

FORGOTTEN REALMS ALTERNATE DIMENSIONS: ISSUE I

Editorial

Welcome to issue I of the Forgotten Realms Alternate Dimensions Webzine. My intention is for this to become a home for people who wish to publish material about their own versions of the Forgotten Realms. The content presented within these pages should in no way be considered canon material and is meant to represent a glimpse of the possibilities available to people running a campaign world in the Forgotten Realms setting.

I would just like to say a brief thank you to all the scribes at Candlekeep and everyone who has worked on the Forgotten Realms for the past few decades. Thank you for inspiring me and giving me many years of enjoyment with the Forgotten Realms.

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Dragons of the East: Iyrauroth "The Dragon Sea Overlord"

Iyrauroth; a very ancient black dragon, is quite possibly the most dangerous threat to civilisation in the Moonsea region and yet despite this he is almost entirely unknown to all but the most knowledgeable of sages and dragon experts.

Iyrauroth, brother of Embrurshaile and current dragon overlord of the Moonsea, is responsible for the destruction of at least one whole city and two entire kingdoms in the Moonsea, without anyone realising who was ultimately responsible.

Iyrauroth's early years were spent living in the shadow of his sister; Embrurshaile, until she grew old and strong enough to slay her parents and drive her younger brother from the lair.

Iyrauroth took flight across the continent of Faerûn and the blue waters of the ocean until he came to a desert land. There he encountered a flight of blue dragons and pledged himself to the ruling Suzerain. Unusually the leading blue dragon accepted this pledge, perhaps through lack of trust in his own children and his failing strength.

His time with the blue dragons and their lawful nature would influence his later life and attempts at empire building through his own progeny.

At some point during his 4th century, Iyrauroth's elder sister perished in a powerful ritual gone awry. Somehow the ritual touched Iyrauroth in his far away exile and he became immediately aware of Embrurshaile's death. He left for Thar immediately to claim his sister's hoard before anyone else could.

Upon arrival Iyrauroth found his birthplace very different. Gone were the verdant hunting lands full of human kingdoms, their animals and their wealth. Instead a near barren wasteland occupied the area filled with strange, magical creatures from faraway lands.

Iyrauroth spent many decades securing his dead sister's lair and fighting off other dragons invading his territory. Since then he has built an army of progeny of various races and lineages, destroying many a kingdom, all the while searching for magic. Powerful magic, magic capable of helping him succeed where his sister failed.

Iyrauroth is an anomaly among black dragons; he is vastly more intelligent than a

standard dragon of his type and his time spent with a family of blues has affected his personality drastically making him more lawful in his outlook. Iyrauroth follows the blue dragon family hierarchy and enforces this upon his children, he also lairs in a vast underground cavern with his progeny who act as his servants and guardians.

Iyrauroth spends his time plundering the lands above for powerful magical artefacts that he intends to use to power the same ritual performed by his sister Embrurshaile. In fact he has already unsuccessfully attempted to recreate this ritual once. The attempt failed but the consequences were much less drastic for Iyrauroth and merely resulted in the depletion of his magic hoard and the death of scores of his progeny. As a side effect Iyrauroth possesses the spellcasting abilities of a red dragon of the same age, making him far deadlier than his age and colour would suggest.

Iyrauroth is now searching for more powerful magic and attempting to rebuild his army of children. One part of his plan involves the Cult of the Dragon; who are courting him in the misguided belief that he may become a "Sacred One". Iyrauroth also searches for an ancient artefact that has eluded him for centuries but which may finally be within his grasp.

Iyrauroth's Lair

Iyrauroth occupies the former lair of Embrurshaile, however in the millennia since her death he has turned that underground cave into a vast, labyrinthine complex of caverns that stretches the length and breadth of Thar.

Iyrauroth's keen intellect and experience underground have enabled him to study the complex nature of natural geology. Using this knowledge he has made sure that the entrances to his lair can only be found within volcanic vents, geysers, chasms and sink-holes. Normal creatures would be foolish to search such places for a dragon lair but Iyrauroth with his mastery of magic finds navigating the potential dangers mere child's-play.

Until the 11th century Dalereckoning (DR), Iyrauroth's lair was filled with his children. True dragons, half dragons and draconic creatures mixed with various races. These progeny acted as his guardians and servants in Iyrauroth's schemes but all were expendable and quickly eliminated when they became too powerful or defiant.

Iyrauroth has a secondary, secret lair, the now lost (to the orcs and dwarves) capital of Vastar and Roldilar known as the Court of the Hollow Mount or Mount Grimmerfang. While not his primary residence and not as heavily fortified, it does possess a presence of his progeny to safeguard him when he is present and it allows him to spy on events in The Vast more closely.

Iyrauroth's Domain

Iyrauroth is careful to keep his domain realistic and manageable. His sister Embrurshaile claimed all the lands from Vaasa to Cormyr and spent much of her time and energy plotting how to eliminate the current dragon occupants of those lands. Iyrauroth however is content in ruling the land of Thar with designs on the entire Moonsea region.

While not particularly territorial, Iyrauroth is careful to make sure any creature that might pose a threat to his existence does not survive for long within his borders. He eliminates these creatures by manipulating events and people on the surface in subtle ways that others would not suspect.

Should a dragon take to lairing within his domain he will send a number of his progeny to the area to gather local humanoids into groups that raid the surrounding settlements. Sooner or later trade is affected and the dragon interloper is discovered and eliminated.

Very occasionally; perhaps once every few centuries, Iyrauroth takes more direct action but only when he can be sure there will be no one to witness his participation.

Deeds of Iyrauroth

Iyrauroth's deeds are many and largely unknown to the population of Faerûn. A few however are known to the sagely and learned in lore.

His first act to affect the realms at large was the destruction of Northkeep in the Year of the Blue Shield (400 DR). An army of humanoids carried on the backs of black dragons assaulted the surface and destroyed the first great human settlement in the Moonsea. Then from the shore a gathering of shamans performed a ritual to destroy the entire island which broke in two and sunk beneath the waves.

Unknown to almost everyone the seeds of Northkeep's destruction had been sown

long ago by Iyrauroth who delivered the death blow himself.

It turned out that one of the items he inherited from Embrurshaile's hoard was an irregular natural rock, roughly spherical in shape and about the size of an ogre's head. This had been plundered from an ancient giant ruin far to the north in lands now covered by the ice of the *Great Glacier*. Through this stone Iyrauroth could hear the voices of other beings that he learned were the ogres dwelling in the land of Thar above him.

Iyrauroth worried about the rise of human civilisation in the lands of the Moonsea and the power they quickly accumulated. Within a century any human settlement could easily become a threat to his power.

So Iyrauroth whispered in the ancient giantish dialect about the evils and dangers posed by the humans and how he desired their destruction.

This stone was one of the counterparts to The Arroth (as it was known to the ogres) and Iyrauroth was forced to claim these artefacts in the Year of the Roused Giants (330 DR) after the former ruler of Thar; Tharkul Halangarog, went into self imposed exile upon learning the true identity of one of the voices in the Arroth. Following his return to Thar, Iyrauroth captured Halangarog and imprisoned him for use in one of his breeding programs.

Despite the loss of the Arroth as a tool to manipulate the ogres, Iyrauroth's manipulations still succeeded. When the city of Northkeep was founded on the Moonsea this greatly angered the humanoid tribes of the region; the most powerful of which was the ogre kingdom of Thar. For decades they sought a means to destroy this powerful island settlement and amassed their forces until Iyrauroth offered his services, for a price.

Iyrauroth's dragon children bore the elite of the humanoids on their backs and delivered them to Northkeep. Together they destroyed the island's defences. Then with no means of protection left to Northkeep, the army landed on boats and began a wholesale slaughter of the populace. Once the pillaging was finished the shamans began working a powerful ritual to beseech their gods to destroy the island as a symbol of power for the ogres, orcs and gnolls of the region and a message to the humans.

While the attack on the surface progressed, Iyrauroth was working his way through tunnels he had created many years earlier. With an expert knowledge of rock formations, pressure and volcanic activity he primed an elaborate bomb that he detonated at the end of the ritual. The explosions collapsed from below the undersea mountain which Northkeep sat upon and split the island in two before it sank beneath the waves forever.

Iyrauroth left with the knowledge that he was guaranteed a kings ransom from the ogres of Thar every decade which would fund his magical research.

Unfortunately for Iyrauroth and the ogres of Thar, there was not enough gold or magic in Thar to meet the regular tribute. When the tribute ceased arriving, Iyrauroth's rage was terrible to behold and thus emerges the second deed of Iyrauroth known to the learned sages of Faerûn.

Iyrauroth destroyed the ogre kingdom of Thar, beginning with the capital of Tharniir in 451 DR. Using his knowledge of geography, Iyrauroth severed the bridges of Tharniir linking it to the mainland and opened a rift into a volcanic vent. In an explosion of steam and rocks the entire island was obliterated.

Iyrauroth's dragon and half dragon children then attacked the remaining centres of power of the ogre kingdom of Thar in a series of lightning raids. Within a single week the ogre kingdom of Thar was completely destroyed as civil war annihilated what Iyrauroth left untouched.

Iyrauroth however was not finished with Thar. A land of filled with ogres and of an ancient and powerful lineage was a resource too good to be left untapped and Iyrauroth desired a prize of incredible power in the faraway lands of The Vast; a prize for which he had been searching for centuries.

In 520 DR an orc of incredible size and strength came down out of the Galena Mountains wielding the Hammer of Vorbyx. Ologh claimed himself of Vorbyx's line and as proof he wielded the Hammer of Vorbyx. Therefore Ologh was the true Tharkul of Thar and set about uniting the ogres and orcs of Thar behind his banner.

Ologh was also an orc of the tribes of The Vast, therefore he was also entitled to a claim on the throne of Vastar; an orc realm that at the time occupied the entire Vast region.

Using the ogres and orcs of Thar, Ologh attacked Vastar and won, creating an over-kingdom of Vastar with himself as its ruler.

Unknown to all, Ologh was also of Iyrauroth's blood, and had been sent to unite Thar in order to conquer Vastar so that he might claim an ancient artefact of tremendous power that the orcs of The Vast had plundered from the forests of Arcorar long ago.

In the Year of Writhing Darkness (572 DR) Iyrauroth arrived at the capital of Vastar to claim from his son and vassal, his prize, as well as the tribute due him from the kingdom of Thar agreed centuries ago by the last ogre Tharkul.

Ologh would not be cowed and attacked the great wyrm rather than relinquish what he had fought so hard to obtain. In a titanic battle that rocked the mountains for days the two beings fought for their very lives. Ologh was ultimately slain, crushed by a mountain-slide, but not before he seriously wounded his dragon father and forced him to retreat, Iyrauroth caused the rock slide as he fled.

Since then Iyrauroth has been busy trying to locate this ancient artefact. Many decades after his battle with Ologh; once he had recovered from his nearly mortal wounds, Iyrauroth returned to Mount Grimmerfang and found it full of orcs yet again. Clearing the palace he found no trace of the artefact he sought.

After long years of study and research Iyrauroth learned that the orcs of Vastar were briefly conquered and ousted from Vastar by the dwarves who created the kingdom of Roldilar; these orcs located the artefact and took it with them. Iyrauroth sent out his children into the now human lands of the Vast to scour it for the artefact's location.

His children stirred up unrest among the local humanoid tribes and spread rumours that the humans harboured a great artefact of untold power. The Sarbreenar Wyrms were one such dragon that went searching for this item, but it was never discovered.

Eventually, Iyrauroth's researches came to nought, but it was then that fate intervened. A chance encounter with a strange young woman from the city of Ravens Bluff who had knowledge of an artefact of abundant magical power that was supposedly hidden in the dwarven ruins below the city. In return for her aid in retrieving such an artefact Iyrauroth would help her realise her ambitions to rule Ravens Bluff and the entire Vast.

And so was born the warlord Myrkessa Jelan who in 1370 DR attacked the city of Ravens Bluff with an army of humanoid creatures and the backing of a great black dragon.

The attack ultimately failed, thanks to the bravery of the citizens of Ravens Bluff, but Myrkessa was really Lady Amber Lynn Thoden in disguise and during the war she was elected mayor, she used her time in office to scour the sewers and catacombs of the city for any trace of this artefact.

In 1372 DR, Lady Amber Lynn Thoden was discovered to have been Myrkessa Jelan and she was removed from office but ultimately evaded capture. Whether or not she retrieved this mysterious artefact is unknown but should her attempts have proved successful then Faerûn is in very real danger.

Iyrauroth's Magic

Iyrauroth inherited a lust for magic, maybe not from his parents but from his now deceased sister; Embrurshaile. She died performing a ritual to increase the magic inherent within her, her goal was to increase her raw power and spellcasting ability but her understanding of this powerful ritual was incomplete.

When it was finished and began draining magic and life from everything within range it imbued that power into Embrurshaile. When the magic ran out before the effect was finished Embrurshaile imploded much like a star that runs out of fuel.

While Embrurshaile did indeed perish in the cataclysm that created Thar it also transferred part of her into the Weave and from there that remaining spark of Embrurshaile latched onto the nearest kin it could find; her brother Iyrauroth.

So Iyrauroth inherited not only Embrurshaile's hoard, lair and domain, but also her lust for magic and power and a desire to finish the ritual.

The list of magic that Iyrauroth possesses is so vast that it is easier to list the artefacts and relics that he failed to acquire:

The Flame of the Spirit: This sculpted lump of amber in the shape of a wriggling flame is a holy relic sacred to Tymora. It was held for some time at the temple-farm of Smiling Lady Well on the island that was also home to Northkeep. Iyrauroth coveted this powerful item and so took his chance to acquire it when the humanoids

of the region united against Northkeep; due to his manipulations.

With the island sinking beneath the waves, Iyrauroth plundered the temple on it's downward slide into the depths of the Moonsea. He was horribly burned by the relic and was forced to drop it into the dark waters below. It was many years before a band of brave adventurers retrieved the relic from its murky resting place.

The Annasherion: This powerful artefact is responsible for the magical field around Ravens Bluff that saturates the area with magic and manifests in strange magical outbursts from those living within this field.

Its origins are unknown for none claim responsibility for the creation of such an item. It was discovered by the orcs of Vastar in the lands that were once home to Uvaeren; before it was annihilated by a falling star, and carried back to their home in The Vast.

It could be that the Annasherion is the remains of the falling star that destroyed Uvaeren, or perhaps it was an experiment of Uvaeren gone wrong, maybe elves from Cormanthor fashioned the artefact from the falling star, or maybe its origins are completely different. Either way it was locked in an underground vault that the orcs lost many lives plundering it in 332 DR.

From here it briefly passed near Iyrauroth's domain; which drew his attention to it, as it travelled on it's way to Vastar where it remained in the Court of the Hollow Mount which was later renamed Mount Grimmerfang.

The Annasherion was taken by the dwarves when they conquered Vastar in 610 DR and it found its way to the dwarven city of Sarbreen. It has lain there ever since, first in the hidden treasure chamber of Sarbreen, then in the ruins of Sarbreen after the city's fall and more recently in the catacombs beneath Ravens Bluff.

The Annasherion's powers are unknown since it has never been studied or indeed used deliberately by any being known in Faerûn today. However the magical field covering Ravens Bluff suggests that it emits a strong magical field of immense power, enough to manifest magical abilities in those staying within the field for a number of years.

This magical abundance is probably why Iyrauroth covets it so. Should he gain such an artefact he will undoubtedly succeed in performing the ritual that consumed his sister long ago.

Vorbyx's Hammer: This hammer is of legendary status among the ogres and orcs of Thar and is a sign of rightful rule of anyone wishing to be Tharkul for it is supposed that it can only be bore by one of Vorbyx's bloodline.

Vorbyx was a powerful ogre; possibly an elder ogre that escaped the curse of Annam, he united the ogre tribes of Thar sometime after -349 DR using the gigantic warhammer that bears his name. He founded a kingdom and a dynasty of ogres that ruled Thar for over 600 years before it fell to the machinations of the dragon Iyrauroth.

Iyrauroth destroyed Tharniir; the capital of Thar and from its ruins he took the Hammer of Vorbyx for his own hoard.

Later he gifted the hammer to his son Ologh and sent him to unite Thar once again and conquer the kingdom of Vastar to the south. Ologh accomplished all this but was reluctant to pay Iyrauroth's price and so the two kin battled each other to Ologh's death.

Iyrauroth was sorely wounded in the fight and forced to retreat leaving the Hammer of Vorbyx behind. The Kur-Tharsu; an order of ogre magi dedicated to preserving Thar and Vorbyx's bloodline took the hammer and set it in the Tomb of Vorbyx for worthy ogres (and orcs) to claim the prize and rule Thar as Tharkul.

Bloodlines: Iyrauroth has a hobby of sort in collecting powerful bloodlines and mingling them with his progeny. At the moment he has distilled from various mating experiments a strong bloodline of Vorbyx which bestows great strength, size and magical powers upon its inheritors.

Mixed with his own bloodline, Iyrauroth has created a number of children of immense power most notable of which was Ologh; Overking of Vastar. Iyrauroth is always on the lookout for more powerful bloodlines with which to experiment in order to create invincible guardians loyal to him.

Embrurshaile's Ritual: Embrurshaile hoped this ritual would imbue her with power enough to defeat all rivals and claim all land between the Tortured Lands and the Vilhon Reach. The actual result consumed Embrurshaile, all her stockpiles of magic and much of the life in Thar which left it as the near barren wasteland it is today.

Iyrauroth's amendments to the spell and subsequent casting merely consumed much of his stockpiled magic and most of his army of children.

The ritual's origins are unknown. Embrurshaile herself was not smart enough nor accomplished enough in the Art to create or even amend such powerful magic. The spell may have been a lost work from the artificers of Horreb who were instrumental in binding Maram of the Great Spear. Could it be a variation of ancient elven magic? Perhaps its origins go back further to when giants ruled the land. Maybe given its effect to imbue dragons with magic it was created by the first draconic life forms released from the Tearfall to create the true dragons alive today.

Iyrauroth's Allies

Iyrauroth trusts no one except those he has indoctrinated into his way of thinking from birth. Even then these children are closely monitored and quickly eliminated should they show any signs of defiance or independence. Such eliminations are subtle and usually indirect to keep the loyalty of his subjects.

In times past Iyrauroth had a much larger pool of progeny upon which to call, however with the recent unsuccessful casting of Embrursahaile's ritual, many of his children were consumed in the casting and so his resources are greatly diminished. This has forced Iyrauroth to act much more publicly than he has become accustomed to, one example being his appearance in the war with Ravens Bluff in 1370 DR.

Iyrauroth has recently taken to using the Cult of the Dragon in his schemes, specifically in the collection of magic items. He is feigning interest in the Cult so that they believe he may become a Sacred One in the future and in exchange they are scouring the area for any and all magic they can locate.

Iyrauroth has no intention of relinquishing his life for the cult and holds no loyalty to them either. He would gladly sacrifice them all for another magic wand to help fuel his ritual.

Iyrauroth's Fate

Iyrauroth's fate is a flip of a coin away from his ultimate fate. He will undoubtedly acquire the magic he deems necessary to perform Embrurshaile's ritual again. The first question is whether this ritual will be successful and the second is what effect a

successful casting of the ritual will have.

The answers to both these questions will only be answered by time and the experience of Iyrauroth himself. If the casting fails he may well be consumed by the ritual in the same way as Embrunshaile. Should he succeed, Iyrauroth could acquire spellcasting abilities far in excess of any dragon or human in history with few exceptions. He could even be transformed into a form unknown; a disembodied possessing spirit perhaps, or merge his consciousness with the Weave itself, either way the possibilities are too terrifying for words.

Next article is a focus on the dragon primordial; Telos.

Laerakond: Overview of an Alternate Abeir

Laerakond was created by two events in Abeir-Toril's history that forever changed the face of the planet.

First was the Tearfall circa -31,000 DR, which not only destroyed the many islands of the Inner Seas and united those seas into what is known today as the Sea of Fallen Stars, but it also forced Ao to separate the continents and the warring gods and primordials of Abeir-Toril.

To do this Ao split the world in two: Laerakond, home of most of the primordials was shunted into a mirror dimension on the planet Abeir while Faerûn and the divine beings and their lesser charges remained on the planet Toril.

Things were further changed on both planets when the elves performed The Sundering circa -17,600 DR, a powerful ritual designed to create a homeland for the elves far from the mainland. This ritual had several unforeseen consequences that included changing the landscape both forwards and backwards in time, but also across dimensions.

So where once the lands of Faerûn and Laerakond were joined was now a vast empty ocean because of the Tearfall. Into this ocean crept life and vast empires were created beneath the waves. Then the Sundering destroyed this life and these empires before they were ever created and shifted the continent of Laerakond from its original position on both worlds.

No one would ever have known Laerakond had existed at all except for a single event that unravelled the work Ao had done to keep the two worlds separate. The death of Mystryl in -339 DR caused all magic to cease momentarily thanks to the insane strivings of one man to become a god. The collapse of the weave was enough to release Laerakond from its mirror dimension and bring it back to Toril. Abeir-Toril was whole once again.

History

In the beginning Laerakond was the home of the primordials. It was a vast continent where beings of incredible power walked. Although joined to mainland Faerûn in what is now called the Western Heartlands, it was separated by a titanic mountain range of

jagged peaks and crags. This land mass is the fabled home of the gods that the modern peoples of Faerûn mistakenly believe exists beyond the Spine of the World Mountains.

In Laerakond lived the Sharn, the Phaerimm, the Dawn Titans, a Fey Court and primordial beings from many other planes and worlds. This was their playground where they lived in isolation from the lesser beings that existed in Faerûn. Some of these primordial creatures chose to live in Faerûn or made brief forays into that land for their own amusement, or in some cases to aid the lesser races. The lesser races however had their own powers and divine protectors: The Gods. The two forces came into conflict often, eventually breaking into open warfare between the creator races, their gods, and the dawn titans. This war caused the Tearfall that split Abeir-Toril in two.

Separated from Toril and the Weave, those on Laerakond found themselves on a magic depleted world, a single continent in a vast ocean. Upon this continent existed the Sharn and Phaerimm who had warred with each other since their creation. The Fey also had a strong presence upon Laerakond since before the two worlds were split.

A very powerful Fey Crossroads existed near the eastern end of Laerakond that allowed a being walking through the area to seamlessly travel to the plane of Faerie without even being aware of it. It is through this crossroads that the Fey first brought the Orcs and their primordial fathers to Abeir-Toril, these primitive orcs then spread through the mountains to Faerûn before Laerakond was separated from it.

Humans also existed in small pockets throughout Laerakond as the personal playthings of the primordials, although they existed in very small numbers.

When the Tearfall struck a number of small meteorites crashed into Laerakond and from these craters emerged dragon like creatures of all kinds.

Once the veil was drawn and one planet became two, the primordials quickly became lethargic and starved of energy. The magic depleted world had not enough to sustain them as they once were. Instead they took to slumbering for thousands of years, but once awakened their power was awesome to behold.

The Sundering had almost no effect on Laerakond beyond flattening the eastern

mountain ranges with large waves. However the position of Laerakond was forever altered, but this would only become apparent upon the rejoining of the two planets.

It was the dragons that inherited Laerakond. These small lizard creatures that came in a variety of sizes, shapes, and colours evolved over time into winged creatures able to breathe fire. Their potential for growth seemed only to be limited by the passage of time and none saw the threat of these dragons until it was too late.

Within a hundred years dragons ruled Laerakond with the orcs as their favoured servants, waging war upon each others' domains for millennia.

Gradually the Fey, separated from Faerie by whatever force isolated Abeir from Toril, dwindled upon Laerakond. The Fey became sick and died or degenerated into twisted creatures of sickness and death and they stalked the forests of that continent like monsters in the night.

The primordials remained slumbering in their fortresses and were largely forgotten by the lesser races of Laerakond.

As for the lesser races, they remained slaves to the dragons. The humans as the primitive barbarians they had always been, while the orcs took to worshipping their primordial fathers that slept beneath the surface. These orcs became religious zealots, steadfast in their faith and confident that Gruumsh and the other orcish primordials would awaken one day to deliver them from the dragons.

The orcs spread across the face of Laerakond. Wherever the dragons ruled, the orcs were present as their servants and warriors for their armies. However the orcs also lived for themselves and created pockets of resistance where the dragons could not venture. Here they worshipped their gods in secret and formed a sophisticated church that spread through all orc slaves.

In -1076 DR a curious event occurred which kick-started the rebellion of the orcs against the dragon overlords. A huge portal opened in Laerakond to another world. A strange world filled with humans that could read and write and fashion weapons of war. Humans very far removed from the primitive cave dwellers in Laerakond.

The orcs quickly threw down the shackles of servitude they had endured for so long and travelled to the portal from all across Laerakond to escape. This event is known

as the Orcgate Wars in Faerûn, but to the orcs it was a time of deliverance.

The dragons punished the orcs and slaughtered them wholesale, driving the remains of that race into hiding. They then took the humans and elevated them from the primitive cave dwellers to a place of more prominence, that of favoured slave.

Thus the far more pliant and less aggressive humans became the servitor race of choice for dragons. They established great cities, for their brains were far more creative than the orcs. Here the dragons lived as emperors of human kingdoms.

Then in -339 DR Abeir rejoined Toril without anyone even noticing the change. Thanks to the Sundering Laerakond was so distant from Faerûn, that the huge waves created by the return of the continent barely registered as ripples on the isle of Evermeet.

The dragons of Laerakond noticed however when the Dracorage in 1018 DR caused all dragons on the planet to descend into madness. Totally unprepared for the effects of the mythal created by the elves after Abeir-Toril was separated, the dragon overlords destroyed their servants, their cities, their empires and each other in a titanic wave of flame and destruction.

Worse still, the explosions and destruction wrought upon the surface roused many of the Dawn Titans from their slumber.

Laerakond now is a ruined continent filled with fallen empires, fallen people and fallen beings all striving to regain what they feel is rightfully theirs.

Next article is a brief timeline of my alternate Laerakond.

Rulesword: Trimming 3rd Edition One Step at a Time

This section will be a focus on trimming down third edition rules into a more friendly and consistent system.

Starting with the most basic complication in the third edition rule-set, that of the exponential number creep.

Years of DM'ing using this rule-set always met the same messy end as players approached epic levels and that was the maintaining and calculating of all the various bonuses for attack,, AC, Fortitude, Reflex, Willpower etc. Almost inevitably the system becomes horribly imbalanced with your average fighter immune to any Fortitude based attack unless the attacker has a series of Feat buffs to improve the static DC.

So my first suggestion in simplifying third edition into a friendlier and simpler system is:

1. **Remove BAB, Fort, Ref, and Will** bonuses from class/monster-type according to level.

Thus a level 10 fighter with 20 Strength using a normal sword gets a +5 bonus to attack from his Strength modifier and that's it (plus any feats or class abilities). A level 10 wizard with 20 Strength using a normal sword gets a +5 bonus to attack from his Strength modifier and that's it. Although why a wizard would devote that much of his attribute progression to Strength is a separate matter.

In this way the need for devoting feats to Attack and Saving Throw bonuses to keep a character competitive is largely eliminated. Also monsters now are much more dangerous because of their tendency to have higher attribute scores.

This change also makes creating PCs, NPCs, and stat blocks easier as some of the math calculation is removed. Finally the need for epic rules is also lessened.

Hopefully in the next few Rulesword articles the need for epic rules will be removed completely and everyone will be on a level playing field; from the lowly peasant, to the divine servant of Mystra.

The next issue will detail suggestion number 2: "Attack, Attack, Attack."

Alternate Dimensions Presents: Vaasa - An Alternate History

The Bloodstone Lands are an area relatively untouched by events in the rest of Faerûn. What follows is an alternative vision for the land of Vaasa which should be similar and yet distinct at the same time.

Timeline

- **-31,000 DR:** The Tearfall: A meteorite falls in the midst of the giant kingdom of Ostoria in the lands known today as Vaasa. Deep in a chasm caused by the meteor strike the primordial Telos begins to grow, leeching magic and life-force from the area around him.
- **934 DR:** Zhengyi spends several years studying the Black Star artefact in Escalant.
- **1038 DR:** The Great Glacier is entirely absent from the lands of Damara, Vassa, and upper Narfell by spring of this year and does not return in winter. This prompts a wave of migration of Impilturan and Narfelli settlers that claim the lands of Damara for their own. The orcs and other monsters claim Vaasa.
- **1064 DR:** Feldrin Bloodfeathers is accused of piracy by a fellow noble house of Sembia and is found guilty. The young man in his early twenties flees with the entire wealth of his family to the settlement of Ravensburg in Damara, where his family has owned land for centuries since before Sembia existed.
- **1074 DR:** Zhengyi the Red Wizard flees Thay in exile.
- **1077 DR:** At the urgings of Higenzi the Witch, Damara mounts a campaign to free Bloodstone Pass from the clutches of the monsters of Vaasa.
- **1079 DR:** Bloodstone Pass is secured and prospecting expeditions extract large numbers of precious gemstones named Bloodstones in honour of the king.
- **1152 DR:** Orcs pour out of Vaasa through Bloodstone Pass and lay waste to much of northern Damara. The disparate orcs are quickly eliminated but the people call for Vaasa and the Bloodstone Pass to be secured for the future prosperity of Damara.
- **1153 DR:** King Veldrin I declares the land that will later be known as Vaasa to be crown property of Damara. The land is open to settlement to all that can keep and hold an area of land for a year with appropriate proof provided of

continued dwelling to the crown. This attracts adventurers and settlers from across Faerûn.

- **1154 DR:** A noble scion of House Belmaris is one of the first to enter Vaasa and claim land along the river running through the centre of Vaasa. The name eventually becomes corrupted to Beaumaris River.
- Settlers and adventurers in Vaasa endure nightly attacks by demonic forces that severely hamper growth and settlement in the region.
- All settlers in Vaasa disappear over the course of a week. Secretly they are enslaved by the forces of Vaas, a marilith demon released from her imprisonment nearly two centuries earlier and has been busy building her tanar'ri forces and enslaving the local grey orc tribes. The humans are kept with the orc slaves which quickly creates a large population of half orcs.
- **1158 DR:** Scouting expeditions into Vaasa all disappear without a trace. A demonic envoy proclaiming that Queen Vaas of Vaasa now rules the lands beyond Bloodstone Pass. The heads of the Damaran scouting expeditions are delivered to the Damaran Court on gigantic platters.
- **1160 DR:** Beginning in this year groups of twisted demonic orcs from Vaasa attack Damara in ever greater numbers. Damara beseeches Impiltur for aid using the exiled Feldrin as an ambassador. Queen Ilmara is reluctant to engage in a war on foreign soil after what happened to her brother Imbrar.
- **1171 DR:** With aid finally arriving from Impiltur the forces of Damara and Impiltur march on Vaasa. The human armies are met with innumerable hordes of tanar'ri and twisted half demon spawn.
- The battle quickly turns in favour of Queen Vaas until Higenzi arrives behind Vaas' forces with several thousand half orcs. Together the allied forces win the day and Vaas is forced to flee the field of battle.
- Damara claims Vaasa as crown land and then awards the half orcs the land around the former settlement of Cinnabaran. The orcs quickly rebuild the ruin into a fortress which they call Palischuk.
- Higenzi once again gains favour with the Damaran court.
- **1347 DR:** Zhengyi the Witch King; devotee of Orcus, arrives in Vaasa to

locate Telos and use his power for Orcus' will. Using rituals he creates a link between himself and Telos allowing Zhengyi to draw on the primordial's power directly. His first act is to create Castle Perilous in a single day.

- **1357 DR:** Zhengyi and his armies slay King Viridin and conquer Damara. Puppet rulers are installed in many of the baronies and duchies of Damara.
- Telos begins to rouse from his eons long slumber when Mystra perishes during the Time of Troubles and all magic in Faerûn goes awry.
- **1359 DR:** Zhengyi is slain and his spirit is drawn to Telos instead of his phylactery because of the link that the two beings share.
- **1360 DR:** The Red Wizards of Thay dispatch another diplomatic envoy to Vaasa to learn what they can of the Witch King. Upon their arrival they learn that Zhengyi has been slain.
- **1361 DR:** Red Wizard research teams are sent to Vaasa to discover what Zhengyi was doing in Vaasa. One member of the team is a tiefling with an uncanny resemblance to Zhengyi himself which the Red Wizards hope to use to their advantage.
- **1362 DR:** The Red Wizards locate an artefact belonging to Zhengyi; a tome of creation. Using this tome they create a replica of Castle Perilous north-east of Palischuk. The Red Wizards also learn about the presence of Telos beneath the Clefts of Razack and of Zhengyi's plans to tap the primordial for limitless resources of power and magical energy.
- **1363 DR:** The Red Wizards create a mining settlement atop the Clefts of Razack by the Beaumaris River, intending to plumb the depths to locate Telos the primordial. Miners from the settlement find many veins of a strange ore containing a hard, dull metal that is icy to the touch. This metal is dubbed Shade-steel for its unique properties and its strange ability to absorb light.
- **1365 DR:** A team of Red Wizards enter the depths of the Clefts of Razack and encounter Telos; who is fully conscious and aware of his surroundings. Telos destroys the Red Wizards in an instant, draining them until all that remains is dust. Telos keeps one Red Wizard alive and transforms him into the Voice of Telos by erasing his personality and implanting the soul of Zhengyi into the soulless husk.

- Zhengyi begins wandering the wastes of Vaasa converting people to the "Will of Telos" by performing miracles and rescuing the common folk from the savagery of Vaasa.
- **1371 DR:** The forces of the Zhentarim begin an invasion of Vaasa using a pass through the Galena Mountains known as *Garumn's Climb*. They quickly secure the southern plains of Vaasa known as the Plains of Haatar Baen. Banite priests use magic to cleanse the poisoned soil of the corruption of Telos. The area under Zhentarim control soon becomes known as the Plains of Haatar Bane.
- Orcs from Thesk still secretly loyal to the Zhentarim begin migrating to Vaasa.
- **1372 DR:** Orc migrants from Thesk integrate themselves into the north-east of Vaasa, particularly the settlement of Palischuk.
- Zhentarim forces seize the trade towns of Maur Eturo and Avang in southern Vaasa giving them significant control over trade entering and leaving Vaasa.
- **1373 DR:** The Rage of Dragons strikes Faerûn causing widespread destruction across the land as dragons lose control. The flight of dragons around Castle Perilous destroys itself. Many settlements in Vaasa and Damara suffer repeated dragon strikes.
- **1374 DR:** In the wake of the Rage of Dragon's the Warlock Knights manoeuvre themselves into prominent positions in the settlements of Vaasa outside Zhentarim control.
- **1375 DR:** The Warlock Knights declare themselves rulers of Vaasa and begin marshalling their forces for war.

Vaasa in the 1360s is a period of flux for the land. After the death of Zhengyi the humanoids that made up his armies are dispersed across the land and plague the fortified settlements. Monsters are as plentiful as ever thanks to the increased lawlessness in the region after Zhengyi's fall.

Then as the years progress nefarious organisations begin to insinuate themselves into life in Vaasa. The Cult of the Dragon set up criminal cells across the land exploiting the independent farm-steaders. The Red Wizards create a number of settlements in order to mine the Clefts of Razack. The Cult of Eltab see a growth in the region as the demons trapped in demoncysts beneath the surface whisper to the people above.

Finally a new cult arises in Vaasa; the Warlock Knights, a seemingly benevolent organisation with a dark secret that seems to stand for law and order in the region.

The next article will focus on the history of Damara.

The Knights Below: Adventure Path - Episode 1

The Night Below is an AD&D super module that I have spent many years converting to a Realms campaign and the third edition rule-set.

Below is an adventure pathway detailing my step by step conversion of the adventure and an accompanying journal of the adventuring group The Knights Below that are still playing through the campaign.

Overview

The county of Halamshire exists in the Upper Rauvin Vale between the Nether Mountains and the High Forest which I placed in the area between Everlund and Moon pass.

There is one major settlement in the area called Lhuvenhead; a partially walled city with a varying population of around 500 people that lies on the North bank of the river. A mining settlement called Hilltop also exists further north in the Nether Mountains but it is only occupied for 6 months of the year by people from Lhuvenhead.

The ruler of Halamshire is Count Adamar Parlfray of the Parlfray family and he rules from the ancestral keep of Stromgard; a small dwarf made keep lying two days ride north of Lhuvenhead.

The county has a history of being plagued by orc hordes from the Nether Mountains and the prosperity of the area has waxed and waned with time. Currently times are difficult in the area due to a resurgence of orc activity.

Encounter 1

The adventure begins with the PCs entering the area by barge travelling from Sundabar to Everlund. There have been rumours of gold, mithril, and adamantite lodes found in the area of Halamshire which have lead to a gold rush and people from across the North are travelling to the region to get rich.

For whatever reason the PCs are also travelling through the area when they are attacked by orcs.

The Environment: The attack occurs at night while the PCs are travelling by barge. The orcs attack in two groups; twenty of them fire burning arrows into the barge to set it alight, twenty of them jump onto the barge to subdue and carry off any people. The barge has torches around it, and because it is likely to catch fire the PCs will be able to see the orcs in and around the boat, but not the orcs firing arrows. These orcs have total concealment so any PC attempting to shoot them has a 50% miss chance, loses his Dex bonus to AC, and suffers a -2 penalty to AC.

The orcs firing at the barge use volley fire which is a special attack $1d20 + \text{Int}$ modifier of the leading orc (Int 12) against AC 15. If the attack hits every square suffers $1d6$ piercing damage + $1d4$ fire damage (although piercing damage is halved against objects), and the arrows must deal 6 damage to set a square alight. Anyone standing in a square on the barge if it is hit by volley must succeed on a DC 15 Reflex save or suffer the same amount of damage.

If the volley attack misses roll using the scatter rules for splash weapons to see what squares are hit.

Once a square is alight it burns in the current square for 3 rounds dealing $1d6$ damage to anyone remaining in that square before spreading to each adjacent square.

A DC 15 Perception check will allow the PCs to discover a number of longswords hidden under one of the boxes on the barge; Melchor is smuggling weapons to the bandits of the region.

The NPCs: Travelling on the barge are a number of NPCs:

- *Melchor (NE hm Exp O):* Melchor is the bargemaster and an evil manipulative little man who routinely overcharges people and occasionally sells his "cargo" into slavery to the local bandits in the region. He is currently blackmailing his guards over a tavern brawl he organised in which they were involved and one man was killed. He always carries a money pouch containing 50 gp (hidden in his loin-cloth) just in case, but otherwise he wears only a leather jerkin under his cloths and a dagger at his belt for protection.
- *Geouf and Susaire (NG human Com O):* This married couple are travelling into the area to make their fortune. Geouf intends to work in the mines, while

Susaire will set up a home and look after the family they intend to start. They are simple, trusting people with excellent knowledge of agricultural and mining skills but are naïve about the world outside their former home. Geouf is very strong (Str 14). They have not a penny or possession to their name apart from a rusted dagger they found on the barge under a box.

- *Mikhail and Markus (N hm Ftr 1)*: These two brothers are guards for the barge. They are practically working for free (1 cp per day) because Melchor is blackmailing them about a tavern brawl he witnessed them take part in which one person died. Melchor offered to take them out of town immediately as long as they worked for him. The two brothers hate Melchor but fear abandoning him in case he reveals their secret. They are armed with studded leather armour, short swords and wooden shields.
- *Hawkeye (CG wood elf male Rgr 2)*: Hawkeye is a wandering elf that is returning home to the High Forest at the request of his family. He is travelling on the barge to make quick time but is aware of the dangers in the area. He is quiet but not rude or aloof, he is simply unused to talking to people and if someone makes the effort to talk to him he will be grateful for the gesture.
- *Barden (LN hm Ftr 2)*: Barden is the organiser of this expedition for the PCs. He gathered them to be guards of the ore barges and protectors of the mines and whatever other dangerous work might be required with the ensuing gold rush. He is an experienced Zhent mercenary and understands the need for rigorous discipline and combat readiness, but he is not particularly smart and never advanced beyond the lowest ranks in the Zhentilar. He wears banded mail and carries a long sword and heavy steel shield. When the barge is aflame he will be the first to jump to shore and will fail and sink beneath the waters and be washed away down the river.

The Enemies: Forty orcs attack the barge from the north bank of the River Rauvin. They are all level 1 Warriors and equipped with leather armour and either a crude battleaxe or a shortbow. All weapon and armour have the fragile quality and so gain the broken condition on the roll of a natural 1 (weapons) or if they are struck by a critical hit (armour). If they already have the broken condition then they are destroyed.

The orcs with bows fire volleys of burning arrows onto the barge to set it alight.

They will not deliberately aim at the people onboard as they want captives not bodies.

The orcs with battleaxes will attempt to jump aboard the barge each round in pairs (DC 15) and will attempt to subdue anyone on board.

The orcs all attack without any gusto or enjoyment. They are silent and methodical, almost robot like in their actions. A DC 20 Perception check allows a party member to notice this although they will not understand what it means.

The orcs are under the influence of an Aboleth domination potion that weakens their willpower and acts as a tracer beacon allowing the Aboleth to control them at any time.

The Aftermath: The PCs should be unable to stay on the barge, it will inevitably catch fire and sink and they will come under repeated attacks from the orcs on the shore that try to jump aboard the boat.

If none of the PCs suggest it then Hawkeye recommends they all jump to shore and take refuge in the High Forest, he knows the terrain and can lead them to his clan refuge.

Melchor is against the idea and will try and use his Diplomacy skill to persuade the other NPCs to join him in jumping off the barge and travelling along the river to Everlund. The PCs need to make an opposed Diplomacy check for each NPC (the brothers and the married couple count as one NPC each since they will not be separated) against Melchor (his Diplomacy check is +6) to convince them to follow them. If they have struck up a rapport with any of the NPCs then they get a +2 bonus for that check.

Any NPCs that follow Melchor will be captured by the orcs and never seen from again. Any that follow the PCs and Hawkeye will travel with the party to the next encounter.

Player Links: The majority of the population in Halamshire are human. Any elves in the party, particularly wood elves are likely to be members of the same tribe as Hawkeye and are returning to their home for the same reason as him.

Any dwarves in the party are possibly long estranged kindred of Druin the miner; the sole remaining dwarf of Underholme who we will encounter later.

Any humans are likely to have relatives in the area. A wizard could be related to the local wizard Tausterm. A knight or paladin may be related to the current ruler

Adamar Parlfray. A barbarian could be a member of the Tree Ghost or Blue Bear Uthgardt tribes which exist in the High Forest.

Alternative Start: For an alternative start for players with closer background links to the area consider making the party part of a scouting team hired by Barden and sent to rescue barges under attack from orcs in the area. In this version the party will begin on the shore and have to board the barge to rescue the NPCs from the orcs.

In the next article the adventure moves into the High Forest and an old elven tomb.

The Knights Below: Campaign Journal

It was a dank and dismal night as the party travelled below decks on a barge to Lhuvenhead. Sat in a circle were Tallyn the wizard; dressed in winter furs and trying desperately not to look like a wizard, although his poor eyesight and withered frame betrayed many years of study. Crag the barbarian was next, he was nearly naked despite the freezing weather and looked (and smelled) as though he hadn't bathed this year despite it being winter), no one however would tell him to his face because he was built like an angry rothé stud and carried a huge sword with him at all times. Chadwick was sat next to Crag, far too polite to mention the smell, and polishing a gleaming suit of chain-mail. In the corner was a man of faith; a worshipper of Helm named Wystan, he never spoke to anyone but his chain armour and large sword showed his willingness to defend the helpless.

Around the barge were several others; the fat, balding bargemaster with shifty eyes, and his two reluctant bodyguards that tried to avoid him at every turn. A married couple wandered the decks chatting about how they would make their riches, while an elf sat on the highest box watching the couple with a smile and keeping a lookout for trouble. Finally there was the swordmaster Barden; an ex-Zhentilar, although a nice guy despite the past affiliation, who had gathered the group to seek fortune in Halamshire.

The journey was cramped and uncomfortable and most of all dull, when all of a sudden the elf up top gave a whooping sound. The guards began shouting and then Melchor came wheezing below-deck and ordered everyone up top to defend the ship.

In the darkness we could see a snake of fire lengthening out in the distance, within moments it was travelling towards the barge at speed and flaming arrows slammed into the deck.

"Take Cover!" Barden shouted and everyone crouched behind boxes or under shields.

Orcs began jumping on deck from the shore two at a time. Mikhail and Markus killed the first orc and Crag and Chadwick bravely stepped up to block the orc's boarding

attempts, slaying at least 5 of the brutes in a matter of minutes.

Everyone else tried putting out the growing fires while keeping out of the way of arrows that were whizzing all around. Tallyn took up a nearby shortbow and fired back at a few of the boarding orcs with surprising accuracy.

It soon became apparent the barge was lost. We were at least 2 days travel from Lhuvenhead and there was no way we could get out of shooting range of the orcs.

Hawkeye spoke to all for the first time since the start of the journey "We should get off the boat and into the forest, I know it's ways and paths." With that he jumped from the boat and ran to the tree-line.

Without question we all leaped from the boat, although Barden struggled to reach the shore and Crag and Chadwick had to scramble to help him up the river bank.

Even then we weren't safe, Melchor quickly started an argument about the High Forest being dangerous and refused to go. The two guards and the married couple nearly went with him but for the kind words of Chadwick who promised he would protect them all with his life and make sure we reached Lhuvenhead safely or die in the attempt.

Melchor ran off along the riverbank and the orcs followed him, we heard his screams minutes later. We all fled into the forest and disappeared beneath the canopy.

In the next episode the heroes venture into an elven tomb.

Credits

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Special thanks to Sam Evans, Kenneth Fabacher, and Ryan Rahuba for proof reading and idea development.

Final Word

Just to note that this is in no way to be considered canon material; it is a fan-made representation of my version of the Forgotten Realms. It uses some canon information as a base but I have removed some pieces of the Realms, altered others, and added many of my own ideas to develop it further.