

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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## When Stuff Happens, Leaving a Legacy

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.*

Some folks try to fight the reality that -- like everyone else -- they're getting older, and will sooner or later die. These people might race to squeeze in more revelry or accumulate more achievements, or might deal with the reality by firmly putting all thoughts of mortality out of their minds until their failing bodies force attention to such matters.

Others start to think of what legacy they might leave, what mark they can make in the world that will outlive them.

In the Realms or any other ongoing **D&D**® campaign world, player characters can seek to establish legacies, too, and some players do think about such things.

Well-played characters in Realms campaigns have left behind all of these forms of tribute to their lives and accomplishments: monuments; thrones, noble domains, and titles; offspring to carry on the family tradition of adventuring or ruling a noble domain, if the character married into nobility; new towns; buildings (a temple, a cathedral, or a castle); important spellbooks; and inns named after them (one character after acquiring ownership of one and another after paying to rebuild an inn hit by a disastrous fire).

Characters who can retire wealthy often invest in objects or places (ships that go to sea, new neighborhoods in growing towns or cities, fortresses) that get named after them. Or they do what kings like Azoun IV of Cormyr did: try to leave behind as many offspring as possible, legitimate and otherwise.

A few NPCs have sought to establish treasure hunts or rumors to puzzle and consume the efforts (and sometimes, thanks to traps, the lives) of others after they are dead, thus keeping their names alive in the sometimes profane debates of those who seek the hidden gewgaw (which might or might not actually exist, depending on the person's personality and sense of humor). The Realms has several equivalents of Blackbeard (the pirates Kurskyn of Dardolphin Isle, a wild-bearded, fiery-tempered dwarf; and Dark Shalyss, a female wereshark who took to piracy on the waves late in life) and at least two mad kings (Marrhrek of Varaezel and Thorl Shatteraxe of Gheladaram, both from vanished Border Kingdoms), all of whose fell, trickster ghosts watch over valuable treasure these characters left behind.

The Realms also features more elaborate treasure hunts, such as the one that goes on to this day across Waterdeep, wherein questers try to figure out the meanings of cryptic rhymes left behind by the long-dead Lord Dauntan Manthor. These short poems are said to point the way to a fabulous treasure: Manthor's dazzling gilded and gem-encrusted flying suit of armor, which he had fused together and filled to the visor with gems and gold coins, then hid somewhere in the city. Or so local legend insists.

The tales that outlive Manthor and others of his ilk might capture the popular imagination and acquire more fame than a legacy embodied in a temple, a large bequest to some holy house, or royal children. Yet the children, the temple, or the bequest can have more lasting influence than any treasure.

Offspring are often the obvious choice for a legacy, because creative players can switch to the younger character to pick up a new career while still maintaining some continuity when the parent character retires from adventuring. Those mighty predecessors, of course, are still alive and can come out of retirement if really formidable challenges arise—or when the "new and improved" adventurer needs rescuing or raising from the dead.

In-game honors are also popular. Receiving a knighthood or other noble title, even if it comes with strings

attached (some amount of active service to the crown, not just loyalty), is something a player can be truly proud of, if it was well earned. "Tarnelo Warwynd, Tamer of Dragons" sounds a little grander than "Tarnelo Warwynd, Just Another Greedy, Me-First Adventurer."

If rulers are reluctant to bestow accolades, the truly formidable adventurer always has the option of founding a kingdom, or at least installing a ruling dynasty on an empty throne (or one that just happened to become empty while the characters were nearby).

And then there are the great heroic deeds of the campaign that have been immortalized in ballads and fireside tales. Wealthy characters might commission minstrels or bards to craft songs and poems that depict them as great heroes, to keep their memory bright. Such characters should be warned that unless a ballad has a catchy tune and lyric and persists in popularity, nothing much will stop tales of heroic exploits that are told and retold in taverns, across kitchen tables, and by firesides from "drifting" over time so the descriptions and doings and even the names of participants change. Turning the hero Herehk of the Arbor into the evil rogue Dlaerek of Arlborm, and his taming and riding of a dragon into the slaying of a dragon, really takes the punch out of Herehk's legacy.

Some players mistrust religious legacies because they fear a loss of control. If their characters sponsor a shrine, a suitable housing for a holy relic, or an oracle (house, food, and fuel, or funds to provide the same), they know that clergy will administer this gift, and the name of the donor might soon be forgotten. Worse, the contribution might even be belittled, if clergy exhaust what was given and ask for more.

The same waning of fame and gratitude might follow the gift of magic items to a town's ruler or guardians for the defense of the town. That's doubly true if the items are ever misused or the town's defense fails.

All of which brings us to the old debate about the ethics of philanthropy: Does one give aid because it is the "right" thing to do? Is seeking to leave a legacy through philanthropy a selfish act? If so, does trying specifically to establish a legacy, by its nature, make a person less deserving of being fondly remembered and honored? Mortals are seldom afforded a Great Evil Foe that they can decisively and publicly defeat and so attain the mantle of heroism. Even when this sort of thing does happen, one person's Great Evil might be another's role model, so that the person who defeated it can be a hero to some, an evildoer to others, and a deluded fool or goat to others.

So in the end, trying to create your own legacy is just as complicated and fraught with peril as everything else adventurers are apt to get mixed up in. As usual, they must hew their own road, make their own decisions, and live with the results.

When it comes right down to it, the same question and the same truism apply to **D&D** adventurers as to all of us in real life: What do you want to accomplish in your life? If you don't know where you're headed, you're unlikely to get there.

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## 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.