

## ARTICLE

# THE WOODEN NOSE WAR

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With a name like the Wooden Nose War, there has to be an interesting story involved. And so there is—and Ed is sharing it with you!

*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.*

Sages have often remarked on the colorful behavior of the self-styled nobles of Sembia, particularly in the latter half of the 1300s DR, when the nobility of the Merchant Kingdom was so new, and therefore not bound by tradition (or overly much by law). Back then, money was clearly the root of all high status, and the wealthy were very much used to doing just as they pleased, with a noble title being seen (given the examples of eccentric Cormyrean nobles just next door to observe and gossip about) as a license to “go utterly wild,” as Royal Magician Vangerdahast of Cormyr disapprovingly put it.

The great mercantile houses of Sembia wielded power like nobles from the late 1200s DR onward, though (aside from a few especially haughty or deluded individuals) titles didn't start appearing in the 1330s, and they became widespread only fifteen to twenty years later. Scribes and sages are warned that they'll encounter many spurious records that state or imply that this or that family of Sembia has been noble for four

centuries or more, and they write of early family members that were “Sir” this and “Lord” that (titles that would have seemed strange indeed to those individuals had they been addressed as such while alive).

As the widespread Sembian saying of the mid-1300s went, “money is everything.” The “new” nobles of the Merchant Realm wielded money like a weapon; although formal legal disputes were few, spending money to hire intermediaries—or buy properties and wares—to frustrate a rival was common. Those who hadn’t coin enough to match a wealthy spender were run roughshod over, and they soon came to expect (though never welcome) such treatment.

The realm as a whole derived widespread entertainment, however, when clashes between evenly matched nobility erupted. Petty disputes—that is, feuds over entirely trivial matters—were frequent, and one of them still well remembered in Sembian lore today is the Wooden Nose War.



In the capital city of Ordûlin, much wealth was built upon manipulation of government bulk purchases (for road building, fortification, and dockyard improvement materials, in particular), and on knowing what was to be made law beforehand, so as to position property holdings and purchases (or forcible creditor takeover) of bridge building, stonemason, and carpentry businesses. Two families who were very successful at this were the houses of Rorlmallis and Baraedren, and there came a time, in the spring of 1372 DR, when wiser elders died within a month of each other, leaving young, arrogant, and forceful men as the patriarchs of both families.

Garlorphar Rorlmallis and Constar Baraedren did not like each other, at all, and matters were not improved when the new Lord Rorlmallis and the new Lord Baraedren clashed over a lucrative bridge building contract for the north of Sembia, the following spring. The rise of various Moonsea powers had led the bureaucrats in Ordûlin to propose a fortified bridge design; a sturdy, high-walled stone span linking strong keeps on both banks of whatever river was being crossed.

The Rorlmallis proposal was for even grander castles instead of keeps, and they wanted them to serve as local bases for Sembian soldiery. They claimed they could provide such fortresses within the proposed budget. The average Sembian builder or stonecutter knew this claim was an outright lie; the cost of materials alone would lead to a cost overrun, even if the builders worked for free and no profit was expected. The

Baraedrens said so, loudly, and their counter-proposal was a more modest design of fortified archways at both ends of a plainer bridge, at a bid price below the proposed cost.

Amused local nobility took sides, and the battle was on. Both noble families publicly disparaged the patriotism and honesty of the other, and they spread rumors of other deceptions and unlawful behavior. While much of this was pure fabrication, there was enough real past dishonesty to blacken both houses with ease, and enemies of both families who could not hope to compete with their wealth gleefully joined in spreading rumors and offering proof (real or trumped-up) of the backslidings of House Rorlmallis and House Baraedren. The nobility of neighboring Cormyr, delighted to find someone else under widespread dark social regard for a change, embraced and followed the dispute as enthusiastically as addicted gamblers wagering on a sporting contest, and they fanned the flames by paying handsomely to hear increasingly salacious gossip involving the two rival families (leading to the fabrication of such calumny).

At home, in their grand rooms behind their ever-higher walls, the Rorlmallis and the Baraedrens fumed. It was inevitable that this would eventually lead to personal violence, in a city that held only so many “most exclusive” clubs and feasting halls. On the warm night of the sixth of Eleasias in 1373 DR, in The Unicorn Rampant feasting club, a spilled drink led to a drink flung in retaliation, sharp words between young Taerego Rorlmallis (who was showing off in front of his chosen escort for the evening, the beautiful—and two summers older—Lady Adrelpheena Talburleane) and bluff, burly Brustar Baraedren.

Then steel was drawn.

Taerego thought himself a master of the blade, easily able to triumph in any duel, but in his rage he was overly hasty—and gave no credit to Brustar’s well-earned reputation as a frequent and accomplished brawler who regularly terrorized tavernmasters and laid waste to their premises. Brustar kicked a chair into Taerego’s chest, then slashed his falling foe viciously across the face. Only Taerego’s helpless backward descent to the floor saved his life—at the cost of his nose, sliced clean off by the razor-sharp tip of Brustar’s sword. Blood sprayed, Taerego shrieked like a child, and Brustar mockingly bowed to him and departed.

Unbeknownst to him, the Wooden Nose War had begun.

Early the next evening, however, Brustar was forcibly made aware that he’d started something. He was not a swift-witted man, but even a dullard would have deduced as much when six masked bullyblades burst in through both front and back doors of the private back room of the Bold Black Behir tavern, swords drawn, and attacked him. They took great care to thoroughly de-nose him before running him through and then fleeing, as abruptly as they’d come. Luckily for him, Brustar had wealth and previous experience enough to be wearing no less than three healing amulets. Keeping him alive and restoring his much-hacked face drained two of them to dust, annoying him

intensely. Those amulets had been expensive.

Brustar furiously recounted what had befallen to his kin, and his brother Indimbur and his uncle Garlrimarr both (separately) decided to retaliate by hiring some swordswingers of their own. These folk clashed with Taerego's new hires, a band of outlander adventurers hight the Sardars of Teziir, whom Taerego had sent forth to finish the job the six bullyblades had obviously bungled (being as word had reached him that Brustar Baraedren was not only still alive, but had a nose again).

The war swiftly spread, each side sending various agents to relieve members of the rival noble family of their noses. And whereas wealthy nobles can get healing or have magic conceal their disfigurement, their underlings had to make do with carved wooden noses—and so the dispute came to be called the Wooden Nose War.

Although open hostilities ceased when both families suffered reverses in fortune and had to flee creditors, long before disaster befell Ordûlin, the war has not been forgotten, and the houses of Rorlmallis and Baraedren hate each other to this day.

Some rare exceptions do exist. Though their father Darroke is enraged by this, both Jathindra and Calaekloe Rorlmallis have taken up with young Baraedren males: Kaloevvar and Anthelphar Baraedren, respectively. And there are rumors of all three of the current Baraedren spinsters, the sisters Lilaela, Kalathe Stoke, and Malrivra, having illegitimate children by Rorlmallis men, though only Lilaela has admitted that her daughter Vesmurla “Vesmur” Baraedren has a Baraedren as a father (which one, she has thus far declined to say).

It's said in the Rorlmallis family that Taerego Rorlmallis still stalks on dark nights, a revenant with a wooden nose, seeking to strangle any Baraedren he can find—and any of his own kin who so dishonor the family name as to consort with a Baraedren.

### **Note to Interested Scribes:**

The former banker to the wealthy of Ordûlin, the saturnine Malvross Helindrar, confirmed most of the details of this feud. He is the same “Malvross the Monied” who after his departure from Sembia was revealed to be the longtime guise of a shapechanged copper dragon, and the owner of several companies that soared in size and profitability throughout the early 1400s DR, supplying mercenaries with all needed material save food and drink).

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