart for good (and the dragon deep in one of its protracted slumbers), a band of adventurers exploring the mountains for old dwarf mines found the wyrm's lair—and surprised the eye tyrant, who was concentrating on perfecting a complex and difficult spell (ironically, a warding spell that would raise an alarm if intruders entered the warded area). Terrified, the adventurers attacked with everything they had, and succeeded in shattering part of the cavern ceiling. The torrent of falling boulders crushed the beholder's body.

Xaerogleth had only an instant or two to escape, and desperately hurled its sentience into its nearest thrall: a female human of small stature and nondescript looks, that it had refrained from destroying only because her small size and weight enabled her to climb shelves and reach storage ledges in the spellcasting cavern that the larger, brawnier male human thralls couldn't reach without doing damage to that which they were commanded to retrieve.

Then it fled from the dragon's lair, westward into Amn. Eventually it reached Crimmor, and there used its intellect to covertly get wealth, practice and improve its mastery of the Art, and make contacts—and scheme.

Xaerogleth desperately wants to seize another eye tyrant's body to be its own, but hasn't yet worked out all the details (complete with fallback alternative plans, in case this highly dangerous attempt at bodysnatching goes wrong) of subsuming the mind of the beholder whose body it's taking—it doesn't want to end up warring with a resident intellect inside a brain it wants kept whole, housed in a body it wants kept unscathed.

Xaerogleth is considering somehow using a formidable band of adventurers, like the one that destroyed its own body, in its attempt to find and snatch the body of a beholder. Thus far, it is testing a growing "stable" of adventuring bands by sponsoring them in dungeon delves and ruin explorations attached to rumors of lurking beholders, and demanding that the adventurers locate and identify (size, name if at all possible, characteristics, aims) any eye tyrants they encounter.

Elminster would like to add the cautionary reminder that this is just the story of one beholder. Across Faerûn and the other continents of Toril, there are thousands of fiercely independent, largely hidden (and, by human standards, both insane and dangerously capable) beholders pursuing their own wild schemes.

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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